

What is a book?
Fungibility of Books and Their Composite Words

Salvador Guzman

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Abstract

Books capture the essence of knowledge distilled into a verbal consolidation. In this sense the physical medium that constitutes the books proper is not what compels attention. What truly continues to rapture our imagination is the stability of the written word. Written documents have proven that communication can be stored, transmitted, reproduced and expressed in a variety of ways. All wealth of actions that the written word commands can be done all without every modifying the original intent. This is the essence of the word and the books that house them. This can only be done by accepting certain fungible facets of words, books and knowledge. A word is a word and knowledge can be built incrementally without regard to any purported **sine qua non** that may lurk in the shadows. In this document, I make the case for the fungibility of the written word.

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1 Introduction

The story of the word is written long and deep in the history of mankind. Our fascination with what is written demands solid analysis of its causes and its consequences. For now, I seek to liberate the context of what is at stake. While I demure from comprehensive deliberation, I will attempt to establish common cause with the earnest reader. My thesis statement is that books are fungible. This hypothesis relies on the premise of the cultural character of the written word. The best that an author can do is point towards objective truths beyond the shores of their time and place. Their epistemological island is of course an invitation to the reader to explore what the writer could not. The language the author employs, with its compositional lexical, syntax and semantic rapprochement are an attempt to scaffold at truths with provincial tools. Thus, what is necessarily permitted is the provincial attempt at the universal.

2 The Nature of Books

What is a book? That is what I seek to answer. In this endeavor, what I must maintain is that the lust for words not blind us to the constituent nature of the written word. To accentuate the point, one can imagine what is required when composing a book. In this particular exercise, I care not what the book is physically composed of. When I refer to book, I mean the total sum of the written verbal content in the book proper. It is this verbal book that I examine. I will make no more distinction between the physical book and the verbal book albeit this one: the verbal book is the muse.

2.1 Typed Tuple

In programming, the concept of a tuple is common place. It is merely a list of categories of things. For example, if one were to describe a specific car, one would use a make, model and year. These three qualities would be the tuple to describe the car. There are many different ways to formulate a tuple in the designation of an object. The impetus for this sort of formal rigor is to allow unambiguous identification of objects. This would lead trivially to algebraic and further formal analysis.

The type of tuple is the cartesian product of the constituent categories. In the above example, the formalism would yield,

$$Cars := (Make \cdot Model \cdot Year).$$

There should be nothing impressive about this. What is significant is the simplicity. One imagines that the goal of this formalism is the ability to specify and decompose more complicated objects into simpler ones. Being a bit more imaginative, one could invoke the notion of a vector space and the specific car as a linear combination of the constituent categories. Since by the nature of being different types, the resulting combination should yield immiscible terms and thus do the categories maintain their identity.

$$Car_i := \alpha_i \cdot x_{make} + \beta_i \cdot x_{model} + \gamma_i \cdot x_{year}$$

where x_{make} , x_{model} and x_{year} are the respective categories and the scalar coefficients α_i , β_i and γ_i are the scalar values that choose x_{make} , x_{model} and x_{year} respectively. The But this is not a book about tuples. The goal is their use as formal descriptors of an object.

In the above example, we can use the tuple to identify a specific car. Of course, this tuple is anemic in that it does not exhaustive describe all possible cars. Not only are there other categories that would describe vehicles more aptly, but even within a concrete tuple, there are multiple instantiations allowed. So this attempt must be tempered by what is feasible and more importantly by what is desired. One could take this discussion of tuples in any direction they want. For example, I did not even mention that tuples themselves could easily be nested inside of another tuple. That is because my particular use for tuples is relative simple and straightforward. What follows next is a model attempt to differentiate books by a tuple.

2.2 Unique Identity of Books by Way of Typed Tuple

A possible formulation of a tuple for books is,

$$Books := (Author \cdot Title \cdot Edition).$$

This is a simple tuple that describes a book in terms of the properties I find significant. The author, title and edition, I maintain possess a unique identity. One could allow for other categories and thus this attempt would be deficient in this regard. A publisher could have different expectations of the book and change small attributes. In this formulation, there is not even a reference to the language of the book, even though it is language that inspired this composition in the first place.

So what is meant by this? The intention, my intention, is that these additional categories of description do not inspire an alternative intention by the author. If the same book were written by the same author in two different languages, I would insist that they are the same book. The language is not the book. I claim that the intention of the author, captured by the tuple, is the book. Of course, I must claim this in a less formal and more ad hoc manner. I have not rigorously constructed such a book. And I refuse to. Having promulgated the formality of the idea, now I will demure and speak in more casual language.

2.3 The Dead Hand of Formality

This jettison of matters formal is no innovation on my part. All that is meant is that I do not possess the proper formal semantics to encode the construction of the identity of books. Perchance, I will be my serendipity to casually come across the lumbering beast, or perhaps build it myself. For now, I resign from an informal description of the thing, the book, the word, since I can accomplish more by this occasion. I will leave the formalism of the identity of the book to future adventurers. I am too beside myself with languor to attempt such a feat now.

3 The Nature of Words

In the previous exercise, I demonstrated that the identity of the book is commensurate with a tuple. Not necessarily my tuple but describable by one. However, what even this venture into rigor fails is that more important than the tuple is the intention of author. I claim that ultimately the identity of the book is the identity of the author's intention. What is the intention? What does the author intend? This is more important than the tuple. Perhaps a finer modeling of the tuple would allow for dictate by intention. Perhaps not. All that is needed to continue is that the tuple I created, that I jovially and eagerly hope would constitute a valid and unambiguous construction, fails. I believe that maybe a tuple with more finesse and a more apt panoply of categories to draw from could improve on my rough draft. That is not relevant. What is that ultimately material is that we will be modeling the intention of the author. Thus, the nature of words is the author's intention.

3.1 What We Mean By Words

In the same way that Foucault sought to extricate the word from the identity of the author, we can go far in our analysis of the identity of a book by submitting as much. While the preceding paragraphs invited the reader to think of a book as being the consequence of the author's identity, the flow of the unilateral conversation can be reversed. In fact, I would prefer to see identity as a downstream consequence of the words themselves. At the risk of rendering my formal shenanigans a vice, I prefer the words foremost speak for themselves. This reflection of the direction of analysis I think is more conducive to my idiosyncratic style of thinking. The simple building blocks yield more profound creatures of insight. A small tangent aside, if words allow for the manifestation of more complex objects, then what is instigated is that the stream of consciousness that pervades minds is the ultimate source of identity. The inner monologue of the mind is commensurate with identity. At any rate, it is the words that we mean.

4 Ambiguity, the Semantic Devil

If the words are a specie of identity, then words become the building blocks of identificatious objects. Even if I were to decouple the two conflated definitions of the word identity, formal algebraic identity and identity of the author, the conclusion would still hold. Thus, do not let my banal games with word sore you on the word as identity.

4.1 Formal Ambiguity

5 Intersection of Knowledge

6 Semantics as the Fungible Scaffold

7 Means by Any Other Mean

8 Towards an Algebra of Epistemology