

Proper Names: Philosophical and Linguistic Perspectives

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Proper names play an important role in our understanding of linguistic ‘aboutness’ or reference. For instance, the name-bearer relation is a good candidate for the paradigm of the reference relation: it provides us with our initial grip on this relation and controls our thinking about it. For this and other reasons proper names have been at the center of philosophical attention. However, proper names are as controversial as they are conceptually fundamental. Since Kripke’s seminal lectures *Naming and Necessity* the controversy about proper names has taken the form of a debate between two main camps, descriptivists and non-descriptivists like Kripke himself.¹

Descriptivists hold that there is a close connection between proper names and definite descriptions: the meaning or sense of a proper name can be given by a (bundle of) definite description(s). The satisfier, if any, of the definite description(s) that provide(s) the meaning of a proper name is its referent. Descriptivists can allow for empty proper names that are meaningful. They also have an initially plausible account of true informative identity statements (‘Marilyn Monroe is no one other person than Norma Jean Baker’). Their informativity is grounded in a difference in meaning-giving descriptions.

¹ The lectures were given in Princeton in 1970 and published in book form as *Naming and Necessity* (Cambridge Mass.: Harvard University Press).

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Kripke presents several arguments against the descriptivist view. He famously observed that a proper name of x and definite descriptions satisfied by x cannot be substituted without change of truth-value in modal sentences. He provided further the outline of an alternative view or ‘picture’ of reference, according to which proper names are tags first introduced in a ‘baptism’ and then transmitted from speaker to speaker in a communicative chain.

Kripke’s arguments did not end, but rather fuel, the discussion about proper names. If he is right, the semantic significance of a proper name is exhausted by its referent. How can, then, an empty proper name be meaningful? How can an identity sentence in which proper names flank the identity sign be informative? Since descriptivists have answers to these questions, this view has not been given up in the face of Kripke’s arguments. Rather descriptivists have refined it in order to incorporate Kripke’s observations. For example, there are different ways to conceptualize the modal difference between proper names and definite descriptions that are compatible with the spirit of descriptivism. In the next round, non-descriptivists started to assess the drawbacks of these ways of conceptualizing the phenomena.

So far no solution has emerged. Rather, the strengths of one view are the weaknesses of the other. How can one make philosophical progress in understanding proper names in this situation? Our aim with the conference ‘Proper Names: Philosophical and Linguistic Perspectives’ (Göttingen, September 2011)² was to bring linguists and philosophers together to investigate proper names from different perspectives. We are pleased to publish the proceedings of the conference in this special issue. Here is a brief overview of the contents of our volume.

Kripke suggested to his readers a ‘picture’ of reference, according to which the reference of a proper name is determined by a causal chain. However, he did not develop his picture in detail. In his *Reference without Referents* (2005) Sainsbury took up the topic where Kripke left off. He provided an account of name-introduction and reference-transmission that was designed to make room for empty proper names. Sainsbury’s contribution “The same name” contains an outline and defence of a causal view, but now it is a causal view of proper name individuation and not reference determination that allows one to distinguish different, but co-spelled proper names.

Sainsbury argues that a plausible version of the causal view will allow one to see empty proper names as meaningful, Stephen Barker’s “Expressivism about reference and Quantification over the Non-Existent without Meinongian Metaphysics” explores a different response to the problems posed by empty proper names. He argues in his paper that *prima facie* empty names in fact refer to non-existent objects and that we also can quantify over such objects. However, he thinks we can hold such a view without commitment to an ontologically serious conception of non-existent objects as proposed by Meinongians. According to Barker, an expressivist conception of reference is all that we need to make such a view palatable.

² We would like to thank the *Lichtenberg Kolleg* Göttingen for generously funding the conference and Christian Beyer for his support.

Kenneth Taylor's "Names as Devices of Explicit Co-reference" develops an interpretation of the explanatory role of Kripke's communicative chains that shares with Sainsbury's new view the assumption that these chains have the function to individuate names. In opposition to Sainsbury, Taylor thinks that these chains also determine the reference of a name. Furthermore, he defends the view that these chains should be interpreted as anaphoric chains of reference preservation and they, hence, not only determine the reference of a name, but also play a vital role to solve Frege's puzzle. Taylor distinguishes between *explicit* or *obvious* co-reference from *accidental* co-reference. "Hesperus" and "Phosphorus" are accidentally co-referential: given how the non-linguistic facts are, these singular terms refer to the same object and necessarily so. However, different tokens of the same proper name are explicitly co-referential. That proper names not only refer, but that tokens of the same name obviously co-refer is a suggestion that can inform our understanding of the kind of expression a proper name is.

Kamp and Maier are mainly concerned with the implementation of certain aspects of Kripke's view into the formal semantic framework of *Discourse Representing Theory*. Kamp makes use of a conception of external and internal anchors and so-called *labelled entity representations* to capture certain important semantic and cognitive aspects of proper names pointed out by Kripke. In opposition to Kripke, Kamp avoids any commitment to communicative causal chains that connect different meaningful uses of proper names. Instead, Kamp proposes a mental network of anchored labelled entity representation that account for the meaningful communication with proper names about specific objects. Such networks allow us to determine the referent of a name in a way that is parasitic on the existence of the entity representations of other people, but they also allow a competent speaker to gain an expert status and, hence, determine the referent of a name in a way that is not deferential.

Emar Maier argues in his contribution "Reference, binding, and presupposition: three perspectives on the semantics of proper names" for the main thesis that proper names are definite expressions that trigger presuppositions. He makes use of the general treatment of presuppositions in a DRT framework proposed by Geurts and van der Sandt and aims to implement proper names into such a framework. According to him, there are rigid and non-rigid uses of proper names and he aims to account for these different uses of names by making use of Hunter's conception of an extra embedding level in a Discourse Representing Structure (DRS) called *hyperglobal DRS*. A hyperglobal DRS content plays a role similar to Kamp's "internal anchors", that is, their content is to be interpreted with respect to a fixed context parameter, distinct from the evaluation parameter. This technical adaption of the mentioned DRT framework for the representation of presuppositions allows one to account for anaphoric and non-anaphoric uses of proper names in semantic terms.

Proponents of the causal chain view take proper names to be singular terms that at most refer to one object. But common sense has it that there are many Peter Smiths. How can, then, 'Peter Smith' be a singular term? An influential response to this problem is Burge's predicate view of proper names that logically represents proper names as general terms that can be combined with different overt and covert

determiners ('the', 'this'). The following contributions investigate this view from different perspectives.

Ora Matushansky distinguishes in her contribution "The other Francis Bacon: on non-bare proper names" four different uses of proper names that she then investigates in detail: (a) uses of names in naming-constructions like 'is called', (b) modified proper names like 'the poet Goethe' or 'an admirable Mozart', (c) apparent uses of proper names with different determiner expressions like 'every Alfred', and (d) derived uses of proper names like in 'This is a Picasso' or 'Waldo Cox is a Romanov'. She argues the predicate view gives the best overall semantic analysis of all these uses.

In contrast to Matushansky, Robin Jeshion and Dolf Rami argue that the predicate view is not required to provide a systematic account of the overall use of proper names. Both contributors point out that there are plausible systematic alternatives to a uniform treatment of expressions like 'Alfred' or 'Picasso' as predicates relative to the level of logical form. In her contribution "Referentialism and Predicativism about Proper Names" Jeshion aims to show that the predicative view is not supported if one takes *all relevant* data about the use of expressions like 'Alfred' or 'Picasso' into account. If we consider all the data, not only does the case for a uniform semantic analysis turn out to be less straightforward, it can also be shown that different systematic mechanisms account for predicative and non-predicative uses of proper names. Hence, the singular term view seems defensible.

In his paper "The Multiple Uses of Proper Nouns" Dolf Rami also argues for the singular term view. He aims to show that there are different systematic mechanisms of meaning transfer which are operative in different predicative uses of proper names. The central thesis of the paper is that there is a new and so far overlooked variety of meaning transfer. This form of meaning transfer is not only operative in the use of proper names, but also in the use of third person personal pronouns. Rami argues further that the predicate view faces serious problems when accounting for the proposed linguistic data.