PREDICATIVE NAMES

Nomes Predicativos

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Resumo: Este trabalho argumenta que os nomes próprios podem ter valoreis vericondicionais não referenciais, mesmo quando eles são usados e interpretados literalmente, minando assim a noção de referência semântica.

Palavras-chave: Referência, nomes próprios, distinção referencial/atributivo;

Abstract: *This paper argues that proper names may have literal non-referential truth-conditional values, thereby undermining the notion of semantic reference.*

Keywords: *Reference, Proper Names, Referential/Attributive Distinction*

Introduction

The purpose of this paper is to challenge the mainstream view that natural language proper names are referring expressions. I aim to show that proper names, when literally used and interpreted, may sometimes denote sets or properties, not specific individuals. They may, in other words, also have non-referential truth-conditional values. Given that proper names are taken to be the referring expression *par excellence*, an important consequence of this discussion is that the very idea of semantic reference would be undermined. The points developed in this paper support instead a pragmatic or Strawsonian stance on reference, according to which reference—or rather, referring—is a property of speakers and not words. As Strawson famously put it, "referring is not something an expression does; it is something that someone can use an expression to do." (STRAWSON, 1950, p. 326) This broader claim, however, is not explicitly argued for here.

The view that proper names are inherently referring expressions is a hoary one in analytic philosophy, dating all the way back to the founding giants of the tradition, Frege, Russell, and Wittgenstein. It is still the dominant view in philosophy of language and formal semantics. All the main textbooks in formal semantics, (CHIERCHIA & McCONNELL-GINET, 1990), (LARSON & SEGAL, 1995), (HEIM & KRATZER, 1998), (De SWART, 2003), and (CANN et al., 2009), subscribe to it. According to this account, natural language names behave like

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individual constants in logic, which denote single individuals belonging to a stipulated model. However, what may be true or appropriate for an artificial language need not be true for natural language; and in effect this paper argues that the official semantics of proper names appears inadequate for some totally unremarkable, everyday uses of names.

The discussion proceeds as follows. Section 2 discusses examples that would show that proper names may have non-referential, or "predicative," truth-conditional values. Section 3 considers and rejects two possible objections to the account given in section 2. Section 4 offers some concluding remarks.

Non-Referential Proper Names

Proper names[2] are *the* paradigmatic referring expressions. If any natural language expression can be said to have a referential semantics, then proper names are it.[3] Central to this widespread and official view in formal semantics is the idea that a name, if used literally, has a definite individual as truth-conditional value.[4] Specifically, the semantic type of proper names is <e>, meaning that their truth-conditional values are individual, known entities. There is less agreement about what further information names may encode, if any. Following Frege (1892a/1997a) many philosophers and linguists accept that there's more to the meaning of a proper name than just its referent, i.e., the individual bearing the name. Proper names, according to the Fregean view, also have "senses"—a layer of information that involves the characteristics or properties the name's bearer may have. Such senses are said to provide a "mode of presentation" (FREGE, 1892a/1997a, p. 152) or "criterion of identification" (DUMMETT, 1973, p. 110) of the individual bearing the name. On the Fregean account, therefore, the proper name "J.K. Rowling" has both a referent (the particular individual it stands for, Joanne K. Rowling) and also a sense, i.e., some qualitative information about J.K. Rowling that would enable speakers to identify her (for instance, "the author of the *Harry Potter* series"). Senses would also explain why true sentences of the form $a = b$ (e.g., "J.K. Rowling is Robert Gal-

[2] This paper focuses on ordinary personal names such as "Martha Smith" or "Robert Jones." It is reasonable to suppose that most, if not all, of what will be concluded concerning personal names would apply to names of other types of object as well. "Semantics" in this paper means "formal or truth-conditional semantics."

[3] In this paper we are using "referential" as in formal semantics, to mean specifically "having an individual as truth-conditional value." The term should not be viewed as synonymous with "extensional." We shall also speak of "referential uses," which are uses of words by speakers that are consistent with the alleged referential semantics of an expression. Non-referential values and uses are then values and uses that do not involve an individual.

[4] To be sure, there are some dissenting voices; see, e.g. Fara's (2015) comprehensive discussion. The approach in this paper will be found to be quite different from those.

braith") are more informative (or have a higher "cognitive value" as Frege puts it) than sentences of the form *a* = *a* (e.g., "J.K. Rowling is J.K. Rowling"). The *a* = *b* sentence may represent new knowledge and could even be denied by someone who didn't know that the identity was true, whereas the *a* = *a* sentence is just a triviality that can't be denied without contradiction.

It is beyond the scope of this paper to consider the nuances of all the modern-day Fregean positions, or to go into the longstanding debate between the Fregean view and its chief rival, Direct Reference, which holds that a proper name has no meaning over and beyond the individual it stands for, if any. In any case, it is unnecessary to delve into these controversies here, since even the richer Fregean position holds that the truth-conditional contribution of a name is its referent. As Frege himself states, "It is the striving for truth that drives us always to advance from the sense to the reference [*Bedeutung*]…when and only when we are inquiring after the truth-value [of a sentence] reference [*Bedeutung*] is involved." (1892a/1997a, p. 157) If senses are countenanced at all, they receive a different theoretical explanation, nowadays usually via possible world semantics.

So, even if it is allowed that a proper name may have a sense as well as a referent—that there is a second dimension to the meaning a proper name that goes beyond the object it purportedly designates—the common view is still that the referent is what matters for determining the truth or falsity of the sentence that contains the proper name; only the named object is relevant for truth-conditional semantics.

As just noted, formally and truth-conditionally, proper names' semantic type is supposed to be <e>. The standard semantic analysis of a simple declarative sentence containing a proper name, like (1) below, is the following.

(1) Damian Lewis is red-haired.

First, (1) is divided into a subject, composed of a noun phrase (NP)—"Damian Lewis"— and a predicate, composed of a verb phrase (VP)—"is red-haired." Next, the standard assumption is made that since the NP is a proper name, its truth-conditional value is an individual, Damian Lewis. That is, Damian Lewis, the man himself, is the contribution the name makes to the truth conditions of the sentence. Finally, it is assumed that the VP predicates something, a certain property, of Damian Lewis—*being red-haired*. Alternatively, the VP may be construed as denoting a set—specifically the set of red-haired things—in which case the sentence would be interpreted as expressing the membership of Damian Lewis in that set.

It makes no difference to our discussion whether we talk of sets or properties; for ease of exposition, in what follows we will mainly speak of sets. Formally:

$V_{M, g}$(X(damian_lewis)) = 1 iff ⟨[damian_lewis] = I(Damian Lewis)$^{M, g}$⟩ ∈ I(X = {x: x is red-haired}).

So again, the analysis says that sentence (1) is true just in case Damian Lewis has the property of being red-haired, or belongs to the set of red-haired things. The conditions for the truth of (1) are that there be a Damian Lewis and that he have red hair. In propositional parlance, one might say that the thought, message, or proposition that would be expressed by a serious, literal utterance of (1) concerns a certain individual, the referent or bearer of "Damian Lewis," viz. Damian Lewis himself, and that this thought is true if in fact Damian Lewis is red-haired.

Despite its official status, the foregoing analysis, with its equally conventional assumption that a literally interpreted proper name always denotes an individual—that it always has a *singular* truth-conditional value—would not seem to square with the facts of usage. All theories, no matter how well-established or mathematically elegant, still have to answer to the facts. This section presents examples where proper names cannot be taken to have specific individuals as values, even when they appear to be used and interpreted literally. The following examples in effect show that the values in question may be of two different kinds: (A) a set or property, or (B) an unknown individual that uniquely satisfies some descriptive or qualitative information—in a manner similar to singular definite descriptions (expressions of the form "the *F*," such as "the table" or "the mayor of Philadelphia") on the standard Russellian (1905) analysis for these expressions. For simplicity, I will call values of either kind "predicative" values, since in such cases the proper names behave like predicates in logic.

Examples of (A):

(2) Every María González is either Spanish or Latin American.

(3) No Ulrike Schneider is Japanese.

(4) Some Jan Peeters are Dutch but all others are Belgian.

Examples of (B):

(5) David Clayton, whoever he is, could play for us. [Said by one co-worker to another. The two employees are browsing the Accounting Department's roster, looking for candidates to join their all-male company soccer team.]

(6) Judging by the name, I think that Juan Pérez, whoever he is, can probably help us out. [Said by one college student to another. The two students are looking for help in translating a passage from Isabel Allende's novel, *La casa de los espíritus* (*The House of Spirits*). They go to the school's Language Center, where pasted on the door is a list of tutors' names.]

Sentences (2)-(4) are completely unremarkable, even if the proper names they contain cannot be taken to refer to individual people. The intended referent for these proper names is broader than a single individual. Rather, they refer collectively to everyone who has the proper name mentioned in the sentence; the names' values are therefore most plausibly construed as sets. (So in [2], for instance, "María González" denotes the set of all people with that name.) Far from requiring any special parsing or qualifications because of non-literality or other factors, sentences (2)-(4) can be straightforwardly evaluated for truth or falsity; and indeed they are all most likely false.

Sentences (5) and (6) are more interesting, and analogous to examples that I have offered previously in (BAUMANN, 2010b).[5] In both (5) and (6) the proper name contributes a combination of descriptive and quantificational information—not a known individual—to the truth conditions of each sentence. In fact, as I pointed out in (2010b) about the parallel examples there, the two sentences may be taken to illustrate the attributive use of a proper name, in Keith Donnellan's (1966) sense of "attributive use." Expressions that allow literal attributive uses are supposed to contribute descriptive information (i.e., they refer to an attribute) to the truth conditions of the sentences that contain them; and sentences containing attributively used expressions are said to express "object-independent" propositions. Whether or not Donnellan's label strictly applies to (5) and (6) is of no real consequence to us here; what's important is that in neither example the proper name is referential, since the interlocutors do not know the specific individual who bears the name. In uttering and understanding (5) and (6), the interlocutors have no particular person in mind, a fact that is signaled by the inclusion of the clause "whoever he is," which in fact serves as a test for the attributive use. Instead, in both cases the interlocutors are using and interpreting the proper name non-referentially, as expressing certain information encoded by it, viz. natural gender in the case of (5) and

[5] That paper offers further discussion of the issues treated in this section, as well as replies to the possible objection that the gender and cultural/linguistic information encoded by proper names is not of truth-conditional import.

cultural/linguistic information in the case of (6). Logical translations for (5) and (6), compatible with the proper names' predicative values, are offered below.

(5*) $\exists x\{[Dx\&\forall y(Dy\rightarrow y = x)]\&Px\}$ [Where D = the set of David Claytons and P = the set of people able to play for the employees' team. In effect, as the formalization shows, the proper name "David Clayton" is being handled as a definite description; the name is replaced by the condition that there is at least one member in the set of David Claytons plus the condition that the set has only one member.]

(6*) $<BEL\{a, <\exists x[(Jx\&Sx)\&\forall y((Jy\&Sy)\rightarrow y = x)\&Hxa)]>\}>$ [The student, *a*, believes (i.e., stands in the binary belief relation BEL to the proposition that) there is one individual who has the properties of being a Juan Pérez (= J) and a Spanish speaker (= S), and that this individual, whoever he is, also has the property of being able to help her (= H).][6, 7]

The predicative values of "David Clayton" and "Juan Pérez" in the above examples would seem to be literal.[8] From an intuitive standpoint, uncorroborated by any empirical research, such a predicative interpretation of proper names would appear rather frequent, or at least not rare.[9] Be that as it may, no great weight will be placed on the notion of "literal" here. Of more interest to us is the following: that sentences (2)-(6) would show clearly that the descriptive information encoded by a proper name may enter into the truth-conditional content of the sentence containing the name. In this case the real contribution of the name is not an individual, but a set or property.

This non-referential or predicative interpretation of proper names needs to be distinguished from other non-referential uses of names that seem to be more palpably non-literal

[6] Natural language proper names convey the information that their bearers belong to the linguistic and cultural group with which the name is associated. While this information may of course turn out to be false (e.g., Juan Pérez may not be Hispanic or a Spanish speaker; he may be German), this does not negate the fact that the *name* conveys this information.

[7] We are employing here the usual relational analysis of belief purely for convenience's sake, without a commitment to the adequacy of such an analysis.

[8] It certainly seems literal, if by "literal" we mean: "(i) sanctioned by the expression's standing dictionary meaning and (ii) not derived through second-level pragmatic principles of communication, i.e., an interpretation according to which the information conveyed by the expression is not part of an implicature."

[9] Frequency, however, is not a sufficient condition for literality, as shown by the phenomenon labeled "standardization" by Bach (1994, 1998). This paper follows the usual philosophical methodology of extracting conclusions on the basis of thought experiments and appeals to intuitions. However, examples (2)-(6) are really very simple, and it is hoped that any speaker of English will share our intuitions regarding them.

and non–truth conditional. Many names have acquired certain associations, descriptive or evaluative, and are often used in ways that exploit such associations. Some obvious examples are Einstein (= genius), Hitler (= evil), and Brad Pitt (= physically attractive): e.g., "Pat is the Einstein of marketing" and "Josh is no Brad Pitt."[10] If "Einstein" and "Brad Pitt" are interpreted standardly (i.e., referentially) in these examples, then the first example is obviously false, given that no two distinct objects can be identical to each other, and the second is obviously true, for the same reason. But clearly these sentences may be used to express propositions that make sense and would be accepted as true in certain conversational contexts. Similarly, when someone says, "That is so Kendra!," for instance, they do not mean (the bizarre and presumably false proposition) that some object or property is identical to, or could be ascribed, some degree of Kendra-ness; rather, the assumption is that Kendra is known for having a certain trait, say impulsiveness, and the speaker is exploiting this bit of common knowledge to express that something Kendra did was characteristically impulsive.

No doubt such uses of proper names are very common too, but I hope it will be agreed that they are nevertheless quite different from the examples presented above, where the name is used apparently literally to convey descriptive, predicative, and essentially non-singular information, and where the sentence containing the name, as a result, has truth conditions that do not involve a specific, known individual.

Two Possible Objections

This section briefly considers and rejects two possible objections to our claim that proper names, when interpreted literally, may have truth-conditional values other than individuals (in particular, they may have sets or properties as truth-conditional values). One possibility is to try to accommodate the predicative interpretation within the orthodox semantic picture. It would then be granted that on occasion proper names may literally denote sets or properties instead of individuals. In this way, the standard semantic account of proper names would be expanded to include the non-standard predicative values as legitimate truth-conditional values. This in effect would amount to a proposal that proper names are ambiguous. Each proper name, considered as a type, would have two entries (corresponding to the two sorts of truth-conditional values) in our mental lexicon. Associated with each mental entry for a name there

[10] Frege himself is cognizant of such uses; in (FREGE, 1892b/1997b, p. 189), for instance, he offers the example "Trieste is no Vienna."

would be distinct concepts. (Just as we are supposed to have two distinct entries and concepts for "bank"—one for "financial institution" and the other for "side of a river.")

A second possibility is to explain away the predicative values by appealing to Grice's (1967/1989) notion of implicature. The propositions containing these non-singular values as constituents, the argument would go, should be seen as pragmatically conveyed in the Gricean sense; they are not literally expressed by the sentence that was uttered. On this second approach, therefore, the non-standard predicative values do not count as truth-conditional values at all—they are not part of what is said, the truth-conditional content of the sentence uttered—but are constituents of some other proposition that is implicated by the utterance of a sentence containing a proper name in a given situation. (This would be the case, for example, if, in a given conversational situation, a speaker who uttered the sentence "Someone got an *A* on the exam," succeeded in implicating the proposition *Sam got an A on the exam*: Here the individual Sam is a constituent of the truth conditions of the implicature and not of the uttered sentence.)

Against the ambiguity proposal (construed as a proposal about lexical entries), two points should be made. First, such a proposal doesn't seem to square with the concept of a lexical entry, since lexical entries are not motivated by truth-conditional considerations, but respond to the internal, structural characteristics of words (or more precisely, "listemes"). The notion of a mental lexicon comes from Chomskyan linguistics. According to Chomsky (1986, esp. §3.3.3.2), a speaker's knowledge of the words of her language is embodied in a mental lexicon. Each word[11] the speaker knows is represented in this mental lexicon as a discrete lexical entry, which contains information about the item's linguistic meaning, syntactic characteristics, and how it sounds. As with print dictionaries, words of the same spelling and phonology, but differing in meaning or grammatical features, require separate entries specifying the different information. Thus, as noted above, "bank" has two lexical entries, one for "financial institution" and the other for "side of a river." In the same way, the verb "to eat" has two lexical entries, which correspond to two distinct syntactic features of this verb, transitivity (e.g., "John eats the sandwich") and intransitivity (e.g., "John eats"). This information can be represented as follows:

Entry 1

[11] Technically it is not a "word" in the ordinary sense that is stored in the lexicon (e.g., "wearable"), but rather a "listeme." This term was introduced in (DI SCIULLIO & WILLIAMS, 1987) and is defined as a meaningful unit that cannot be generated by morphological rules and must therefore be memorized ("permanently stored") in the course of acquiring a language (e.g., "-able"). The distinction between words and listemes can be ignored for the purposes of this discussion.

Eat, Verb, [_ NP]

Entry 2

Eat, Verb, [_]

The entry gives the syntactic type of the word (a verb, in this case) and describes its syntactic behavior (in this case, whether the verb is transitive or intransitive). However, no extra-linguistic information, such as individuals, sets, or any other non-linguistic value, may be stored in the lexicon. This is impossible given that such values are real entities; evidently the referent of "New York"—the city itself—and the truth-conditional value of "dog"—all the canines in the world—cannot be literally in the head. Furthermore, lexical entries are not generated due to the differing truth-conditional values an expression may have. Indexicals offer a good example. For instance, there is supposed to be a single lexical entry for "I" (which captures the word's context-invariant meaning "the person currently speaking or writing"), even though the pronoun may obviously have different truth-conditional values on different occasions of use. That is, "I" has one meaning, but many different people may use the pronoun to refer to themselves at different times. What is registered in the lexicon is the meaning, not the values, since again these are real entities existing outside the brain.

Now, when it comes to proper names, the very idea that they may have lexical entries is *prima facie* strange. Just as we wouldn't really expect to find an entry in a print dictionary for an ordinary proper name such as "Amy Harrison," it would likewise seem unreasonable to expect such entries in the mental lexicon. Indeed, some philosophers, like Paul Ziff (1960, pp. 85-7) and Kent Bach (2002, p. 85), have gone so far as to assert that proper names are not part of language at all. But let's assume for the sake of argument that this idea is a cogent one; for each proper name a speaker knows, there is an entry in the lexicon. Now, if the argumentation in section 2 is sound, then for each proper name there would be not one, but two lexical entries, each corresponding to the two types of truth-conditional values a name may have, referential/singular and non-referential/predicative. In particular, for the proper name "Juan Pérez" in (6) there would be, in addition to an entry for a certain Juan Pérez, an entry with the information *Spanish speaker*. A curious and surely implausible consequence of this idea is that "Juan Pérez" would then be synonymous at the lexical level with "Spanish speaker" or "hispanophone." As improbable as that is, the real issue, as with the indexical "I," is that there is simply no call to posit lexical entries on the basis of the multiple and varying truth-conditional values

an expression may have. It contravenes the very notion of a mental lexicon as currently understood.

A second objection to the ambiguity proposal is that, even if it were to be granted that an expression can have two different lexical entries because of the different truth-conditional contributions that it makes, this would not explain how a communicator selects the appropriate entry or is able to identify the correct truth-conditional value in a given context. Just stating that an expression is ambiguous doesn't *explain* the ambiguity; this doesn't tell us how it is exactly that people are able to discern the correct meaning in a communicative situation. Moreover, it might be argued (correctly, in my opinion), that disambiguation is a pragmatic, not a semantic, process; and so any account of it would necessarily have to transcend the boundaries of truth-conditional semantics. In effect, ambiguity (or rather, disambiguation) is a problem for truth-conditional semantics generally; there is no account within this framework capable of explaining how homonymous words are disambiguated or how context-sensitive expressions such as indexicals are assigned referents in real time. This problem would extend to ambiguous proper names as well.

Against the Gricean option, my reply is shorter, since by now it is pretty well established in philosophy of language that, contrary to what Grice stipulated, "what is said," i.e., the truth-conditional content of a sentence, is not determined solely by conventional meaning and syntax (plus disambiguation and saturation), but is rather built out of many contextual factors not always directly traceable to the sentence. This alternative view of "what is said" is known as *contextualism*, and some of its main proponents are John Searle (1979, 1980), Charles Travis (1981), Dan Sperber and Deirdre Wilson (1995), François Récanati (1993, 2004, 2011), Robyn Carston (2002), Stephen Neale (2004, 2017), and Anne Bezuidenhout (2002). See also (HUANG, 2015) for a textbook exposition of contextualism versus Gricean pragmatics.

The examples in section 2, warranting predicative values for proper names, are consistent with the general contextualist thesis—though in these examples the alternative values are in fact traceable to a component of the sentence, the proper name. More importantly, the discussion in section 2 would suggest that, in agreement with contextualism, the truth conditions of sentences (2)-(6) *themselves* include the predicative values; these non-standard values are not constituents of other propositions somehow implicated by the saying of these sentences. They are constituents of what is said by (2)-(6).

It is not clear, at any rate, what these other propositions would be, if the relevant notion of implicature is particularized conversational implicature. They could be anything, since particularized conversational implicatures vary as widely as do the conversational contexts in

which they are produced. If, instead, the implicatures in question are supposed to be either conventional implicatures or generalized conversational implicatures—assuming these are valid notions; both have been called into question in recent years—then the problem is that proper names do not seem to prompt specific inferences in the same regular and automatic way the paradigmatic examples of conventional implicature or generalized conversational implicatures do. For example, the conjunction "but" prompts, by conventional implicature, the idea that there is a contrast or tension between the two things connected by the word. It does this automatically, as a matter of its lexical or conventional meaning (hence the label "conventional implicature"). And the determiner "some" is often understood as meaning "some but not all;" such an inference exemplifies generalized conversational implicature in that this understanding of "some" is common or generalized, but may be defeated or canceled in context, just like any conversational implicature. In sum, conventional and generalized conversational implicatures are fixed or fairly regular inferences prompted by specific items in a sentence—they generate information that goes beyond the conventional meaning of the sentence containing the items. In contrast, the descriptive information carried by the proper names in (2)-(6) determines the interpretation of the sentences themselves.

At any rate, the alternative truth conditions for (5) and (6)—perhaps the "harder" or more controversial cases—were represented perspicuously in logical notation, which should help allay the potential worry that the sentences might not be truth-evaluable if the proper names are taken to have non-referential predicative values. Naturally it is in context, via pragmatic mechanisms such as saturation, that interlocutors discern the appropriate values. How these mechanisms work, and why Gricean pragmatics fails to adequately account for them, is a big topic that cannot be taken up in this paper.

Conclusion

This paper argued that proper names may have truth-conditional values other than individuals; specifically, they may have sets or properties as values. The argument may be summarized as follows: (a) The mainstream view holds that all proper names are referential; (b) but there exist non-referential proper names; (c) therefore it is false that all proper names are referential; some are predicative. The big-picture consequence of this is that the very notion of semantic reference is called into question, since proper names are taken to be the paradigmatic examples of referring expressions. The possibility of literal non-referential values for names

instead supports a pragmatic, Strawsonian conception of reference—of referring as an activity and not as a property of language.

In closing, I should like to say a brief word about rigidity, an important semantic property that proper names are supposed to have. Following Kripke (1980), many philosophers hold that proper names are not just referring expressions, but *rigidly* referring expressions; an expression is said to refer rigidly—or to be a "rigid designator"—if it refers to the same object in every possible world where the object exists. In an earlier paper (BAUMANN, 2010a), I argued explicitly that proper names are not rigid designators, if rigidity is taken to be a *de jure* semantic property of proper name types. Obviously I am not going to repeat those same arguments here, but it should be easy to see that names are not rigid if the discussion in section 2 holds. The reason is very simple. Rigidity implies reference; if an expression is rigid then it is referential. However, we have found that proper names are not inherently referential; at best, they may sometimes be *used* referentially. By *modus tollendo tollens*, then, it follows that names are not rigid. The most we could say is that rigidity is a pragmatic property that proper name tokens may have on occasions of use. This is in fact what we concluded in (2010a). But of course that is not the desired or traditional understanding of rigidity. Unfortunately, the traditional semantic understanding of rigidity is unavailable if there is no semantic reference, but only pragmatic referring.

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