

## Names as Definites

This is a sketch of an approach to the semantics of proper names which treats them as definite noun phrases, in the sense that they have anaphoric familiarity presuppositions. Though this is related to approaches which treat them as definite descriptions, including the recent work of Geurts (1997), on the present proposal they are not assumed to have any descriptive content. The proposal is closely related to that of Cumming (2008), but also differs from it in significant ways. In any case, there is good evidence that names are not rigid designators, contra Kripke (1972).

### I. Some properties of proper names:

#### **Property A: The introduction requirement**

In order to be felicitously used, a proper name must be properly introduced beforehand:

- (1) There is a gentleman in Hertfordshire. Ernest is engaged to two women.  
Who's Ernest? and what's he got to do with Hertfordshire?

There are a number of ways that a name can be properly introduced. Here are a few:

Cumming's (2008) "naming construction":

- (2) There is a gentleman in Hertfordshire by the name of 'Ernest'. Ernest is engaged to two women.

Appositives, also a construction for naming:

- (3) There is a gentleman in Hertfordshire, Ernest. Ernest is engaged to two women.  
(4) I'd like you to meet my friend Ernest. Ernest is engaged to two women.

Tagging:

- (5) A: Who's that?  
B: Ernest. Ernest is from Hertfordshire, and he's engaged to two women.

An introduction ritual:

- (6) A: Charles (nodding and gesturing), this is Ernest (similarly). Ernest (similarly), Charles (similarly).

There is another way that a name can be introduced, and this is via an original dubbing event:

Dubbing:

- (7) A: Who's that?  
B: I dunno. Let's call him 'Ernest'. I think Ernest is awfully cute, don't you?

cf.: *I hereby dub thee Sir Ernest*, or a naming by parents. In these cases, there is a socially granted authority vested in the dubber. But nicknames and nonce cases like (7) do frequently occur, and the resulting association can persist just as well in the informal cases as in the more formal ones.

N.B. the difference between the naming constructions/tagging and dubbing. The former introduce a pre-existing association between name and the anchoring individual. The latter proposes to institute the association.

All the above argues that a name displays the familiarity presupposition typical of definite NPs. This is consistent with other properties of names, pointed out by Geurts (1997), showing the usual definiteness effects:

- (8) There is {\*John/\*the philosopher/a philosopher} available.
- (9) half of {Belgium/the country/\*some countries}

Geurts takes names to be disguised definite descriptions, roughly ‘the individual named *John*’. But his descriptions are not Russellian. Rather, they are anaphoric, presupposing an antecedent, which explains Property A. He implements this idea in Discourse Representation Theory.

One class of Cumming’s examples would tend to support this approach:

**Property B: Availability of *de dicto* readings**

Names display the *de dicto/de re* distinction typical of descriptions, as in Cumming’s example after *Love’s Labours Lost*:

- (10) Context: Rosaline, Maria and Katherine are going to a masked ball. They exchange favors given to them by suitors, to mislead them about their identities, as follows:
  - Rosaline ⇒ Katherine
  - Katherine ⇒ Maria
  - Maria ⇒ Rosaline
 Rosaline’s suitor is Biron. Therefore, he mistakes Katherine for Rosaline. So KR is true, but RK false (failure of symmetry):

- (KR) Biron thinks Katherine is Rosaline.  
                             de re      de dicto
- (RK) Biron thinks Rosaline is Katherine.

cf. definite descriptions, as in:

- (FL) Biron thinks the person who entered first is the person who entered last.  
   de re    de dicto
- (LF) Biron thinks the person who entered last is the person who entered first.

Cumming constructs a similar example to demonstrate failure of transitivity as well.

But Cumming offers other evidence which argues that names are neither rigid designators nor descriptions:

**Property C: Invariability under operators that range over worlds**

Unlike definite descriptions, the denotations of names do not generally vary under modals and other operators that range over possible worlds. Cumming extends Kripke's (1972) argument to this effect, based on the behavior of names in the scope of metaphysical modal auxiliaries, by arguing that names are unacceptable in another kind of intensional context, one which gives rise to Concealed Questions (CQs). He follows Nathan (2005) in arguing that the complement of a predicate which takes CQs is referentially opaque. So examples like (11a) are ambiguous, and (11) may be true but (12) false:

- (11) John knows the capital of Fiji.  
Acquaintance reading: John is acquainted with the city.  
CQ reading: John knows to answer to the question *what is the capital of Fiji?*
- (12) John knows the largest port in Fiji.

But proper name complements can only give rise to the acquaintance reading:

- (13) John knows Suva.  
has only the acquaintance reading, though Suva is the capital of Fiji
- (14) #Today, John learned Suva.  
*learn* requires a "world-sensitive object"

Even metaphysically rigid descriptions are ok, as in (15a), as long as they're not really proper names, which he takes to be the case with *the number two* in (15b):

- (15) a. John knows the even prime. (CQ)  
b. John knows the number two. (\*CQ)

Cumming takes this property to argue against descriptivist accounts of proper names, like Guerts. However, it isn't clear that it does so. For it turns out that many definite descriptions cannot be CQs either. This includes not only those like (15b) (which one might argue to be not a name, but a title—it is *two* which is the name), but short definites like *the woman* and others like that in (16) (Cumming) and (17) (Ezra Keshet, p.c.):

- (16) [context: The picture on Jordan's wall changes each month] John knows the picture on Jordan's wall. (only the acquaintance reading)
- (17) John knows the city named Suva.

Keshet points out that the definite description in (17) is just the type that descriptivists would take to reflect the descriptive content of a proper name. So it isn't clear that this test is problematic for the descriptivist.

**Property D: General, i.e. non-specific, non-functional denotation**

There are three aspects of this property. Unlike descriptions (at least, those without bound variables in them) or rigid designators, names:

- 1. may be non-specific: (2) above could be true even if “I deduce [(2)] solely from onomastic and marital trends in the Home Counties. In that case, I have no particular Ernest in mind when I utter [(2)], and my claim must be a general, existential one.”
- 2. display a lack of uniqueness (incompatible either with a rigid Kripkean function or a Russellian definite): Suppose there are *two* men going around Hertfordshire under the name ‘Ernest’, one called Algy and another Jack, the latter the older brother of the former, each engaged to two women. Then both the following are intuitively true:
  - (18) There is a gentleman in Hertfordshire by the name of ‘Ernest’. Ernest is engaged to two women *and is the elder of two brothers*.
  - (19) There is a gentleman in Hertfordshire by the name of ‘Ernest’. Ernest is engaged to two women *and is the younger of two brothers*.

Note again, however, that while these properties weigh against the Kripkean account or a descriptivist account based on the Russellian theory of definite descriptions, they are not problematic for Geurts, who does not assume a Russellian account, uniqueness or specificity.

Cumming Properties B-D to show that only a variabilist theory like the one he adopts predicts that names will vary along the correct parameter. Schematically:

World Parameter			Assignment Parameter
STABLE	UNSTABLE		
Millianism	Descriptivism	STABLE	
Variabilism		UNSTABLE	

Descriptivism incorrectly predicts free variation along the world parameter, while Millianism incorrectly predicts no variation at all.

But on Cumming’s variabilist theory, proper names have the proffered content of free variables, and they thus get their interpretation from a contextually given assignment of values to variables. The utterances in which they occur then denote open propositions, since the values of these variables must be contextually fixed to yield the understood closed proposition. Indefinites act as operators over contextual assignments, effectively updating them to fix values for the

corresponding variables in subsequent discourse. So far, this is basically a re-invention of the idea of discourse referents introduced by indefinites, serving to interpret anaphoric definites in subsequent discourse. His real innovation is an explanation for the *de dicto/de re* distinction, yielding not only an account of the *Love's Labours Lost* example (10), but the real big game, the *Hesperus/Phosphorus* puzzle:

- |      |                        |   |
|------|------------------------|---|
| (20) | Hesperus is visible.   | Open proposition: <i>visible</i> $x_{hes}$  |
| (21) | Phosphorus is visible. | Open proposition: <i>visible</i> $x_{phos}$ |

The goal is to explain how, despite the fact that *Hesperus* and *Phosphorus* both refer to the planet Venus, one could reasonably believe that (20) is true but (21) false, or *vice versa*, and of course to guarantee failure of substitutivity *salva veritate*. To accomplish this, Cumming (546ff) posits that attitude predicates can shift contextual assignment values. Hence, when a proper name occurs in the scope of such a predicate (i.e. is *de dicto*, as opposed to wide scope/*de re*), its value may be affected by that shift. *believe* and other attitude predicates are treated as relations between individuals and open propositions: “one believes an open proposition *o* iff *o* is true at every assignment-world pair consistent with what one believes (every pair in one’s “belief set”).” So you believe (20) iff “you have inwardly “tagged” that use of ‘Hesperus’ with the property of being visible.” And you might have so-tagged uses of *Hesperus* without doing so with *Phosphorus*. Thus you can believe one of (20)/(21) without believing the other, and substitution only preserves truth if the names are read *de re*. There are also a number of other nice consequences discussed on p.548.

But Property C, invariability under operations over possible worlds, is compatible with this story, because metaphysical modals are *not* shifters. They only operate over closed propositions, which is to say that they cannot shift the contextual reference relation captured by assignments. So we get Kripke’s results in those modal contexts.

So far this is a very nice account, albeit Cumming fails to recognize the close relationship between his theory and that of familiarity-based approaches to anaphora in the literature on dynamic interpretation. This is, however, a bit more than just an oversight, for it leads him to ignore certain possibilities which the latter kind of theory suggests. In particular, Cumming assumes without argument that names are always free in the sentence in which they occur. However, Geurts, adopting an anaphoric theory parallel to that developed for donkey sentences, looks for and finds evidence that names *can* take antecedents in the utterance in which they occur, even local to an intensional operator:<sup>1</sup>

**Property E: Potential local satisfaction of the familiarity presupposition**

Names may occur locally bound:

- (22) If a child is christened ‘Bambi’, then Disney will sue Bambi’s parents.

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<sup>1</sup> Geurts provides a number of examples of purported local satisfaction which I take to instead involve mention of the names in question. You can recognize them by the fact that a paraphrase is better with an *indefinite* description (*a person named Leslie*, not *the person named Leslie*), instead of a definite, as in his:

(i) In English, Leslie may be a man or a woman, but John is always a male.

or my improved version (where the use of a name instead of a pronoun is motivated by the existence of two equally salient potential antecedents):

- (23) If one child was christened *Bambi* and another *Bugs*, Disney would sue Bambi's parents, while Looney Tunes would send Bugs's folks a bushel of carrots.

This is similar to Geurts' (24) (a case of modal subordination), where a delusional, irrealis link between Mary's imaginary son and his name is implied, again, not in the actual world, but in a world or circumstance conforming to her imagination:

- (24) Mary is under the illusion that she has a son named *John* and she believes that John is the thief.

This is exactly what the anaphoric theory would predict. Notice that on the modal subordination account of Roberts (1989,1996), *John* in the second conjunct is *not* free in the clause in which it occurs. That is, *a son named John* is only what she calls a "licensing NP" for the anaphora (see also Roberts 2004), and not the true antecedent for the anaphoric definite, the true antecedent being the discourse referent introduced in the restriction of the domain of the operator *must*.

But crucially, names cannot always occur locally bound, as we see in (25), due to Carl Pollard (p.c.):

- (25) [Context: There are two different guys named *Bob* in the department, and it happens that exactly one of them is on each department committee.]  
Every time there's a committee meeting, Bob wants to adjourn early.

This is quite odd. But it is fine if we replace Bob with *the member named Bob*. This seems like a real problem for Geurts' descriptivist account: Presupposing the descriptive content 'named *Bob*', and permitting that to be merely locally satisfied, doesn't yield an adequate theory.

Here is what I think accounts for the difference between the acceptable cases like (23) and (24) and the unacceptable (25): In (23), we have an explicit dubbing to establish the causal link between name and bearer, *not in the actual world but in the hypothetical circumstance*. Similarly, in (24) it is clear that Mary imagines that there was such a dubbing event to name her imaginary son. But in (25) there is no such hypothetical dubbing: There are merely two Bobs, one on each committee, both so-called because of actual original dubbings. So I would argue that the locally-bound examples crucially involve a non-global *dubbing*.

Cumming does consider an example involving modal subordination:<sup>2</sup>

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<sup>2</sup> He fails to note that on the account of Roberts (1989,1996), the indefinite in the first sentence is not the antecedent for the definite in the second, but only licenses it (see also Roberts 2004 for discussion of the difference between a true antecedent and a licensing NP, and arguments that examples like (26) involve licensing, due to the scope constraint on anaphora). On this analysis, this example falsifies his claim that a proper name is always free in a sentence in which it occurs.

(26) Gwendolyn will only marry a man named ‘Ernest’. Ernest must have a strong, upright nature.

Here, as in (24), there’s no explicit hypothetical dubbing. To relevantly satisfy the familiarity presupposition of the subject of the second sentence, we must assume that the modal *must* has its domain restricted to worlds in which Gwendolyn’s non-negotiable requirement (suggested by the first sentence) has been satisfied, so that Gwendolyn finds a marriageable man named Ernest. Then the proffered content is that in any ideal world in this domain, this hypothetical Ernest is strong and upright. Implicitly presupposed is that this someone named Ernest was so dubbed in the usual fashion. Again, this differs from the *Bob* case in that we’re not ranging over different real Ernests, but considering a hypothetical one.

It isn’t clear that examples like (24) - (26) are all that problematic for Cumming. His theory would presumably have to be extended to permit indefinites in the scope of a modal or predicate like *be under the illusion that* to shift the contextual assignment, temporarily in such cases, just as they do permanently when the indefinite is not in an intensional context. This would just require, in other words, adoption of more of the mechanisms of the dynamic theories which his theory tracks up to this point.

But Cumming’s theory does not provide us with a way of readily accounting for the difference between examples where local binding is licensed by hypothetical dubbing and those in which it fails, like Pollard’s (25). If I’m right about this difference, it harkens back to Kripke’s thesis that the felicitous use of a proper name is anchored in a kind of causal linkage between the name and its bearer. But like Geurts’, Cumming’s theory has nothing to say about this kind of linkage, hence no account of the difference.

## II. An alternative story

Proper names carry a familiarity presupposition, like other definites (Roberts 2003, 2004, 2002). This means that they must have a familiar discourse referent antecedent in the context of utterance. We can model this using assignment functions, in a dynamic version of Cumming’s account. But just as, on Roberts’ story, what is presupposed to hold of the anaphoric antecedent for a definite description differs from that for a demonstrative, so the familiarity presupposition associated with a proper name has a feature peculiar to this type of definite NP: For felicitous use of a name *n*, the discourse referent in the interlocutors’ common context which satisfies its familiarity presupposition carries the information that the individual bearer of *n* does so by virtue of a socially recognized, causal dubbing event by an (authorized) agent, and the subsequent social propagation of the name-individual association through the language reaching from the dubbing event in an unbroken anaphoric chain to the current occasion of use. As in Kripke’s account, the linkage is merely causal, not descriptive, in that the individual in question bears the name solely by virtue of this socially recognized linkage, not through any property described by the name itself.<sup>3</sup>

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<sup>3</sup> Actually, in some places there *are* presuppositions about the bearer associated with the names themselves—e.g., the French and the Czech governments by law restrict what names you can assign to a child in virtue of gender or nationality. So apparently you cannot name a boy *Caroline* in France, or a girl *Charles*. But that’s an extra feature,

That's it, quite simply. But this approach has a number of consequences that recommend it.

- It straightforwardly explains the requirement (Property A) that a name be introduced to the CG prior to use. This is just what is required to create (via dubbing) or properly extend (via the other introduction mechanisms) the anaphoric chain to new users.
- As with anaphora in general, it predicts the attested lack of specificity and functionality in some uses of proper names (Property D).
- It suggests a way to explain the fact that while generally invariable under modals and other intensional operators (Property C), names can vary under attitude predicates (Property B) and in some cases be locally bound (Property E). What's crucial in these cases is the potential for assumption of a hypothetical, irrealis dubbing which anchors social propagation of the name-denotatum association via an anaphoric chain. Since this anchor and chain are part of what is conventionally presupposed by a name, their local assumption licenses merely local satisfaction of the presupposition, as in (23). If a modal is metaphysical, it is implausible (because irrelevant to metaphysical matters) that a speaker would intend to restrict its domain with information about such hypothetical social institutions, so we don't see local variation of the denotata of names under such operators. But when we are in an attitude context, as in (24), or when an operator is restricted with propositions pertaining to the beliefs, wishes or ideals of an agent, such as Gwendolyn's in (26), then it is more plausible to consider the restriction of the operator as involving a hypothetical dubbing and anaphoric chain. Agents have attitudes toward such matters which are completely parallel to the attitudes of the interlocutors in a discourse toward the common ground and associated discourse referents: In particular, the agents of reported attitudes may have beliefs about the way that particular names are anchored, and in contexts reporting those attitudes the satisfaction of the presuppositions of the names in question, on their *de dicto* interpretation, is relative to the agents' attitudes about their anchoring. If the ancients believed that the anchor of the anaphoric chain associated with *Hesperus* was distinct from the anchor for use of *Phosphorus*, then in reporting their attitudes by using these names *de dicto*, we do so relative to the kind of anaphoric relations they presuppose, not those assumed by modern interlocutors in their common ground. Relative to the ancients' assumptions, *Hesperus* was *not* coreferential with *Phosphorus*. As Cumming points out, this has nothing to do with metaphysical possibility. In fact, the world as the ancients thought it to be was *impossible* in several respects, including this non-coreference. Then if the familiarity presuppositions of *de dicto* interpretations of names are merely locally satisfied in an irrealis context, the subject of embedded (20) may have a distinct discourse referent antecedent than that of embedded (21), yielding the possibility of distinct truth conditions for the whole. That is, not only can we straightforwardly retain Cumming's account of the *Hesperus/Phosphorus* puzzle. But I would argue that the present story, where the anaphoric presupposition *involves* the dubbing and anaphoric chain, is preferable in at least two respects.

First, instead of restricting local satisfaction to the complements of attitude predicates, as Cumming does, what is essential is that the local contexts which “shift” the variable assignment (the discourse referents associated with the names) involve an agent's attitude. Hence, the present story can be extended straightforwardly to predict restriction of the

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and not necessary in the general case—as witnessed by the association of *Craige* to a female person in the current instance.



domain of modals when their restrictions involve attitudes, as is the case in Cumming’s own (26). Because Cumming’s story involves differentiating between the attitude predicates, which take open propositions as their arguments, and the metaphysical modals, which take closed propositions, extending it to account for attitudinal interpretations of modals would be awkward, as these would have to take “open propositions”, so that modals would be of different types under different interpretations—their complements sometimes open, sometimes closed. On the present anaphoric story, what’s essential isn’t the type of the complement, but whether presupposition satisfaction is local or global, a distinction quite well motivated independently of the present issue. Second, since on the present account the discourse referents which satisfy names’ familiarity presuppositions carry information about anchoring, it is arguably more natural to assume that a given agent’s information about the anchoring of a given name might differ in just the way required from that of the interlocutors as represented in the common ground, in order to give a satisfactory account of how *de dicto* interpretations arise. Effectively, Biron is confused about what anchors the use of the name of his beloved Rosaline; he has defective information about the discourse referent associated with that name. So his *use* of the name to refer to the lady with his favor is defective—the presupposition incorrectly satisfied, and this is reflected in the local context reflecting his attitudes. The ancients were in a similar position about the Morning Star and Evening Star, taking them to have distinct anchors when they have in fact one. And that’s all there was to it.

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