Heidi Savage
December 2017

Being Called Names: Attributive Calling Accounts of Proper Names

Historically, debates about the nature of proper names have been about whether we should treat them as devices of reference or as disguised definite descriptions. More recently, however, the debate centers around treating them as devices of reference or as predicates. There are different views about the nature of name-predicates. At least one version of predicativism relies on analyzing name-predicates as involving the concept of being called by a name – calling accounts. Some have offered meta-linguistic calling accounts of the nature of such predicates, but such accounts are subject to criticism on the grounds of failing to be informative. An alternative calling account, the attributive account, most recently developed by Fara, does not fall prey to this objection, on the face of it. However, it is not clear that it is fully informative, and it also appears to rest on a mistaken conception of the nature of meta-linguistic actions, which itself suggests another way to the significance of acts of naming.

1. Introduction

The meaning of a proper name has long been a source of controversy. It seems

undeniable, at some level, that names are used to stand for particular individuals. The

classical debate concerned whether they did so by describing these individuals, or through

a more direct mechanism. Historically, many philosophers adhered to the former thesis, due

to the theoretical advantages pointed out long ago by Russell. But later developments – a

concern with natural language and how it actually functions, together with Kripke's scathing

critique of descriptivist accounts of proper names – nearly eliminated that view.

More recently, however, though not without some historical basis, some

philosophers have begun to question even the background assumption that names stand

for particular individuals. Instead, what these philosophers suggest is that names function

semantically as predicates – that is, they advance a predicative thesis concerning the

meaning of proper names. It is this suggestion we will be concerned with in the present

paper, focusing on both previous and recent proposals, with an emphasis on what will be known as attributive accounts, pioneered by Burge (1973), but developed by Fara (2011a, 2011b, 2015). While the most recent attributive account represents a significant advance over previous versions of predicative theses, it ultimately fails to provide a satisfying account of the meaning of proper names, or of the significance of acts of naming. A different account is then sketched, based on a picture of acts of naming as performative meta-linguistic acts.

2. Motives for Treating Names as Predicates

The motives for treating names as predicates are varied, but one classical reason comes from Quine (1953): names should be treated as predicates because doing so allows us to avoid the traditional problems associated with empty names.[1] Those traditional problems arose in the context of taking names to be expressions that have only referents – that this exhausts their meaning. Clearly the existence of empty names challenges this view since it predicts that these names would be meaningless. However, if we stop treating names as expressions used to refer to individuals and instead treat them as predicates, then their meaning need not be exhausted by having a referent. Instead, they can be fully meaningful expressions, since their meaning would consist in being associated with a specific property, and therefore, would not require the existence of a referent to give them meaning.[2]

Contemporary predicativists have a different motivation from Quine's for treating names as predicates. These predicativists are motivated, instead, by linguistic evidence

---

[1] While Quine himself was not concerned with this idea as a thesis about natural language, since his concerns were with metaphysical issues, not an analysis of natural language. Still, the idea of treating names as predicates has its roots in this work.
[2] Of course, we do have empty predicates in the language as well, but we'll ignore that for the purposes at hand.

suggesting that names do in fact function like predicates.[3] For instance, consider the sentence 'Some Franks are real chatterboxes, while some other Franks are true bookworms'. Sentences like this show that names, like predicates, can take on determiners, and predicativists take this as evidence that they are predicates, that they are not expressions that function to designate singular individuals, at least grammatically.

3. Accounts of Names as Predicates

Because Quine never develops his suggestion of treating a name as a predicate in any detail, we are left wondering what the meaning of a name might be, if it is to be treated predicatively. As we might imagine, predicative accounts of proper names can come in different varieties.

One possible Moorean-style (1903) account is that the meaning of each name is equivalent to that of a simple, un-analyzable predicate, one for each named individual in a domain of discourse. But this account faces the same problems that any primitivist theory of any other concept faces. As an explanation, it is rather unsatisfying.

If we reject the previous account as unsatisfying, then we still need an analysis of the meaning of name-predicates. Other accounts of names as predicates explain the meaning of name-predicates in terms of calling relations.

One traditionally popular view is known as the meta-linguistic account (Kneale 1962; Katz, 2001). On this meta-linguistic calling account, the meaning of a name like 'Tyler' is equivalent to 'individual called 'Tyler'. So, when a speaker utters the sentence 'Tyler wanted a new car' the meaning of uttered sentence is equivalent to 'The/that individual called 'Tyler'

---

[3] See Burge, 1973; Elbourne, 2005; Elgardo, 2002; Fara, 2015; Geurts, 1997; Gray 2013; Izumi, 2013; Larson and Segal, 1995; Matushansky, 2008; Pietroski, 2010; Sawyer, 2010; Sloat 1969.

wanted a new car'.[4] The calling relation on these accounts is understood to hold between an individual and a linguistic expression. It is exactly this feature that leads to a specific objection to this view, which in turn motivates another calling account.

Arguably, an informative account of the meaning of an expression in a language ought to give a non-native speaker of that language an understanding of that expression's application conditions.[5] But, it is not clear that the meta-linguistic account can accomplish this. Kripke, in fact, argued that the meta-linguistic account of proper names is not informative (1980: 68-70) in the previous sense. And the reason for this is that the meta-linguistic account mentions the relevant expression itself in its application condition.[6] To illustrate its inadequacy, Kripke applies this approach to the particular expression 'quarks' (1980: 69). On Kripke's interpretation, the meta-linguistic analysis of the meaning of 'quark' is just this: the expression 'quarks' picks out those things we call 'quarks'. However, while a speaker understanding the expression 'called' in the object language might recognize this as a truth, they would still not understand or be able to use the expression 'quarks' unless they were already familiar with its application conditions.

Mutatis mutandis, suppose a speaker is attempting to understand the expression 'Tyler' and they are told that the meaning of 'Tyler' is whatever we call 'Tyler'. Would this

---

[4] Different accounts use different determiners depending upon whether they believe names can function as definite descriptions, in which case 'the' is the appropriate determiner, or they believe that names need to function as rigid designators, in which case 'that' is the appropriate determiner.

[5] See Katz (2001) for a rejection of this condition on a satisfying account of the meaning of a proper name.

[6] We might think that an account that is tautologous might still determine a name's reference simply by fiat. However, even if that is correct, such an account would not allow us to determine a name's referent as speakers. We have to distinguish between theories of meaning that are materially adequate in pairing the correct symbols with their appropriate extensions from those that are truly informative. Truly informative accounts will at least allow some way of knowing how to learn the meaning of the expression in question.

information, in and of itself, help the speaker in their quest to speak the object language in which they are seeking fluency? Not especially. Perhaps, if we already had some knowledge of naming conventions, believed that names are devices used to arbitrarily tag individuals, and we were learning language in an immersive way, it might give us some guidance. But our analyses of meanings are supposed to give guidance to the complete novice with access only to a translation manual, and it seems clear that the meta-linguistic analysis of proper names fails in this regard. Kripke concludes that a meta-linguistic account cannot give us any way of understanding the meaning of a name that is not tautologous. And, therefore, it gives us no means for determining that name's application conditions, and therefore, it is uninformative.[7]

We can now see the need for a predicative account of proper names distinct from the meta-linguistic account. Still, however, we might believe that the meta-linguistic account gets at least something right: a name's meaning is fundamentally tied up with acts of calling. That is, the idea that the meaning of name has something to do with our calling practices is plausible. An alternative calling account of proper names that respects this insight is the attributive account. This account, in its infancy, was characterized by Burge in the following way: a proper name is (literally) true of an object just in case that object is given that name in an appropriate way (1973, p. 340). We can see that Burge is here making the relation between a name and its bearer one of having a certain property, and that objects have these properties in virtue of certain acts of calling, though the view is not explained this way

---

[7] Katz (2001) responds to this challenge by claiming that the purpose of offering a theory of a name's meaning is not to allow a speaker to determine its reference, but rather to explain certain inferences we might make with respect to proper names. This is not a response we shall pursue here, since we are here interested in evaluating direct responses to Kripke's challenge, responses that do take the desiderata that a theory of a proper name's meaning ought to in fact provide a means for determining its reference.

explicitly. Still, for Burge, a name is true of an object, in the same way as any predicate can be true of an object, and the condition under which name-predicates are true of objects is when certain acts of calling are performed in the appropriate way. Fara's attributive account recognizes these features of Burge's account explicitly, and gives us a precise and worked out formulation of it (2011b).

What makes attributive accounts special as predicative accounts, then, is not that they reject the importance of calling relations in an account of the meaning of a proper name. What makes them special is that they dispense with the meta-linguistic aspect of the previous analysis. On the attributive view, when we call someone Tyler, we ascribe the property of being Tyler to that individual; we relate an individual to a property, not a linguistic expression (Fara, 2015). As we can see, just as in the meta-linguistic account, a name's meaning depends on a calling relation, but on one that is not itself meta-linguistic. To rely on an example used by Fara (2011b), someone can be called stupid, in the sense of failing to be intelligent, but this does not to relate that person to the linguistic expression 'stupid', but rather to the property of being stupid. That is, we can call people "names" – say derogatory things about them – via attributions of certain properties associated with particular expressions. This, of course, is what is meant by children crying out: sticks and stones may break my bones, but names will never hurt me.

As in the case of being called stupid, to be called Tyler, on an attributive account of naming, is to be attributed the property of being Tyler. It is not to be understood as having anything to do with that individual being related to any particular linguistic expression. For this reason, that is, because the attributive account does not mention, but rather uses a name in an account of its meaning, it can arguably avoid Kripke's informativeness objection.

6

Before, exploring this latter point any further, let us first examine, in more detail, exactly what this new attributive notion of calling consists in, and how exactly it is supposed to apply in the case of proper names.

4. Two Notions of Calling

On the attributive view, it is a mistake to understand the expression 'being called x' in one and only one sense, the meta-linguistic sense, since calling can also be understood in an attributive fashion. There are several examples of this attributive understanding of the calling relation, which we will now turn to examining (Fara, 2011b).

One example, seen previously, which illustrates how we might call some individual something in an attributive sense relies on an adjective. For instance, we might say that

(1) Maude was called 'stupid'.

is true, but still maintain that it is false that

(2) Maude was called stupid.

This is because it might be the case that Maude has the expression 'stupid' applied to her as an ironic nickname as in

(3) Hey, stupid, help me with my calculus homework.

Or, she might also literally have the property of stupidity attributed to her as someone might do by saying

(4) That stupid Maude caused me to fail my calculus class.

That is, Maude might be called stupid but fail to be addressed using the word 'stupid'.

We can further illustrate the different notions of calling involved in these examples by noting that a person might not mind being addressed as stupid, but would mind having the

property of stupidity attributed to her. As Fara writes, this person might make make her opinions known by uttering the sentence:

(5) You can call me 'stupid', just don't call me stupid.

The calling relation in the first part of this utterance is the familiar meta-linguistic notion, holding between a person and a linguistic symbol, while the calling relation in the second part is a different, attributive relation, holding between a person and a property.[8]

Now that we have established that there are, in fact, different notions of calling we can invoke, it is incumbent upon us to examine whether the other attributive notion of calling carries over to the case of proper names. Again, turning to more examples from Fara (2011b), this time involving proper names, while it might be true that

(6) Quine was called Willard,

as in Quine has the property of being a Willard, perhaps in virtue of its being written on his birth certificate or some such thing, nevertheless the following sentence might be false:

(7) Quine was called 'Willard'.

The first use is supposed to indicate that we know that Quine's name is in fact Willard, but what we do not know is whether Quine was ever addressed using the name 'Willard'. Perhaps he was always referred to using the expression 'Will' by his parents. If the only notion of calling was the meta-linguistic notion, then as Fara notes, sentence (6) should be ill-formed, to say the least. To the put the point in another way, if sentences (6) and (7) were merely different formulations of the same point, then any observed discrepancy of the truth of those sentences should not be possible, but in fact, it is. To be called Willard is not simply

---

[8] Bach (2002) also points out this distinction, but does not develop the view in the detail that Fara does.

a matter of being addressed as 'Willard', since despite the fact that Quine's name was 'Willard', it could still fail to be an expression that others use to address him.

In the previous examples, the being-addressed-as relation is the relation that properly delineates the meta-linguistic notion of calling, something anyone can do with whatever expression they choose at anytime they like. To call in this sense is to assign someone or something to a linguistic item arbitrarily as its semantic value, and perhaps as a one-time act. However, naming is decidedly not like this, as our previous examples illustrate. Quine, for instance, got his name in virtue of someone or other having a certain special authoritative relation to him, such as his parents might have to him. Parents are in the position of being able to make it true that Quine is called Willard, but not necessarily that Quine is called by the name 'Willard'. In other words, Quine's parents cannot guarantee that Quine will be addressed using the name 'Willard' in the object language, but they do make it true that Quine is, in fact, Willard.

Clearly, there is a difference then between having a name, and being addressed using that name. The second of these is the standard meta-linguistic notion, first is encodes the idea of its being a matter of property attribution – the attributive use. Naming is not a matter of meta-linguistic actions, but rather a matter of property attribution.

5. The Informativeness of the Attributive Account

Suppose that there is an attributive notion of calling. And suppose being called by a certain name should be understood on this model. If correct, then Kripke's objections to calling accounts miss the mark because there are calling accounts that are not meta-linguistic, and his objections apply only to calling accounts that are meta-linguistic. As illustrated, we can distinguish different notions of calling in natural language – the meta-linguistic and the

attributive. Once we see that there is an attributive use of proper names, we can give an

informative account of the meaning of a name using this relation, rather than the first, meta-

linguistic relation. In fact, Fara, the leading attributive theorist, does offers us a way, the only

explicitly developed way, of illustrating how such accounts are informative by introducing

this schema

    'N' is true of an object just in case that object is called *N*

as a general application condition for proper names, on which the notion of calling on the

right-hand side of the schema should be understood in the attributive sense.

    To illustrate, this schema entails, for instance, that the name 'Tyler' is true of an

object just in case that object is called Tyler. Specific to the naming case, the schema

licenses a type of disquotation principle such that, if an object is named '*N'*, then that object

is, in fact, *N*. For instance, if an object is called 'Tyler', then that object is in fact Tyler.

    We can see that the schema is informative by showing that the substitution of other

predicates, like the previously discussed 'stupid', result in the schema being false, thereby

proving that the schema is informative. According to Fara, "if the being-called condition for

the applicability of names as predicates were trivially true, then analogous schemata for

other predicates would be trivially true" (2011b, p.499).[9] But, of course, this is false.

---

[9] There are several issues here that need to be clarified about the relation between informativeness and falsifiability before we can properly assess the attributive schema. First, the attributivist cannot be committed to it as a necessary and sufficient condition for informativeness, since the necessity of identity claims prove that falsifiability is not necessary for a claim to be informative. Furthermore, it is far from clear that falsifiability is the correct criterion for evaluating the informativeness of accounts of the meanings of expressions. For instance, we could know that a claim is falsifiable without fully understanding the content of the claim itself, as shown by Kripke's example of a speaker who understands the concept of calling can understand that the claim that quarks are called 'quarks' without thereby coming to know the meaning of the expression 'quark'. So not only does the condition fail to be necessary, it may not even be a sufficient condition for

Consider again the case of the predicate 'stupid'. In that case the schema yields the result that 'stupid' is true of an object – so that the object is stupid – just in case it is called stupid. And, of course, this is not only falsifiable, but false. Some stupid individuals are not called stupid, and some individuals are called stupid even though they are not.

Of course, whether an object is called *N* is itself dependent on our linguistic practices: the fact that someone possesses the property of being called Tyler, for example, holds only because that individual was, at some point, dubbed using the name 'Tyler'. Still, even if being called Tyler, for example, is true of an individual in virtue of our naming practices, this does not make the condition meta-linguistic. To stress the point once again, this is because being Tyler does not involve being related to a linguistic symbol, but a certain property – that of being Tyler.

Attributive accounts of the meaning of a name-predicate, then, have the resources to respond to Kripke, since on this view, relying on the attributive notion of calling in order to give the meaning of a name-predicate is not tautologous in the way it is in when we understand that relation purely meta-linguistically. We can see this if we subscribe to Fara's schema as a condition for name applications, since as we just saw, it is indeed falsifiable, and therefore, informative.

6. More Notions of Calling

There are notions of calling that are neither meta-linguistic, nor attributive. Consider for instance the fact that my dog's name is 'Jackson', but I address him using the expression 'J'. Still, even though I might address him as 'J' and while I may have attributed the property

understanding the meaning of an expression. Relatedly, it is unclear whether we should understand informative and substantive as interchangeable. Instead, we might think of a substantive truth as a metaphysical matter, while informativeness is an epistemic matter. However, it is not my aim to engage this matter directly here.

of being Jackson to him in naming him using the expression 'Jackson', I might also perform

callings besides the previous two kinds, as I do when I call out 'Jackson' to induce him to

come inside.

The notion of calling that is in play here is that of performing a certain action – that of

using Jackson's name in order to induce a certain behavior in him – known as an inducive

use of calling. Note that, of course, we could felicitously report on that kind of calling using

both of the following sentences:

(8) I called 'Jackson' to get him inside.[10]

(9) I called Jackson to get inside.

In sentence (8), a speaker, namely myself, addresses my dog using the name 'Jackson'. I

report on what I did or said by mentioning an expression, and that mentioning of that

expression is done in order to achieve a certain effect – that of getting my dog to come

inside. In contrast, in sentence (9), we are simply reporting on an act with no commitment

about how it is performed – about how Jackson is ordered or enticed to come inside. That

is, to accomplish the purpose of inducive calling, we might do any number of things that

may or may not involve the name 'Jackson'. Of course, I may use the name in order to

accomplish my inducive goals, but I may also simply use the word 'come' to do so, or

perhaps simply the word 'in'.

The existence of more than two notions of calling rules out at least one way of

interpreting Fara's line of argument, a strong interpretation of it as a deductive argument.

Instead, we must now interpret is as an argument by analogy. Because there is at least a

third notion of calling, and perhaps more, this casts doubt on the assimilation of naming to

_____

[10] I enclose the name 'Jackson' in double quotes here to indicate that we are speaking of an actual tokening of the word by a speaker in the object language.

an act of property attribution. The inducive notion of calling is now, in fact, another option for how to understand the notion of calling at work in the case of names. The idea that names are introduced for the purposes of calling attention to, or of getting attention from, an individual is not implausible. In light of this, interpreting Fara's line of argument deductively is impossible without its being guilty of relying on a false dilemma.

In other words, the argument cannot be of this form:

(a) Either the meaning of a name invokes a meta-linguistic or attributive notion of calling.
(b) <u>The meaning of a name cannot invoke a meta-linguistic notion.</u>
(c) Therefore, it must invoke an attributive notion.

Rather, it is of this form:

(a) Being attributed a certain property can be understood using a calling relation – an attributive notion of calling.
(b) <u>Names can be understood using a calling relation.</u>
(c) Therefore, the calling relation in both cases is likely to be the same.

This point plays a pivotal role in one of the objections to the attributive account, two of which we will consider next.

7. Two Objections to Attributive Accounts

The first objection we will explore deals with whether the attributive account, as developed by Fara, is truly informative. It turns on interpreting Fara's argument as an argument by analogy. The second objection is to the attributive theorist's commitments concerning acts of naming, and what constitutes them. It points out some potentially unpalatable consequences of an attributive account of naming.

7.1 The Informativeness Objection

On the surface, the schema for proper names that has them functioning attributively is informative. For sake of argument, let us grant that the falsifiability criterion is itself a

sufficient marker of informativeness for theories of semantic competence. Even so, the argument we saw earlier, that an attributive calling account is informative, showed only that the schema was falsifiable for adjectives like 'stupid'. It did not show that it was falsifiable for name predicates.

Because we must interpret Fara's attributive theory as an argument by analogy, the strength of the claim that the schema is falsifiable, and therefore informative for names, depends on the strength of the analogy between the nature of calling with respect to adjectives and proper names. In order to prove with any certainty that the attributive account is informative for names, we need a false instance of the schema offered when applied to names, not just adjectives. And, in fact, there is at least one kind of case in which this could occur.

The kind of case in which the attributive theorist's schema can be false with respect to names involves those that are translatable across languages. Imagine a French individual, baptized using the name 'Jean', and consider the relevant instance of the given schema in French:

(10) 'Jean' est vrai d'un objet ssi cet objet est appelé Jean.

Because the name 'Jean' is putatively a version of 'John' in English, this instance of the schema can be translated into English as

(11) 'Jean' is true of an object iff that object is called John.

And here we have an instance of the schema that is clearly false, since 'Jean' is true of the individual, but it is false that he is called John. That is, no one standing in the authoritative naming relation to Jean attributed the property of being John to Jean.

We could even imagine that, in parallel with a previous example, this individual, annoyed at the habits of Anglophones, says:

(13) You can call me 'John', just don't call me John.

In uttering this sentence, the speaker would then be agreeing to be addressed by the name 'John', while insisting that he is not John, or that the property of being John is not true of him. This case is analogous to that involving the adjective 'stupid', since both show that, while we might attribute a particular property to an object, this does make the property true of that object.

The cross-linguistic test for informativeness thus seems to vindicate the given attributive schema. However, we might question whether the success of the cross-linguistic test really does show that the naming case is, after all, akin to the predicate case, since no such cross-linguistic test was required for other predicate-expressions, expressions like 'stupid'. If we are to find the analogy between names and adjectives convincing, we should explore whether there could be an instance of the attributive schema on which it might be false for names not only cross-linguistically, but also intra-linguistically.[11]If this could be done, then the analogy between names and adjectives would have a much stronger basis, and therefore, so too would the claim that the attributive account of names is truly informative.

But, of course, since the property of being, let us say John, is had purely in virtue of language-relative naming practices, an intra-linguistic proof that the schema could be

---

[11] This may not seem obvious. For instance, one might propose that names form a special class of predicates for which this generally informative schema is guaranteed to hold. That would represent an interesting way to characterize names against the backdrop of a generally informative schema. However, whether the schema is indeed informative depends upon whether the analogy between adjectives and names is appropriate. And this has not been convincingly established.

falsified for names is impossible. Certain expressions, such as 'stupid', have applicability criteria that are not entirely dependent upon linguistic practices. Others, such as names, do not. As we saw, it is not sufficient for someone's being stupid that they are called stupid – other factors are in play as well, having to do with what it is to be stupid. In other words, the property of being stupid has some language independent application criteria. In contrast, it is sufficient for someone's being John that they are named John, making John a property, if it is a property at all, an entirely language specific property.

The lesson to be drawn is that the attributive schema is not informative for names in the same way as it is for other predicates, since unlike those other expressions, we cannot falsify the schema for names within a language, and this is because the attributive calling relation for names, although not superficially metalinguistic, is still wholly supported by particular acts of naming. These acts of naming somehow make certain language specific properties true of objects, and it is this fact that is in need of analysis, if we are to have a truly informative account of the nature of proper names. In fact, Kripke himself indicates as much: whatever this relation of *calling* is is really what determines the reference... (1980: 70)[12] Simply providing a schema for proper names that is not itself meta-linguistic does not give us insight into this latter issue, and therefore, while not straightforwardly tautologous, the attributive account is not informative in a deeper way.

7.2 The Conferring Properties Objection

A second objection to attributive accounts of names concerns how to understand acts of naming. According to the arguments we saw previously, a meta-linguistic understanding is ruled out because meta-linguistic acts are willy-nilly in a certain way: we can address

---

[12] In fact, this very quote from Kripke reveals that he is indeed open to an analysis of the very notion of calling itself that may not be meta-linguistic.

anyone with any expression we like, but this does not make it true of them that that expression is their name. This understanding of meta-linguistic acts suggests that there must be something different about acts of naming that distinguishes them from mere meta-linguistic acts of addressing an individual by using an expression of the speaker's choice. The meta-linguistic analysis is mistaken not only because it is uninformative, but also because meta-linguistic speech acts just cannot capture how acts of naming really work.

The attributive theorist's explanation of the difference between addressing an individual with a certain expression and naming an individual, which we saw earlier, is that acts of naming are special authoritative acts that confer properties upon an individual – that of having the property of being called by a certain name, and by our previous disquotation principle, that of having the property expressed by that name. However, this understanding of acts of naming has some rather odd consequences.

It is simply a fact that properties can be described in several different ways. For instance, as Fara points out, we can ascribe the property of being stupid to someone by saying that this person is dim-witted and ignorant. A question then arises for the attributive account of naming: why, if having a name is to bestow a certain property upon a individual, could this not also be accomplished in any number of ways, as we can do with other property attributions? On the property attribution model, it is unclear why not, in principle, supposing being given a name is a matter of bestowing a property. But this is simply not how people get the names they do. Mentioning a certain expression is an essential part of the act of naming, but it is unclear on the attributive account, why this should be the case.

Reconsider our previous Jean example. It is not obvious why we could not, on the attributive view, bestow the name 'John' by using the expression 'Jean'. After all, 'Jean' is in

17

fact a translation of 'John', just as the expression 'dim-witted and ignorant' is a translation of the expression 'stupid'. The names 'Jean' and 'John' then should express the very same property. We should then, if the attributive theory is correct, be able to make it true of John that he has the property of being John by using the expression 'Jean' in naming him.

The idea here is that the implications of making names express properties show that an attributive view of acts of naming is flawed. For instance, if the attributivist is to maintain that we cannot name John 'John' by using the name 'Jean', then they would have to deny that the name 'Jean' is a translation of the name 'John'. Alternatively, the attributivist could maintain that in special cases of bestowing names we cannot ascribe certain properties to individuals by using different words that express that very same property. But neither of these moves would be easy to defend.[13]

8. An Alternative Hypothesis: Performative Meta-linguistic Speech Acts

An act of naming could be thought to be some kind of speech act, or at least it is plausible to think of it on this model. But what kind of speech act? Attributivists would say that they ought to be understood as acts that make it true of individuals that they have certain properties. But this account misses the importance of the meta-linguistic role played by the relevant expressions in acts of naming, as revealed by the second objection considered above.

And, the reason for this is that the attributive theorist's conception of meta-linguistic is impoverished. For instance, the attributivist has it that meta-linguistic acts of calling are

---

[13] Another issue that might be raised about the attributive account is that it potentially inherits all of the problems of semantic instrumentalism about names, except now those problems are applied to properties, given that an attributive account is apparently committed to the idea that stipulative acts of naming are acts that bring into existence certain properties.

ephemeral one-off acts, but it is unclear whether ephemeral acts of calling ought to be at all relevant in discussing proper names, since arguably, proper names are not produced by ephemeral acts of calling. There must be more to meta-linguistic acts of calling, then. While it might very well be false that Quine is called 'Willard' at any given time, but holding our language fixed, can we truly say that it is possible that Quine was never called by the name 'Willard'? Surely, it must have been true at least one time. Again, we see a failure to give meta-linguistic acts their proper due in an account of naming by the attributivist. We can see this when Fara says:

> My parents called me Delia Ruby Graff when I was born - that's what made it the case that I was called Delia Ruby Graff. I added 'Fara' as an adult - that's what made it the case that I am now called Delia Ruby Graff Fara. But I have never heard anyone call me 'Delia Ruby Graff Fara'; I doubt that anyone ever has. So although I am now called Delia Ruby Graff Fara, I have never been called 'Delia Ruby Graff Fara' (2011b., p. 6).

Here we can see how the attributivist account falls prey to our previous objection. The attributivist relies on an impoverished notion of meta-linguistic acts.

Instead of understanding meta-linguistic acts on the previous model, we should instead first separate types of meta-linguistic acts relying on a distinction long ago made in Austin's work (1962). Specifically, we might apply his performative-constative distinction to those meta-linguistic acts. A performative linguistic act is one that brings about a certain effect, as when a speaker utters the words 'I promise', and thereby makes it true that they have made a promise, or when speaker utters 'I do' during a wedding ceremony, and thereby makes it true that they are then married. Constative linguistic acts are those that merely describe, as when someone asserts that he promised to make her a sandwich or that they were married by a Justice of the Peace. They do not effect changes in the world. A

19

performative meta-linguistic act, then, would be one that effects a change where that change is essentially tied to the words mentioned in that act, as when Humpty Dumpty declares that the expression 'glory' shall mean a nice knockdown argument, or when August Comte coined the term 'positivism' for a certain understanding of scientific methods for studying the world. A constative meta-linguistic act would be one that merely describes, but which is accurate only if certain words are mentioned, as when we report that Humpty Dumpty defined 'glory' as a nice knockdown argument, or that August Comte coined the term 'positivism'.

Of course, if it seems obvious that Quine was called 'Willard' could be false, since others might choose never to mention the name 'Willard' at all in addressing Quine, we must now recognize this as false only as a description of our linguistic practices, only as a meta-linguistic constative utterance. It does not follow that because we can falsify constative meta-linguistic utterances that, therefore, calling itself is not fundamentally meta-linguistic. This is true only if we fail to recognize that, in addition to constative meta-linguistic acts, there are also performative meta-linguistic acts.

Suppose we consider the fact that was Quine was called 'Willard' in another sense, in the sense of his having been dubbed using that name, an instance of a performative meta-linguistic act. Such acts have felicity conditions, but not truth values. So, we could not say that Quine's parents, for instance, got it wrong when they dubbed Quine using the name 'Willard'. And it is in this sense that calling is meta-linguistic, in the performative sense. Once we recognize these performative meta-linguistic acts, we need not eliminate

meta-linguistic acts completely from an account of naming. I will now offer something in the way of supporting some kind of meta-linguistic analysis of being named.[14]

Consider the fact that in naming a child, one does mention, in fact must mention, a particular expression. After all, as we saw, if a specific name is not mentioned, it is not clear why an individual might not be called a certain name in any number of ways, as we saw with the attributive notion of calling. Recall also that, in the inducive case, I can call or summon Jackson by uttering the expression 'come' or 'Jackson'. It appears that the meta-linguistic features of acts of naming cannot be avoided, since otherwise, there is no explanation for why people get the actual names that they do.

Up to this point, mentionings of expressions as direct speech reports in the object language have been enclosed in single quotes, as has the mentioning of an expression in the meta-language. But this usage might be flawed. There is a reason for this. It's possible that the informativeness objection to meta-linguistic accounts is misguided for reasons other than what the attributive theorist believes. We might think, for instance, that there is a difference between saying the meaning of 'quarks' is whatever are called 'quarks', and the meaning of 'quarks' is whatever are called "quarks." The former does indeed seem tautologous, but perhaps the latter is not. The latter gives us some information about direct speech reports, and those could very well be used in constructing a theory of the meanings of the expressions so reported.

Actually, the use of double quotes here might reveal a problem with Kripke's objection, which I address elsewhere. Namely, that the objection trades on conflating the meta-language with the object language. If the use of double quotes here is appropriate, as

---

[14] This idea is developed more fully in my "Naming as a Performative Meta-linguistic Act."

it seems, then we might say that a meta-linguistic analysis is indeed informative because the use of the expression being analyzed on the right-hand side is understood in terms of the way language is actually used.[15]

Having distinguished between performative and constative meta-linguistic acts, and between mentionings in the meta-language versus mentionings of expressions in direct speech reports, we are now in a position to give a meta-linguistic analysis of the meaning of a name. In explaining an act of naming we can describe it thus: 'Tyler' means whatever it is to be called "Tyler." Where the second occurrence of "Tyler" is intended to represent a direct speech act that mentions the word 'Tyler' in the object language. In understanding acts of naming then, we need to understand them as performative speech acts, and the meaning of a name encodes this fact by reporting on direct speech acts in the object language, because on this view, to be called "Tyler" is to have been the subject of a performative meta-linguistic speech act in the object language.

9. Conclusion

The real issue, then, for the attributivist centers around the nature of the special authoritative calling relation underlying acts of naming, which are sufficient on the attributive view to make a name predicate apply to an object, as distinct from those predicates whose application conditions are not settled by linguistic practice alone. Presumably, the answer is to be found in an analysis of the phenomenon of naming itself, and just how our linguistic apparatus allows us to engage in successful acts of naming. On my reading of Kripke, it

---

[15] Of course, we might also see the mistake as one of assuming that the meta-linguistic analysis is to be taken as mentioning the word itself in the abstract sense, rather than a phonetic form. This is yet another twist on a meta-linguistic account, and it may well be informative, but it may also no longer be a meta-linguistic analysis given that it is appealing to phonetic, rather than purely syntactic forms

was this deeper kind of explanation he was seeking that the attributive account does not yet provide.[16]

<div align="right">SUNY Geneseo</div>

Bibliography

Austin, J.L. 1962. *How to do Things with Words.* Oxford: Clarendon Press.

Bach, K. 2002. "Giorgione was so-called because of his name." *Philosophical Perspectives* 16: 73–103.

Burge, T. 1973. "Reference and Proper Names." *Journal of Philosophy* 70: 425–39.

Church, A. 1932. "A Set of Postulates for the Foundation of Logic." *Annals of Mathematics*, second series, 33, 346-366.

Elbourne, Paul D. 2005. Situations and Individuals. Cambridge, MA: MIT Press.

Elugardo, Reinaldo. 2002. "The Predicate View of Proper Names." In Logical Form and Language, ed. G. Preyer and G. Peter, 467–503. Oxford: Oxford University Press.

Fara, Delia Graff. 2015. "Names Are Predicates," Philosophical Review 124(1), 59–117.
--------. 2011a. "Socratizing," American Philosophical Quarterly 48(3), 229–238.
--------. 2011b. "You can call me 'stupid',…just don't call me stupid." *Analysis* 71(3).

Geurts, Bart. 1997. "Good News about the Description Theory of Names." Journal of Semantics 14: 319–48.

Gray, Aidan. 2013. "Name-Bearing, Reference, and Circularity." Philosophical Studies. Published online December 10, 2013. doi:10.1007/s11098-013-0262-z.

Izumi, Yu. 2012. "The Semantics of Proper Names and Other Bare Nominals." PhD diss., University of Maryland, College Park.

Katz, Jerrold. 2001. The End of Millianism: Multiple Bearers, Improper Names, and Compositional Meaning. *Journal of Philosophy.* XCVII.3 (March): 137-166.

Kneale, William. 1962. 'Modality de dicto and de re'. In Ernest Nagel, Patrick Suppes & Alfred Tarski (eds.), *Logic, methodology and philosophy of science. Proceedings of the 1960 International Congress.* Stanford University Press. Stanford, CA. 622-633.

Kripke, Saul A. 1980. *Naming and Necessity*. (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press).

Matushansky, Ora. 2008. "On the Linguistic Complexity of Proper Names." Linguistics and Philosophy 21, no. 5: 573–627.

Moore, G.E. 1903. Principia Ethica. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

Pietroski, Paul. 2010. "Concepts, Meanings, and Truth: First Nature, Second Nature, and Hard Work."*Mind and Language* 25: 247-78.

Quine, W.V.O. 1953. "On What There Is." *From a Logical Point of View* (Harper & Row, New York).

Russell, Bertrand. 1905. "On Denoting." *Mind*, 14: 479–493.

Savage, Heidi. 2016(a). "Names Are Not Predicates." Unpublished manuscript.
---------.2016(b). "Performative Meta-linguistic Actions." Unpublished manuscript.
---------.2016(c). "The Problem with Meta-linguistic Analyses of the Meanings of Proper Names." Unpublished manuscript.

Sawyer, Sarah. 2010. "The Modified Predicate Theory of Proper Names." In New Waves in Philosophy of Language, ed. S. Sawyer, 206–25. New York: Palgrave Macmillan.

Sloat, Clarence. 1969. "Proper Nouns in English." Language 45, no. 1: 26 – 30.