

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 names as 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 understand the significance of acts of naming.

1. Introduction

Just how we should understand the meaning of a proper name is, as of yet, unclear. 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 by Russell (1905). But later developments – a concern with natural language and how it actually functions, together with Kripke's (1980) scathing critique of descriptivist accounts of proper names – nearly eliminated that view.

More recently, though not without precedent, some have begun to question even the idea that names stand for particular individuals. Instead, what is suggested is that names function semantically as predicates – a predicative thesis concerning the meaning of a proper name. It is this suggestion that we will be concerned with in the present paper, focusing on different proposals, but with an emphasis on what will be called the “attributive”

account, originally suggested by Burge (1973), but subsequently developed by Fara in some of her recent work (2011a, 2011b, 2015). As we shall see, while this most recent account represents a significant advance over previous versions of the predicative thesis, 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 proposed based on a picture of naming as a type of performative meta-linguistic act.

2. Motives for Treating Names as Predicates

The motives for treating names as predicates are varied, but one classical reason comes from Quine (1953).¹ According to Quine, names should be treated as predicates because doing so allows us to avoid the traditional problems associated with analyzing the content of empty names. Up until Russell's claim that names are actually equivalent in meaning to disguised definite descriptions, there was difficulty explaining the meaning of expressions containing proper names that fail to refer. It appeared that, in order to say of Pegasus that it was the winged horse of Bellerophon, and to say something sensible and true, Pegasus must in fact exist. Even worse, take the negative existential sentence

(1) Pegasus does not exist.

On the referentialist theory of names prevailing at the time — that names are mere labels or tags for singular individuals — a name must refer in order to have meaning. But given the truth of sentence (1), and the non-existence of Pegasus, surely this must be a mistake. Quine's solution was to treat names as predicates, since if we treat a name as a predicate, we can assert sentence (1) without paradox. We can say that it is false that there is anything that instantiates the property of being Pegasus.

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.

Contemporary predicativists have a different motivation from Quine's for treating names as predicates. These theorists are motivated, instead, by linguistic evidence suggesting that names do in fact function like predicates.² For instance, consider the sentence 'Some Franks are chatterboxes, while some other Franks are bookworms'. Here names are being modified by quantifiers, and this is something that makes sense only if the subject expression is associated with a group of entities, as predicates are. The names contained in the previous sentence, then, appear to operate as predicates. Now consider the sentence 'The current President of the United States is a real Napoleon'. In this case, we have a name functioning as if it can be used to attribute a property to an individual, again something predicative expressions are wont to do. Lastly, consider the sentence 'That Charles is a mere dilettante'. As in the previous quantifier case, this sentence has a name functioning to pick out a set or a group, and this is evident in virtue of the need to use the expression 'that' in order to ensure that we have a unique referent for the subject of the sentence to be about. Because in each of the previous cases, names are functioning in the same way as predicate expressions function, predicativists take all of these examples as evidence that names are indeed predicates, that they are not expressions that function to refer to singular individuals.

3. Accounts of Names as Predicates

² 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.

Because Quine never develops his suggestion of treating names as predicates in any detail, we are left with the question of what the meaning of a name on this type of account might be. Several ideas suggest themselves.

One of those ideas, inspired by Moore (1903), might be that the meaning of each name in the language is to be understood in terms of predicates that express primitive properties. But this account faces the same problems that any primitivist theory of any other concept faces. As an explanation, it is rather unsatisfying. And, if we do reject the primitivist account as unsatisfying, we are still in need of an analysis of the meaning of names as predicates, or name-predicates. Some analyses explain the meaning of these name-predicates in terms of calling relations.

A traditionally popular calling view of the meaning of a proper name is known as the meta-linguistic account (Kneale 1962; Katz, 2001). While it is not essentially a predicative thesis, it is this form of it that will occupy our focus. These accounts are known as meta-linguistic because the analysis of the meaning of the relevant expression, in this case a proper name, is itself mentioned in its application condition. For example, on the meta-linguistic calling analysis of name-predicates, a name like 'Tyler' means *individual called 'Tyler'*. This meta-linguistic calling account makes the name 'Tyler' a common noun, since it allows for many individuals to be called by the name 'Tyler', as it should on a predicative account.

Because of the meta-linguistic nature of the previous account, the calling relation involved is understood to hold between an individual and an expression. In fact, it is this particular feature that leads to a specific objection to this view, which in turn motivates a different type of calling account.

Arguably, an informative account of the meaning of a certain type of expression in a particular language ought to give a non-native speaker of that language an understanding of that expression's application condition, at least this is plausible when it comes to expressions like predicates, relations, and proper names. It is not clear, however, 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 precisely because the meta-linguistic account mentions the relevant expression itself in its application condition.³ To illustrate its inadequacy, Kripke applies this approach to the particular expression 'quarks' (1980: 69). According to Kripke, a meta-linguistic analysis of the meaning of 'quark' would just be this: the expression 'quarks' picks out those things we call 'quarks'. Now taking a name as an example, the account would be that the meaning of 'Tyler' is whatever we call 'Tyler'. Would this information, in and of itself, help the speaker in their quest to understand the object language in which they are seeking fluency?⁴ Not especially. As Kripke points out, while a speaker understanding the expression 'called' in the object language might recognize the previous claims as true, they still would not understand or be able to use the expression 'quarks' or 'Tyler' unless they were already familiar with their application conditions. In Kripke's hands, these analyses are

³ 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 understand the meaning of the expression in question.

⁴ Arguably, there are different ways to understand the meta-linguistic proposal: as a constitutive claim about the meaning of the expression in question; or as an application condition, or reference condition for the expression. Katz (2001), for instance, agrees with the former understanding, but rejects the latter. Katz claims 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. The account we are evaluating in detail, however, can be taken either way, and so we don't pursue this distinction here.

themselves mere tautologies. He therefore concludes that a meta-linguistic account of proper names cannot give us any way of understanding their meanings, and therefore, it is uninformative.

If Kripke's objection to the meta-linguistic account is correct, we are in need of another analysis of the meaning of names as predicates. The meta-linguistic account fails. Nevertheless, we might believe that the meta-linguistic account gets at least something right: the idea that a name's meaning is fundamentally tied up with acts of calling is fairly 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). In contrast with the meta-linguistic account, we can see that Burge, in asserting that a name is true of an object, is here making the relation between a name and its bearer one of having a certain property, rather than being related to a particular linguistic item. It is less clear that Burge is relying on a notion of calling per se, since he says only that an object must be "given" the name in an appropriate way, and giving a name could be understood in various ways, as an act of christening, dubbing, or perhaps as an act of calling. Nevertheless, for Burge, a name is true of an object in the same way as any predicate can be true of an object. A more developed attributive account due to Fara adopts the latter feature of Burge's account, but also incorporates the idea that we call people names; she gives the meta-linguistic account its due, but rejects one of its central features – that the calling relation holds between an individual and a linguistic item. Since Fara's gives us a precise and worked out formulation of Burge's attributive account of the meaning of a name (2011b), our main focus will be on her account, especially since hers is the only well-developed attributive calling account currently available.

In Fara's hands, what makes attributive accounts special as predicative accounts 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, just not one that is meta-linguistic. It is because the attributive account does not mention, but rather uses a name in an account of its meaning, that it can arguably avoid Kripke's informativeness objection. Before exploring this latter point any further, let us first examine, in more detail, what this new attributive notion of calling consists in, and how it is supposed to apply in the case of proper names.

4. Two Notions of Calling

To illustrate the nature of attributive calling, Fara points out that someone can be called stupid, in the sense of being attributed the property of failing to be intelligent, as opposed to be addressed with the expression 'stupid'. That there is this difference is illustrated by the fact that we can attribute the property of stupidity to someone without even using the word 'stupid'. We might call someone stupid, for instance, by saying that they are not very intelligent. In contrast, to be addressed with the expression 'stupid', a speaker must actually mention the word 'stupid' and relate it to an individual in some way or other. This latter way of calling is the meta-linguistic way of calling, whereas the former attributive way of calling does not to relate an individual to the linguistic expression 'stupid', but instead to the property of being stupid. The very same considerations, according to Fara, apply to proper names. To be called Tyler, on an attributive account of naming, is to apply the property of being Tyler to an individual.

To illustrate this difference more clearly, consider some sample sentences used by Fara. We can assert the following sentence

(1) Maude was called 'stupid'

as true, as a meta-linguistic statement, but we can still maintain that it is false that

(2) Maude was called stupid,

in the attributive sense. This is possible since Maude could have 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 dumb Maude caused me to fail my calculus class.

That is, Maude might be addressed as 'stupid' but fail to have the property of stupidity attributed to her, or she 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 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.⁵

⁵ Bach (2002) also points out this distinction, but does not develop the view in the detail that Fara does.

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. Perhaps, no one ever addressed Quine with the name 'Willard' at all. 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 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. It follows, then, that to be called Willard is not simply a matter of being addressed as 'Willard'.

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 latter is the standard meta-linguistic notion; the former is claimed to encode the idea that it is a matter of property attribution – an attributive use.

5. The Informativeness of Attributive Accounts

Let us now return to the objection that motivated the need for an alternative to the meta-linguistic account in the first place – that meta-linguistic calling accounts fail to be informative, and that attributive accounts can avoid this objection. The meta-linguistic account was flawed, according to Kripke, because it mentioned the name itself in giving its meaning or application condition. In contrast, the attributive account does not do this. Specifically, on the attributive account of naming the meaning of the name 'Tyler' is not *individual called 'Tyler'*, as it is on the meta-linguistic account, but rather *individual called Tyler*. If the attributive account is viable, then Kripke's objection to calling accounts misses the mark with respect to these types of accounts; they can, in fact, be informative.

To show that an attributive account can be informative, let us examine Fara's schema for the application of a proper name. According to Fara, the application condition for a proper name is as follows:

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

On this schema, the notion of calling on the right-hand side should be understood in the attributive sense. Applying this application condition to the name 'Tyler', we can see that

this schema entails that the name 'Tyler' is true of an object just in case that object is called Tyler.

To illustrate that the schema is informative, Fara shows that under certain conditions it is falsifiable. Assuming that if the schema is falsifiable, it is informative, one instance of its being false will illustrate that it is truly informative. As we shall see, applying the schema to other predicates, for instance, a predicate like 'stupid' results 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).⁶ But of course, as we just saw, this turns out to be false. In the case of 'stupid' 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.

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

⁶ 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 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.

give the meaning of a name-predicate is not tautologous in the way it is in when we understand that relation purely meta-linguistically.

7. Objections to the Attributive Account

To being with, we will explore the fact that Fara's schema as applied to names is falsifiable under only one kind of circumstance, unlike other predicates like the predicate 'stupid'. This shows that perhaps there is a dis-analogy between names and other ordinary predicates. Second, we shall examine in what this difference might consist, pointing out that names may not have an attributive reading at all. Third, we will examine whether Fara's account, even if strictly informative, is informative in the sense needed for linguistic competence with a proper name. Finally, the fourth objection shows that the attributive theorist's commitments concerning what constitutes acts of naming are implausible.

7.1 The Falsifiability Objection

On the face of it, the application schema for proper names is informative. At least this seems to be true insofar as we accept that names are predicates, since the schema is falsifiable for predicates in general, and names are just one of these types of expressions. That is, Fara makes the assumption that any particular predicate can be used to show that the schema is informative for predicates generally, because all predicates are alike. And we might question this assumption; we might not be satisfied with the claim that the schema can be falsified for the predicate 'stupid' and that therefore it must be informative for names as well. Instead, we might also want to see if the schema can be falsified when it is applied to a proper name. Because Fara's argument that her schema is informative for names is fundamentally analogical in nature, then any and all differences we might find between predicates like 'stupid' and name-predicates like 'John' are relevant for assessing the argument's cogency. Assuming we find such differences, then, this casts doubt on the

premise that names are predicates just like the predicate 'stupid', and that therefore Fara's account is indeed informative.

Are cases in which we can substitute a name into the schema and obtain a false reading? As a matter of fact, there is at least one kind of case in which we see a falsification of the schema when applied to a proper name, say, the name 'John'.

The specific type of case we are interested in involves a name that is 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 Jean, 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 sentence (5), 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 address someone using a certain expression, this does make the associated property true of that individual.

The cross-linguistic test for informativeness thus seems to vindicate the given attributive schema. However, we might wonder whether the success of the cross-linguistic test really does show that the naming case is, after all, akin to the standard predicate case, since no such cross-linguistic test was required for these expressions, those like 'stupid'. We can question whether this cross-linguistic test vindicates Fara's argument on the grounds that when we have an intra-linguistic assertion as we do in sentence (13), it does not seem as intuitively felicitous as an utterance of a sentence like (5). In fact, an assertion of (13) might generate outright confusion, whereas the meaning of an assertion of sentence (5) seems perfectly clear.

But what explains this difference? In order to diagnose the problem of the underlying reason for the difference we see between name-predicates and other predicates, Fara's informativeness argument must be scrutinized more closely.

7.2 The Attributive Reading Objection

Let us now explore why Fara's schema is unfalsifiable for names intra-linguistically, and why therefore, an utterance of sentence (5) seems to show clearly that there are different readings associated with different notions of calling, a meta-linguistic reading and an attributive reading, but an utterance of sentence (13) does not.

Fara begins her argument by considering whether the schema, when applied to the predicate 'stupid', is informative. In this case, it is clear that the attributive reading is the natural reading, and that this reading is false, thereby proving that the schema is informative for a predicate like 'stupid'. What this suggests is that there is another underlying feature that a predicate must have for Fara's schema to be informative. Specifically, an instance of the schema must have a clear attributive reading for any predicate for which it is

informative. To truly establish that the account is informative for names, then, we must explore whether there is an attributive reading of names as predicates.

We might think that Fara does establish that there is an attributive reading of a proper name when she considers the name 'Willard'. Recall that Fara pointed out that Quine might have the name 'Willard' but never be addressed as such. This showed that naming must involve more than a meta-linguistic notion of calling. However, it does not show that the non-meta-linguistic notion must be attributive. A reason for thinking that the non-meta-linguistic reading for names is not attributive is that this notion of calling can get a foothold only when we have certain qualities associated with certain predicates that are independent of any particular actions on the part of speakers. This is why calling someone stupid is bothersome to the individual so-called – because of the meaning of the word 'stupid', but being addressed as 'stupid' may not be. But what quality is associated with being called by a specific name like 'John'? Does John-ness express a certain quality an individual might have? The answer from the attributivist is that it expresses the property of having been called John in the attributive sense, but this is just what is at issue, and therefore this answer would, of course, beg the question.

Simply providing a schema for proper names that is not itself meta-linguistic does entail that that schema invokes an attributive concept of calling. Before we can accept Fara's schema for names as one that invokes an attributive notion of calling, we need some reason for believing that the differences we see between names and other predicates does not mean that there is a different notion of calling at work in the case of names.

7.3 The Informativeness Objection

As we've seen, there is a dis-analogy between ordinary predicates and names. Ordinary predicates have application conditions that are not purely language-relative, whereas

names do not. For instance, 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. This raises the question of how much progress has truly been made on the attributive account even if we do in fact grant that strictly speaking the account is informative, though of course we have seen reasons for doubting even this.

The account of a name's meaning is now 'being called *N*'. On an attributive account, acts of calling someone by a certain name somehow make certain language specific properties true of objects. But how is this accomplished? There is no analysis offered of what it is to be called *N*. 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)⁷ Simply providing a schema for proper names that is not itself meta-linguistic, insofar as it still includes an unanalyzed notion of calling in its account of a name's semantic value, 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.

7.4 The Conferring Properties Objection

A third 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 anyone with any expression we like, but this does not make it true of them that that

⁷ In fact, this very quote from Kripke reveals that he is indeed open to an analysis of the very notion of calling that may not be meta-linguistic.

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 therefore 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 most ordinary 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 an 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, if we suppose that 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 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, at least not without a much deeper analysis of the nature of the properties claimed to be expressed by proper names.⁸

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? As we know, 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 fourth objection considered above.

The reason why the attributivist believes that names cannot be accounted for by a meta-linguistic conception is that their conception of the meta-linguistic is impoverished. For instance, the attributivist has it that meta-linguistic acts of calling are ephemeral one-off

⁸ 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.

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. It might very well be false that Quine is called 'Willard' at any given time, however, 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).

The above quote seems to assume that the only way acts of naming could be meta-linguistic is if a speaker actually mentions a name directed at a specific object being addressed. But meta-linguistic acts need not involve directly addressing someone with a particular expression, so long as there is some act or law or even convention that associates an individual with a specific expression. For instance, producing a birth certificate might count as a meta-linguistic act. Or perhaps producing new documents with a person's married name might also so count.

These previous meta-linguistic types of actions can be understood relying a distinction long ago made in Austin's work (1962). Specifically, we can 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 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. But this is false only as a description of our linguistic practices, only as a meta-linguistic constative utterance. It does not follow that because a constative meta-linguistic utterance is false that, therefore, calling itself, in the case of naming, 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 Quine was called 'Willard' in another sense, in the sense of his having been dubbed using that name, what we will now think of as 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 connection with proper names, 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. Let us now consider some support for this type of meta-linguistic analysis of acts of naming.

Consider the fact that in naming a child, one does mention, in fact must mention, a particular expression. After all, 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. 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.

However, as before, any meta-linguistic account of naming must address the informativeness objection. 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. That is, it is possible that the informativeness objection to meta-linguistic accounts is misguided for reasons other than what the attributive theorist claims – that they are misguided not because of failing to recognize other notions of calling, but because of a failure to distinguish strongly enough between mentionings of expressions in the meta-language from direct speech reports within the object language. 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 previous formulation of a meta-linguistic account gives us some information about speakers’ usage of expressions via direct speech reports, and these could very well be used in constructing a theory of the meanings of the expressions so reported, if we

assume that in understanding a direct speech report, we thereby must understand something about the context of such reports. If the use of double quotes here is appropriate, as it seems it is, then we might say that a meta-linguistic analysis, understood as reporting on the linguistic actions of speakers, 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.⁹

Applying this idea to a name like 'Tyler', the analysis of its meaning would be 'individual called "Tyler."' Its application condition would be as follows: 'N' is true of an object just in case that object is called "Tyler". Understanding the name 'Tyler' would involve knowing something about the actions of speakers with respect to the use of the name, which traces back to a performative speech act that mentions a particular expression. The calling relation in the case of acts of naming is a relation between an individual, a linguistic symbol, and an authority imbued with the power of associating an individual with a specific expression, and this performative act produces uses of a name that can be reported on in giving its meaning. In other words, in understanding acts of naming, we need to understand them as performative speech acts, which allows for speakers to engage in using that name, which subsequently allows us to give its meaning in terms of direct speech reports. To have the name 'Tyler' is to have been the subject of a performative meta-linguistic speech act upon which all other callings are dependent.

9. Conclusion

⁹ 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

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 was this deeper kind of explanation he was seeking that the attributive account does not yet provide.¹⁰

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