

## **Being Called Names: Attributive Calling Accounts of Proper Names**

**Abstract:** Debates about the semantics of proper names have traditionally focused on the question of whether we should treat them as devices of reference or as disguised definite descriptions. In contrast, most recently, the debate centers around treating them as devices of reference or as predicates. At least one version of predicativism relies on analyzing names as involving the concept of being called by a name – calling accounts. Some theorists have offered meta-linguistic calling accounts of the nature of such predicates, but such accounts are subject to Kripke’s criticism 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 attributive calling accounts are truly informative in any robust sense, or that attribution is the proper concept to use in understanding what it is to call someone by a certain name. In addition, attributive calling accounts arguably 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**

What the meaning of a proper name consists in remains controversial. 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 non-descriptive mechanism. Historically, the former descriptive thesis was highly popular, due to its theoretical advantages, pointed out by Russell (1905). But later developments led to the rejection of that thesis. Namely, a concern with natural language and how it actually functions, together with Kripke’s (1980) scathing critique of descriptivist accounts of proper names. This prompted a return to the idea that names ought to be understood on a referentialist model – as mere labels or tags for singular individuals.

More recently, though not without precedent, some have even started to question whether names stand for particular individuals at all. Instead, what is suggested is that the semantic nature of a proper name is the same as that of a predicate – also known as the

“predicativist” thesis about the meaning of a proper name. Predicativism about proper names, originally developed by Burge (1973), will be our central focus in the present paper, examining different proposals, with an emphasis on the most persuasive of these, called the “attributive” account, recently developed by Fara (2011a, 2011b, 2015).<sup>1</sup>

One of the main challenges for a predicativist thesis is to explain what the meaning of a name as a predicate, or name-predicate, could possibly be. Originally, predicative accounts analyzed names in terms of expressing a meta-linguistic property that mentioned very names themselves (Kneale 1962; Katz, 2001). But Kripke influentially argued that any meta-linguistic account of the meaning of an expression will fail to be informative.

The various versions of the meta-linguistic theory differ with respect to their account of the relation that holds between a name and the set of individuals that have them. At least one of them relies on a calling relation, but like the others, it is also subject to Kripke’s objection, due to its meta-linguistic nature.

In general, calling accounts are the main focus, since it is only a more recently developed calling account that directly avoids Kripke’s criticism. This calling account, the attributive calling account, does not give a meta-linguistic analysis of the meaning of a proper name, and for this reason it avoids Kripke’s objection. The view, nevertheless, has some flaws. It is not clear, for instance, whether it provides a robustly informative account of the meaning of proper names. It is also not clear that the notion of calling appealed to — an attributive sense — can properly apply with respect to names at all. Last, the view appears to rest on some mistaken assumptions about the significance of acts of naming. A different account of naming is then proposed based on a picture of naming as a type of performative meta-

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<sup>1</sup> Why it is known as an attributive account will be made clear later.

linguistic act.

## 2. Motives for Treating Names as Predicates

The motives for treating names as predicates are varied. One classical reason comes from Quine (1953), who relies on predicativism to solve a certain problem that arises if we accept the referentialist thesis – that names are nothing but tags or labels for individuals. The problem is that, if accept it, a paradox arises. For example, the negative existential sentence,

(1) Pegasus does not exist,

is true, and this requires that Pegasus must fail to exist. However, on the referentialist thesis, sentences containing names can be true only if they have a referent. It follows from this view that if sentence (1) is to be true, then Pegasus must exist — a paradox. According to Quine, names should be treated as predicates because doing so allows us to avoid this paradox.<sup>2</sup> In treating names as predicates, we can assert sentence (1) truthfully. What we assert is that it is false that there is anything that instantiates the property of being Pegasus. Contemporary predicativists have a different motivation than Quine’s for treating names as predicates. These theorists are motivated, instead, by linguistic evidence suggesting that names do in fact function like predicates.<sup>3</sup> 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

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<sup>2</sup> 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.

<sup>3</sup> See Burge, 1973; Elbourne, 2005; Elugardo, 2002; Fara, 2015; Geurts, 1997; Gray 2013; Izumi, 2013; Larson and Segal, 1995; Matushansky, 2008; Pietroski, 2010; Sawyer, 2010; Sloat 1969.

expression is associated with a group of entities, as predicates are. 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. Because in each of the previous cases, names are functioning in the same way as predicate expressions function, predicativists take these examples as evidence that names are indeed predicates, that they are not expressions that function to refer to singular individuals.

### **3. Predicativist Accounts and Their Roots**

However, if the idea that names are predicates is accepted, this leaves predicativists with task of providing an analysis of the meanings of name-predicates. They do not, for instance, unlike other predicates, appear to express any robust qualitative property of the bearer of the name. Rather, the property expressed with a name-predicate, on the face of it, has to do only with the properties of a language. This fact is what motivates meta-linguistic accounts, since if it is a linguistic property that is expressed by being, say, Tyler, that property is most naturally thought of in meta-linguistic terms. In contrast, the attributive believes there is a way of understanding these predicates that is not meta-linguistic.

Both types of predicative accounts have their roots in Burge's work, which was characterized by him 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 this instance,

we can see that Burge is committed to the idea that a proper name is a predicative expression, expressing a property that applies to individuals.

What is not clear is just what this property is. All that we know is that it is a property that is true of an individual just in case that individual was given a name in an appropriate way. The relation between the property expressed by a name, and the individual whose name it is, is left open. We can see why the Burge's view can be taken to support any number of views, including the two calling accounts at issue.

One clue pointing at an attributive interpretation is that Burge does not simply say that a name is true of an object, but that it is literally true of an object. Why would Burge use the expression 'literally' in his predicativist thesis? The answer is not clear, but I suspect it is done to emphasize the idea that a name-predicate should be a predicate that expresses a fundamental or basic property of the object itself, as opposed to merely expressing a relational or extrinsic property. That is, name-predicates should not merely express nominal or appellative properties – properties that hold only relative to certain linguistic practices – like the properties associated with meta-linguistic accounts. For this reason, I see the attributive account – analyzing the meaning of name-predicates as expressing fundamental or basic attributes of those named – as the proper successor of Burge's idea, rather than meta-linguistic accounts.

### **3.1 Meta-linguistic Accounts**

Before focusing on my main target – the attributive account of predicativism – I will first describe the variants of meta-linguistic accounts in more detail. I do this in order to make it clear why they fail, and that they all fail for the same reason, which serves as a motivation

to focus on attributive accounts.<sup>4</sup>

On one version of the meta-linguistic view, an individual and their name are connected via the bearing relation. That is, the meaning of each name in the language is to be understood in terms of a predicate that expresses the property of bearing that name (Bach, 2015). The property expressed is, therefore, a nominal property. The corresponding meaning of a proper name N on this view is being a bearer of “N.” What makes this view distinctive is that it does not specify any particular linguistic act as constituting the relation between a name and the individuals that have it. This view leaves that question open. It offers only a thesis about the meta-linguistic meaning of a proper name.

In contrast, the calling account does offer a thesis about the relation between a the individual named, the name itself, and the property the name expresses. Rather obviously its analysis relies on the idea of being called N. On this view, the meaning of each name in the language is to be understood in terms of a predicate that expresses the property of being called by a particular name. The corresponding meaning of a proper name N on this view is being called “N.”

Both meta-linguistic accounts make a name N a predicate, since they both allow for many individuals to have a particular name. This is as it should be on a predicative account. Furthermore, on both accounts, the relation between an individual and their name holds between an individual and a relational nominal property that relates an individual to a linguistic item. It is this feature that motivates Kripke’s specific objection to this view, which in turn motivates a different type predicative account – the attributive calling account.

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<sup>4</sup> Note that the meta-linguistic thesis is not essentially a predicative thesis, but it is this form that will occupy our attention. In fact, the meta-linguistic account was originally proposed as a descriptive, rather than a predicative thesis.

### 3.2 Kripke's Objection to Meta-linguistic Accounts

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. In fact, as Kripke argued, 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.<sup>5</sup> 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 amount to this: the expression 'quarks' picks out those things we call 'quarks'. Now applying this reasoning to, say, the name 'Tyler', the account has it that the meaning of 'Tyler' is whatever bears the name 'Tyler' or is called by the name 'Tyler'. Would this information, in and of itself, help the speaker in their

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<sup>5</sup> 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 non-native 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.

quest to understand the object language in which they are seeking fluency?<sup>6</sup> 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 themselves mere tautologies. For this reason, he 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 predicative analysis of the meaning of proper names, since the meta-linguistic account fails.

### **3.3 The Attributive Account**

While the meta-linguistic accounts we saw face a serious objection from Kripke, we might nevertheless believe that the meta-linguistic calling account gets something right – that a name’s meaning must be fundamentally tied up with acts of calling. The bearing relation is a rather nebulous notion, but the idea of calling, in contrast, is something with which we are fairly familiar. The calling account of proper names, alternative to the meta-linguistic version, is the attributive account.

As before, the attributive account, due to Fara, takes seriously the idea that names must express more than nominal properties, and her own analysis of how names express the

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<sup>6</sup> 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. He 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. However, the account we are evaluating takes seriously the idea that a theory of a name’s meaning ought to be able to determine its application conditions, otherwise, there would be no need to respond to Kripke’s objection, and this is part of what motivates the account on which I will focus.



properties they do is by attributing them to individuals via a calling relation. Fara's attributive account 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 an attributive account of Burge's predicative thesis, our main focus will be on her account.

In Fara's hands, what makes attributive accounts special as predicative accounts is that they dispense with the meta-linguistic aspect of the previous analysis. On the attributive view, when refer to someone with the name 'Tyler', we attribute the property of being Tyler to that individual; and this act does not merely relate an individual to a linguistic expression, as the meta-linguistic calling account with its commitment to mere nominal properties would have it (Fara, 2015). The attributive view does not mention a name at all in its analysis of the meaning of name-predicates, but rather uses them. It is precisely because the attributive account does this 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. Notions of Calling**

We can see that there is another notion of calling embedded in our linguistic practices, in addition to the standard meta-linguistic notion, by considering the following examples from Fara (2001b). For instance, take this sentence

(2) Maude was called 'stupid',

as an actual ironic act of nicknaming of a brilliant mathematician. Still, even if we accept this sentence as true, we can nevertheless maintain that it is false that

(3) Maude was called stupid,

in the sense of attributing the property of actual stupidity to her.

Fara then points out that if the only notion of calling was the meta-linguistic notion, sentence (3) should be ill-formed, to say the least. To put the point in another way, if the only notion of calling is meta-linguistic, then we should simply treat sentence (3) as a clumsy way of expressing the content of sentence (2) – as an instance of a use-mention conflation. However, if this were the correct way to think about sentences (2) and (3) – as merely different formulations of the same point, then any observed discrepancy in the truth of those sentences should not be possible, but as demonstrated, it is. In addition, the idea that we can express an act of attributing a property to someone by using the expression ‘calling’ is supported by linguistic data at any rate.

We can see the difference even more clearly by considering, as Fara does, the fact that a person might not mind being called stupid in one sense as illustrated in sentence (2), but would mind being called stupid in the sense illustrated in sentence (3). This person might make their opinion known by uttering the sentence:

(4) You can call me ‘stupid’, just don’t call me stupid.

The calling relation in the first part of this sentence is the familiar meta-linguistic notion, holding between a person and a linguistic symbol – associated with the property of being called ‘stupid’ – a nominal property of the kind that meta-linguistic calling accounts claim constitutes the content of the meaning of a name-predicate. In contrast, the calling relation in the second part is a different relation holding between a person and a non-nominal property.<sup>7</sup>

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<sup>7</sup> Bach (2002) also points out this distinction, but he does not develop the view in the detail that Fara does.

Another way we know that there is a distinct concept of calling different from the standard meta-linguistic notion is illustrated by following sentence,

(5) That Cindy is as dumb as she looks,

someone might be called stupid without even using the word 'stupid' at all. That is, someone might be addressed as 'stupid' but fail to have the property of stupidity attributed to them, or they might be called stupid but fail to be addressed using the word 'stupid'.

The very same distinction, according to Fara, applies in the case of calling someone by name. Turning again to some examples from Fara, consider the fact that the sentence

(6) Quine was called 'Willard',

might be false, and yet the sentence

(7) Quine was called Willard

might still be true. Sentence (6) might be false because it is possible that Quine was never addressed using the expression 'Willard'. Perhaps he was always referred to using the expression 'Will'. Still, even if Quine was never addressed using the name 'Willard' that is still his name. That is, sentence (7) is still true even if sentence (6) is actually false. It follows, then, that to be called Willard is not simply a matter of being addressed as 'Willard'. Clearly, there is a difference, then, between having a name, and being addressed using that name. The latter instantiates the standard meta-linguistic notion; the former is claimed to encode the idea that it is a matter of having a certain basic or fundamental attribute.

In the previous examples, the meta-linguistic notion of calling is understood as being-addressed-as, something anyone can do with whatever expression they choose at anytime they like. Having a name, however, is decidedly not like this, as illustrated by the truth of sentence (7) despite the possibility of sentence (6) being false. Individuals cannot just

change their names arbitrarily on a whim, for example. Whereas this seems to be false with respect to the act of addressing an individual using a certain expression. 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. For an attributivist, what this parental authority involves is the ability, on the part of certain speakers, to imbue individuals with certain basic properties. In Quine's case, to imbue him with the property of being a Willard.

## **7. Objections to the Attributive Account**

I will now consider three objections to the attributive account in detail. First, I will examine the claim that attributive accounts are informative, and we'll see that this claim can be questioned. Second, I will closely examine the arguments, provided by Fara, for the claim that there is an attributive notion of calling at work in the case of proper names, concluding that the evidence for this claim is tenuous at best. Third, I will show that the attributive theorist's entailed commitments concerning acts of naming are flawed.

### **7.1 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 correct, then Kripke's objection to calling accounts fails to apply 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, inspired by Burge's, 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 is supposed to 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 false. Assuming that if the schema is falsifiable, it is informative, one instance of its being false illustrates that it is truly informative. As I will show, 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).<sup>8</sup> But of course, as we just saw, this

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<sup>8</sup> 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.

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, then, appear to have the resources to respond to Kripke, since on this view, relying on the attributive notion of calling is not tautologous in the way it is in when we understand that relation purely meta-linguistically. However, it is not clear that the account is truly informative in the sense that Kripke wanted. On an attributive account, acts of calling someone by a certain name somehow make certain basic properties true of objects. But what is a basic name property? Simply providing a schema for proper names that is not itself meta-linguistic, insofar as it still includes an unanalyzed notion of attributive calling, save for its involving some basic name property being true of an individual, while not straightforwardly tautologous, fails to be informative in a deeper way. As Kripke notes “whatever this relation of *calling* is is really what determines the reference...” (1980: 70).<sup>9</sup>

## **7.2 Notions of Calling and Ordinary Property Attributions**

It seems clear that there is more than one notion of calling at work in our natural language practices, and it is also clear that one such notion is attributive in nature. However, in order to show that the attributive account of proper names is correct, one of two things need to be proven: (a) that there are only two notions of calling – the meta-linguistic notion and the attributive notion; or (b) that the attributive notion is most plausible candidate for the type of calling in play in the case of proper names.

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<sup>9</sup> In fact, this very quote from Kripke reveals that, contra Fara, he is indeed open to an analysis of the very notion of calling itself that may not be meta-linguistic.

Proving that (a) is true would entail that the attributive account is correct, assuming there is good reason for accepting a calling account, and for believing that a meta-linguistic calling account of proper names fails. However, there are examples of calling that are not obviously meta-linguistic or attributive. Consider, for example, 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 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, to summon him. Note that we can felicitously report on that kind of calling using the following sentence:

(8) I called Jackson to come inside.

Sentence (8) reports 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 summoning, 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 calling goals, but I may also more effectively use the word 'come' to do so, or perhaps simply the word 'in'. It is not, then, a meta-linguistic notion of calling at work in sentence (8) then. To further illustrate, we might also utter the sentence

(9) You can call Jackson, just don't call 'Jackson',

as a dog trainer might do when instructing a new dog owner on how to train a dog to come to them. Clearly, there is a difference between calling Jackson, and calling 'Jackson'. This new notion of calling is distinct from both the meta-linguistic and the attributive notions.

Instead it is a summoning notion of calling. Because there is at least a third notion of calling, and perhaps more, this casts doubt on the assimilation of naming to an act of property attribution. The summoning 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. This means that option (a) is not a viable option for establishing that the notion of calling in the case of names is attributive.

The strongest arguments we have for option (b) is an argument by analogy that can be found in Fara's (2011b) work. Recall that Fara's informativeness argument begins with an application of her schema to the predicate 'stupid'. In this case, the attributive reading of the schema is the natural reading, and of course, this reading is false, thereby proving that the schema is informative for a predicate like 'stupid'. This argument by analogy shows that if we can treat names as attributive predicates, then there is a schema that proves that a calling account can be informative. However, if this argument is to support the claim that names have an attributive reading, then it must also serve as support for the claim that, if there is an informative application of the schema to a specific predicate, then there is a natural attributive reading of that predicate.

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, this would cast doubt on the premise that names are predicates just like the predicate 'stupid', which in turn, would cast doubt on the idea that there is an attributive reading of the schema as applied to names.



One place we might find a difference is in whether we can falsify the schema as applied to proper names. Are there cases in which we can substitute a name into the schema and obtain a false reading? Well, as a matter of fact, there is at least one kind of case in which we can falsify the schema when applied to a proper name, a case involving names that are translatable across languages, for example, the names 'Jean' and 'John'. 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 supposedly 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, like sentence (5), this individual, annoyed, says:

(12) 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. This cross-linguistic test for informativeness thus seems to vindicate the attributive schema.

However, we might question whether the success of the previous cross-linguistic test

does, in fact, show that the naming case is akin to the standard predicate case. One difference between the name case and the case of other predicates is that no such cross-linguistic test was needed in the case of a predicate like 'stupid', which leads us to look for the reason for this difference. One potential reason is that there is not in fact an attributive reading of the schema as applied to proper names.

That there is a disanalogy between the names case and the predicate case can be further illustrated by considering the fact that when we have an utterance of sentence like (12), it is not as intuitively felicitous as an utterance of a sentence like (4). In fact, an assertion of (12) might generate outright confusion, whereas the meaning of an assertion of sentence (4) seems perfectly clear.

What this shows is that Fara's argument by analogy has flaws, reasons for questioning whether names are on a par with other ordinary predicates. The option we are exploring as to what might explain these differences is that, unlike other predicates like 'stupid', there really is no attributive reading available in cases involving proper names.

Attributive readings require predicating attributes to an individual, and it is not clear that being called a name accomplishes this. That is, attributive readings 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'? There is seemingly no natural property, at least, John-ness that an individual might have.

We, therefore, have no reason for believing that providing a schema that we can

apply to proper names that is not itself meta-linguistic entails that that schema, as applied, invokes an attributive concept of calling. Before we can accept Fara's analogical arguments that the attributive account is true of names, we need some explanation of the differences between names and other predicates.

### **7.3 Attributive Theories and Acts of Naming**

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 expression is their name. 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.

As noted previously, in the case of ordinary predicates they have application conditions that have qualities associated with them, 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 contrast, names do not express qualities of the object instantiating the property. Being a John requires that they are named

John, making John a property, if it is a property at all, a language-specific property, something the attributive account was supposed to avoid.

It is also a fact that most ordinary attributive 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, we could, if we suppose that being given a name is a matter of bestowing a certain attributive 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 basic 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 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.<sup>10</sup>

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

An act of naming should 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 third objection considered above.

I claim that 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 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. Instead of rejecting meta-meta-linguistic accounts, I propose instead, that there must be more to meta-linguistic acts of calling than the attributive theorist allows.. 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

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<sup>10</sup> 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.

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 as relying on 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 sentence

(6) 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 this 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. 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 in 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. It might, for instance, give 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.<sup>11</sup>

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 with the power of associating an individual with a specific expression. 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. 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**

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

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<sup>11</sup> 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

provide.<sup>12</sup>

SUNY Geneseo

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