

# Why the Predicativist Calling Account Fails: Names Can Never Hurt You

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Recently, some have claimed that names are predicates, and that their semantic content involves the concept of being called. This concept is often assumed to be a meta-linguistic concept, and if so, then names must be predicates with meta-linguistic content. However, meta-linguistic theories of the content of any expression fail to be informative and cannot accommodate cross-linguistic translation. Fara argues, however, for a different concept of being called that is not a meta-linguistic concept, and therefore a predicativist calling account of names need not be subject to such criticisms. Fara argues that the concept of being called can be understood in terms of attributing properties. I argue, however, that this view is subject to several flaws. First, I show that the arguments Fara offers for the property attribution concept of being called can equally be used to derive at least two other concepts of being called, and that therefore Fara's account of names as predicates is not sufficiently justified. Second, Fara is offering an argument by analogy as she makes explicit. I point out some significant differences between names and predicates, which casts doubt on her claim that names are analogous to predicates, or least those she compares them to. Third, the account fails to be informative, just as meta-linguistic accounts do, given a flawed interpretation of what it is to be informative. Fourth, acts of property attribution seem to be as capricious as acts of addressing individuals with certain expressions, something Fara claims is a reason for rejecting meta-linguistic accounts. Last, the attributive account also entails an implausible explanation of the act of giving a name. I claim this is the result of an anemic conception of the nature of meta-linguistic actions. I suggest an alternative account of acts of giving names that is, in fact, meta-linguistic in nature, but is not subject to previous criticisms, since it is not offered as a theory of a name's content, but of the initial fixing of its reference. I argue in fact that an account of giving names must be meta-linguistic, and that a more robust concept of the nature of meta-linguistic speech acts is needed. I offer a sketch of such an account based on Austin's performative-constative distinction.

## 1. Introduction

It seems undeniable, at some level, that a proper name is an expression that has a specific individual as its semantic content. Historically, debates about proper names took this assumption for granted. The controversy concerned whether a name had its semantic content by denoting a specific individual via some complex uniquely identifying description or via some more direct non-descriptive semantic mechanism – that of reference.

The referentialist view is traditionally believed to be rooted in the work of the nineteenth century philosopher Mill (1843). 50 years later, however, while science, mathematics, and logic were undergoing serious revision, Mill's ideas were rejected in favor of the descriptive

thesis, nascent in Frege's work (1892) and explicitly developed in Russell's work (1905). This theory enjoyed the status as the received view, again for roughly 50 years, due to its perceived advantages for rejecting certain metaphysical theories. However, as natural language was increasingly becoming a subject of philosophical interest in and of itself, epitomized in Austin's 1955 lectures and subsequent work (1962), descriptivism came under scrutiny, culminating in its near complete rejection due to devastating criticisms offered by Kripke in his 1970 lectures and their subsequent publication in 1980, though descriptivism had already been rejected by Marcus much earlier (1961). This prompted a return to the idea that names ought to be understood on a referentialist model – as directly referring to individuals rather than denoted via some uniquely identifying description.

More recently, though not without precedent, some have started to question whether names stand for individuals at all – whether directly or indirectly. Instead, what is suggested is that the semantic type of a proper name is, in fact, the very same as that of a predicate – also known as the “predicativist” thesis about proper names. As compelling as the thought of a name as quintessential subject might be, as it turns out, speakers do use natural language in ways that give credence to the predicativist thesis. In terms of their compositional nature – their semantic type – this is not particularly problematic, as predicates are nominalized regularly, and this has a well-developed compositional explanation. However, how to offer a predicativist analysis of the semantic content of proper names is not as clear.

In assessing potential predicativist analyses, the standard theory of a predicate's semantic value will be assumed to be correct – that they are expressions that have functions as their semantic values, taking certain types of expressions as arguments, and producing a sentence with the semantic value of either true or false. Applying a predicate to an argument produces a sentence that is true just in case that argument's semantic content is a member of the set that satisfies whatever a predicate's semantic content demands. The standard set

theoretic theory of a predicate's semantic content as the set of any potential argument's semantic content that occurs in a true sentence will also be assumed. These sets philosophers often call "properties."

The predicativist theory of names, then, at least holds that names are of the semantic type predicate and that their semantic content is that of a property. Typical evidence for this claim relies on the existence of grammatical sentences in which names function as if they are expressions with the semantic type of a predicate. More specifically, that of a general predicate that applies to multiple individuals. Therefore, contemporary predicativism is also committed to the claim that names are general predicates having a property that more than one individual can have as their semantic content.

There are at least two accounts of the semantic content a name might have if it is a general predicate: a meta-linguistic account and a non-meta-linguistic account, each of which can be further analyzed as either bearer or calling accounts, and even further as either descriptive or demonstrative. I focus on calling accounts, since bearer accounts, I will argue, are not informative. I also accept that any meta-linguistic account of name's meaning is likewise uninformative. This leaves only non-meta-linguistic predicativist calling accounts serious contenders as a theory of the meaning of proper names – of their semantic type and content.

There is a recent well-developed predicativist non-meta-linguistic calling account of the meaning of proper names due to Fara (2011a, 2011b, 2015). I argue, however, that it has several flaws. One is that arguments for a particular understanding of the concept of calling can also be used equally as well to prove the existence of other non-meta-linguistic notions of calling. Another is simply that the argument in favor of the attributive account as a substantive account is an argument from analogy, which are notoriously difficult to sustain, especially given the semantic and syntactic differences that exist between ordinary predicates

and name predicates. Third, the account fails to prove that it is substantive. Last, it has unintuitive consequences for an account of the act of giving a name.

In the next section, I explain the motivations and evidence for predicativism both historical and current. In section three, I give a general description of meta-linguistic predicativism, and describe the most common objections to it. Section four describes different notions of calling and their role in accounts of predicativist accounts of proper names and settles on one account as the most plausible. I then, briefly, in section five, describe three of its advantages. Section six examines the argument for a particular analysis of the notion of calling and raises concerns about it, and section seven does the same concerning using this notion of calling as an analysis of the semantic content of a name as a predicate. Section eight raises more general concerns about the view on which I here focus – the attributive non-meta-linguistic calling account of names as predicates. Finally, in section nine I offer a sketch of an alternative explanation of some of the data presented in favor of that view -- what I call a “meta-linguistic performative” account of acts of naming developed elsewhere (Savage ms., 2020).

## **2. Motivations for Predicativism**

The original inspiration for predicativism begins with Quine’s work (1953) in which he deems that names must be predicates to resolve issues concerning the meaning of certain empty names. Quine, however, never develops the idea. In fact, given what Quine says about names as predicates, they could be predicates that apply only to one single individual.

Contemporary predicativism is motivated, however, not by any philosophical puzzles, but instead by our actual use of linguistic expressions such as proper names, which does suggest that they do in fact get used like predicates, and that are used as general, not singular

predicates.<sup>1</sup> For instance, consider the sentences

- (1) Some Donalds are chatterboxes, and
- (2) All Donalds eat potato chips.

In sentences (1) and (2) the name 'Donald' is bound by quantifiers and it also occurs plurally. If this sentence is sensible and grammatical, which it appears to be, then the name 'Donald' is an expression with the semantic type of a predicate, since only predicates that are common nouns require binding when they occur in the subject position of a sentence.<sup>2</sup>

### **3. Meta-linguistic Predicativism**

Meta-linguistic predicativism makes the mentioning of a name itself part of its semantic content. On these accounts, to have a certain name is simply for it to be true that that name – as a linguistic item – is applied to a group of individuals. The property that serves as a name's semantic content then is a relational or extrinsic property holding between individuals and a name in virtue of our linguistic practices – that of being an individual to which a name is applied. For instance, the name 'Donald' is an expression with the semantic content of being an individual to which 'Donald' is applied. This analysis generates several objections. A worry about the account's general substance, Kripke's classical worry about calling versions of such accounts, as well as two others arising from Fara's examination of the account.

#### **3.1 The Bearer Version of Meta-Linguistic Predicativism as Uninformative**

Stated as it is, however, this account tells us nothing about the nature of the property of having

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<sup>1</sup> See Burge 1973; Bach 2015; Elbourne 2005; Elugardo 2002; Fara 2015; Geurts 1997; Gray 2013; Izumi 2013; Katz 2001; Larson and Segal 1995; Matushansky 2008; Pietroski 2010; Sawyer 2010; Sloat 1969.

<sup>2</sup> There are many distinct types of examples used by predicativists to show that it is true, and different types suggest different accounts. Because Fara's examples involve bound uses of names, and that is the account on which I will focus, I have mentioned only on these examples.

a name, since it analyzes the property expressed by a name as the set of individuals to which a name applies, and this analysis relies on already understanding what it is to apply linguistic expressions like names – one of the questions at issue. The previous characterization, then, as an explanation of a name’s semantic content is uninformative.

Those who subscribe to meta-linguistic predicativism however do not simply stop with the above characterization. In fact, there are two popular accounts of the idea that a name’s semantic content is that of being an individual to which a name is applied. The first analysis is that to have a certain name is to bear that name. The second is that to have a certain name is to be an individual who is called by that name.

The bearer account, however, does not seem to add much to the analysis initially deemed uninformative, since the concept of bearing a property seems nearly equivalent to the concept of having a property. If this objection rules out the bearer interpretation, then only predicativist accounts that rely on the concept of calling are feasible. However, three objections – one due to Kripke (1980) and one due to Fara (2011b) – rule out even the calling version of the meta-linguistic account. It is for these reasons that the focus of the discussion is the most recent version of the non-meta-linguistic calling account developed by Fara.

### **3.2 The Calling Version of Meta-linguistic Predicativism as Uninformative**

Kripke believes that an informative analysis of a name’s semantic content should enlighten a speaker concerning what determines that name’s referent in a way that, in principle, a speaker could then use to identify that name’s referent. That is, an informative account of an expression’s semantic content is that it ought to identify what that expression stands for or represents. Meta-linguistic accounts of the semantic content of a proper name fail to do so. According to Kripke, analyzing the semantic content of the name ‘Donald’ as being called ‘Donald’ is as informative as stating that the semantic content of the expression ‘quark’ is whatever is called a ‘quark’. Neither analysis identifies what these expressions stand for or

represent. Kripke therefore concludes that calling versions of the meta-linguistic account of a proper name's semantic content, then, are not informative (1980: 68-70). And the reason is that the meta-linguistic account mentions the relevant expression itself in its application condition.

### **3.3 The Predictive Inadequacy of the Calling Version of Meta-linguistic Predicativism**

To show that the calling version of meta-linguistic predicativism is inadequate, Fara (2011b) considers the following two sentences:

- (3) Quine is called 'Willard'
- (4) Quine is called Willard.

If the calling version of meta-linguistic predicativism were correct, then sentences (3) and (4) should have the same truth values, assuming sentence (3) simply sloppily ignores the use-mention distinction. But Fara claims otherwise. According to Fara, sentence (3) might be false, while sentence (4) could still be true. Sentence (3) might be false because it is possible that Quine was never addressed using the expression 'Willard'. He may have always been addressed using the expression 'Will' instead. Still, even if Quine was never addressed using the name 'Willard', this is nevertheless still his name. That is, sentence (4) is true even if sentence (3) is false. The calling version of the meta-linguistic account, then, cannot predict this outcome and is therefore flawed.

In addition, according to Fara, the meta-linguistic account also cannot predict the relative stability of an individual's name. The reason is that meta-linguistic calling – that of being addressed as – is far too unconstrained. Anyone can address any individual in any way they choose but doing so does not therefore change that individual's name. Actual language use is subject to whim in certain circumstances, but having a particular name is not subject to just any speaker's whim. Therefore, there must be more to having a name than simply being called that name in the meta-linguistic sense – that of being addressed as.

#### 4. Non-Meta-Linguistic Predicativism

The idea of giving an account of names as predicates that are non-meta-linguistic has its roots in Burge's work (1973). According Burge (p. 340), "a proper name is (literally) true of an object just in case that object is given that name in an appropriate way." In this instance, we can see that Burge is committed to the idea that a proper name is a predicative expression that has as its semantic content a property that applies to individuals. Furthermore, it is a property that is literally true of an object. Now, why would Burge use the expression 'literally' in his predicativist thesis? The answer is not clear, but it seems reasonable to assume that its occurrence is not accidental.

While Burge himself is non-committal concerning the specific relation that holds between a name and those that have it, he says only that they are "given," he does use the word 'literally' in his description of how name predicates apply, and there is likely some reason for this. One way to take this use of the word is to suggest the idea that, in applying a name-predicate, we attribute a property to an individual that is more substantive than one that applies simply in virtue of linguistic practices – meta-linguistic properties. Instead, a name's semantic content has to do with non-meta-linguistic properties. For this reason, non-meta-linguistic predicativists do not mention, but instead use a name in their account of its semantic content.

I will focus on the calling version of non-meta-linguistic predicativism for 2 reasons: First, the informativeness objection to a non-meta-linguistic bearer account would apply equally well to its meta-linguistic cousin. Second, the idea that the semantic content of a name would involve the concept of calling in some way or other seems plausible in a way that it does not for other expressions. In fact, even referentialist accounts of a name's semantic content involve this concept, at least generally, since referentialist accounts typically invoke the idea that names are for referring to individuals – plausibly understood as a kind of calling.

The difference, however, which is not insignificant, is that for non-predicativists, being a device for referring – a type of calling that entails that an expression is singular – is part of the nature of a name’s semantic type and its semantic content. This is false on the non-meta-linguistic calling account. The most recent, and well-developed non-meta-linguistic calling account, due to Fara, relies on the idea that to call someone a name is to attribute to that individual a particular property, which Fara dubs the “attributive” account.

#### **4.1 The Attributive Notion of Calling**

Fara uses several examples that illustrate the existence of the notion of calling that involves property attributions. This notion of calling she then claims should be used in an analysis of the semantic content of a proper name. That there is such an attributive notion is illustrated by considering the content of the following sentences:

- (5) Maude is called ‘stupid’
- (6) Maude is called stupid.

Imagine that Maude is brilliant, but that she is sometimes ironically addressed as ‘stupid’ by her co-workers. The occurrence of the expression ‘called’ in sentence (5), then, denotes the activity of using a certain linguistic expression ‘stupid’ to address a particular individual Maude. Sentence (5)’s truth, then, depends entirely upon the use of linguistic expressions. In sentence (6), however, the expression ‘called’ denotes a different activity that has to do with making assertions about an individual’s properties. In uttering sentence (6), a speaker does not address Maude with the expression stupid but instead “calls” her stupid – attributes the property of being stupid to her. Since Maude is brilliant, sentence (6) would therefore be false. And it would be false not because of anything to do with the use of any linguistic expressions, at least not directly, but rather because of the properties Maude has independently of how

she is addressed.<sup>3</sup>

Fara uses these examples to show that if the only notion of calling were a meta-linguistic notion, then a difference in truth value between sentence's (5) and (6) should not be possible. In fact, sentence (6) should not even count as well-formed. That there are two notions of calling is also illustrated by the fact that Maude can surely respond to a friend who utters sentence (7) by uttering the following sensical and grammatical sentence:

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

Sentence (7) makes perfect sense, and if so, Fara must be correct that calling is not a uniform concept. It not only involves addressing individuals with certain expressions, but also involves attributing properties to them.

Yet another reason to accept an attributive concept of calling is that ordinary predicates can be described in multiple 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 or dumb. Consider for instance the following sentence:

(8) Maude is called dumb.

Sentence (8) fails to contain the word 'stupid' but shares the same meaning as sentence (6). Maude, then, can be called stupid without using the word 'stupid' at all. However, if calling were inherently meta-linguistic, then, sentences (6) and (8) could not have the same meaning, since they would contain different expressions and would therefore be true in virtue of facts about whether certain expressions occur sentences (6) and (8), not in facts about Maude's properties. But intuitively, sentences (6) and (8) do have the same meaning. Again, showing that there is more to calling than the meta-linguistic understanding of that concept.

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<sup>3</sup> Bach (2002) also points out this distinction, but he does not develop the view in the detail that Fara does.

## 4.2 The Predicativist's Attributive Account of Proper Names

While the meta-linguistic account analyzes the semantic content of a name as relating an individual to a linguistic item, the attributive account, in contrast, understands the relation between an individual and that individual's name as that of relating that individual to a property that is, in a sense, independent of our use of linguistic expressions. It is instead dependent on our practices of property attribution.

On Fara's view, a name's semantic content is captured by the following schema, which I will call "Schema F,"

Schema F: '*N*' is true of an object just in case that object is called *N*.

In schema F, being called *N* is to be attributed a property – that of being *N*. Returning to sentence (6), it clearly contains an instance of the attributive use of the expression 'called'. Equally clearly, however, Schema F does not capture the semantic content of the expression 'stupid' since an individual is not stupid in virtue of its being attributed to them. The same is true of most common nouns. Suppose that instead of discussing Maude's intelligence, speakers begin to discuss Maude's weight instead. And suppose Maude has gained weight lately. A colleague utters the following sentence to another behind Maude's back:

(9) Maude has become a real whale.

In uttering sentence (9), Maude's colleague calls Maude a whale, using it in its metaphorical sense. But Schema F does not capture the semantic content of the expression 'whale' either, metaphorically or otherwise. Like the expression 'stupid', the expression 'whale' is true of an individual metaphorically or otherwise in virtue of facts that have nothing to do with whether any speakers call that individual a whale or not.

Fara claims that the same is not true, however, of sentence (4). In this case, Fara claims that Schema F does capture the nature of being called Willard. 'Willard' is true of an object just in case that object is attributed the property of being Willard. On this view, then

names are predicates, and they have properties as their semantic content. This idea is novel, and fruitful.

## **5. Three Advantages of the Attributive Account**

Fara points out three advantages of the attributive view: it can avoid Kripke's informativeness objection to meta-linguistic accounts; it can explain the discrepancies between the truth values in sentences (3) and (4); and last, it can explain the apparent stability of an individual's name.

### **5.1 The Informativeness of the Attributive Account**

Fara's argument that her account is informative begins with an application of her schema to the predicate 'stupid'. As we saw, the use of the expression 'stupid' in sentence (6) concerning Maude, at least, is clearly false, since attributing stupidity to an individual does not make it true that they are in fact stupid particularly in Maude's case.

Fara then argues that If Schema F is false when applied to the predicate 'stupid', then since names are predicates, the attributive account of proper names must be informative due to the possibility of Schema F being false – a criterion standardly used to distinguish scientific claims from pseudo-scientific claims. 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). But they are not. Therefore, Schema F is an informative account of the semantic content of a name.

### **5.2 The Predictive Adequacy of the Attributive Account**

Concerning the difference in the truth values of sentences (3) and (4), on the attributive account, sentence (3) is false since Quine is not addressed with the expression 'Willard', but 'Will'. Nevertheless, Quine's name is Willard and on the attributive account the truth of sentence (4), which is about the attribution of the property of being Willard to Quine, is true since Quine does in fact have the name 'Willard'. The difference in truth values between (3)

and (4) therefore can both be predicted and explained by the attributive account.

### **5.3 The Stability of Names**

Fara's conception of meta-linguistic calling is that being addressed as, and speakers can address any individual using any expression they like, such as they do in calling Quine 'Will' instead of 'Willard'. But such acts do not imbue individuals with the names by which they are addressed. Quine's name is 'Willard' whether others call him 'Will' or not. The attributive account of names can explain this stability since individuals are imbued with names by being attributed the property of having that name and let us suppose that having a property is a more stable fact about an individual than how speakers choose to address them.

## **6. Analyzing the Argument for the Attributive Notion of Calling**

Clearly, Fara has made a compelling case for the claim that there is more than one notion of calling, and that one such notion is that of property attribution. She then uses this notion to analyze the semantic content of names. One question that arises is whether there might be yet other notions of calling. I show that there are, and that the arguments for them have the very same structure as those offered for the attributive notion. If this is correct, then we need an independent reason for believing that an analysis of names ought to invoke Fara's understanding of calling as opposed to some other notion.

### **6.1 Calling as Summoning**

I will now show that there are notions of calling in addition to the attributive notion. And that at least two of these can be argued for using the very same kind of arguments that Fara uses in illustrating that there is an attributive notion of calling.

First, consider the fact that my dog's name is 'Jackson', and that I often call him to come inside, as I might do by using this sentence

(10) I called 'Jackson'.

Just like sentence (3), sentence (10) is in fact made true by facts about how speakers address

one another.

Now consider this sentence as a report on the action performed by my utterance of sentence (10):

(11) I called Jackson.

This sentence is not made true in virtue of the use of any expression. It is not meta-linguistic. This can be demonstrated since calling a dog by name is an ineffective way of summoning them. Instead, the word 'come' or 'inside' or some other word ought to be used consistently. Just as there are truth value discrepancies between Fara's sentence's (3) and (4), this is also true of sentences (10) and (11). Given the facts, sentence (10) is likely false, while sentence (11) could still be true. In fact, just like Fara's sentence (7), I could sensibly utter this sentence to my dog-sitter:

(12) You can call Jackson, just don't call 'Jackson'.

This case also allows for a multitude of ways that I might call Jackson similar to Fara's point that calling Maude stupid can also be done in more than one way.

There is, therefore, a notion of calling that is non-meta-linguistic, but is also not an attributive notion. This second notion was derived by using the same types of examples that Fara does to prove that there is an attributive notion. There may be others and it may turn out that one of these other notions of calling is a more suitable interpretation of Schema F as an account of a name's semantic content than Fara's attributive interpretation.

## **6.2 Calling as Recognition**

There are reasons to believe that there is also a notion of calling that should be understood in terms of recognition or to bring attention to a particular individual. Imagine a new professor in the first class of the semester who sees an unknown student with her hand raised wearing a t-shirt with the expression 'Baby Phat' written on it. The professor calls on the student by embarrassingly blurting out: Yes, Phat-girl. This embarrassing moment might be objectively

reported on by uttering the following sentence:

(13) The professor called Phat-girl to answer her question.

Certainly, if the expression 'Phat-girl' were simply being mentioned, sentence (13) would not make sense, but it does. Suppose the student's real name is 'Susan'. The name 'Susan' could be substituted for the occurrence of 'Phat-girl' in sentence (13), and it would not change its meaning. Like Fara's example that uses the predicate 'dumb' in sentence (8) instead of 'stupid' to illustrate that calling can be understood as the attribution of a property, and not simply meta-linguistically, sentence (13) also illustrates that calling should not simply be understood meta-linguistically. However, this case does not illustrate that the notion of calling in play is one of property attribution. In fact, the entire scenario is embarrassing or funny, depending on your perspective, exactly for this reason. Now there is a third notion of calling in play illustrated again by using the same types of reasons that Fara offers in favor of the existence of an attributive notion. In fact, the third notion might be a reasonable interpretation of Schema F:

Schema F: '*N*' is true of an object just in case that object is called/recognized as *N*.

If so, then the attributive account has a competitor whose merits need to be assessed.

### **7. Analyzing the Argument for an Attributive Account of Proper Names**

After illustrating that there is an attributive notion of calling, Fara then justifies interpreting Schema F – a general characterization of the predicate expressed by a name – as invoking this notion of calling by arguing that it is informative. She shows this by showing that Schema F is false when applied to the predicate 'stupid', and names are predicates just like 'stupid'. Fara's argument for the attributive account of proper names, then, is an argument from analogy, as her own assertions previously quoted would indicate. If so, then any differences between ordinary predicates and name predicates need explanation.

## 7.1 Syntactic Differences between Ordinary and Name Predicates

There are significant syntactic differences between predicates like 'stupid' and so-called name-predicates that are not addressed by the attributive account. For instance, 'stupid' can occur as an adjective in a sentence:

(14) The stupid, enormous, wild turkey walked over the cliff,

whereas we cannot sensibly utter this sentence

(15) The stupid, Johnish, wild turkey walked over the cliff.

Or consider the fact that the expression 'whale' cannot occur as the nominal head of a sentence unless it is pluralized or bound, but this is not true of proper names.

(16) Whale is a fascinating animal

is not a grammatical sentence, but

(17) John is a fascinating animal

Is a grammatical sentence.

Ordinary predicates can also be verbs, as in this sentence

(18) The fisherman went out whaling.

But proper names cannot be so used. This is not a sentence that anyone would find immediately acceptable:

(19) He was Elvising on the dance floor.

## 7.2 Semantic Differences between Ordinary and Name Predicates

Semantically, the predicate 'stupid' represents qualities that are independent of any linguistic practices or even practices of property attribution. In fact, this is what allows Fara to use the predicate 'stupid' to prove the falsifiability of Schema F. Names like 'John', however, do not represent significant robust qualities. Being John is to be nothing more than to happen to have the name John. That is, in the case of a name, what linguistic independent quality does an individual have in being called the name 'John'? None it would seem – other than being

called John. The name 'John' unlike 'stupid' has no meaning outside of its attributions to individuals.

Furthermore, unlike calling someone stupid, or a metaphorical whale, which we can do in multiple ways, having the property of being John is a *sui generis* property. There is no way to call someone a John other than to attribute to that individual the property of being John.

In response, the attributivist might point out that it is false that names have no substitutes. We do in fact have diverse ways of calling people the same name, for instance, across different languages, or in cases in which someone adopts a persona with a name not assigned at birth (these cases are more controversial). For example, we can call someone John in English by attributing to an individual the property of being John, and in French we attribute this very same property by attributing to an individual the property of being Jean, at least as far as Canadians are concerned the name 'John' and 'Jean' are versions of the same name.

Whether these in fact do express the same property, however, can be questioned by applying Schema F. Imagine, for instance, a French individual, baptized using the name 'Jean', and consider this French sentence produced by applying Fara's schema to the French name 'Jean':

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

Now if 'Jean' is simply is the French version of the English name 'John', sentence (20) translated into English should result in this sentence:

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

If the attributive account were correct, then, and 'Jean' and 'John' are simply synonyms, then sentences (20) and (21) should both be true, since each name should express the same property, just as we saw with sentences (5) and (6).

In fact, if the attributivist accepts the customary practice of treating the names 'John' and 'Jean' as synonyms, the following sentence should seem as natural as a sentence like (7) does:

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

But sentence (22) does not sound like a natural thing to say at all. It seems it would be a rather odd thing to say. In fact, even maintaining that sentence (21) is true seems odd.

I claim that the oddness of sentences (21) and (22) is caused by the attempt to interpret them attributively. Attributive interpretations, as mentioned, require predicating substantive qualitative properties of an individual – they are descriptive properties. That is, attributive readings can get a foothold only when we have certain qualities associated with certain predicates that are independent of any actions on the part of speakers. This is the reason that calling someone stupid is bothersome to the individual so-called – because of the meaning of the word 'stupid' as illustrated in sentence (7). But this explanation seems implausible concerning sentences (21) and (22).

First, sentence (21) does not even appear to be true as it should on the attributivist account. Second, any offense that Jean might express using sentence (22) is not explained in virtue of having a negative property attributed to him, but rather, it has to do with a misuse of language – a meta-linguistic fact. I claim that there is, in fact, no quality associated with being called by a specific name like 'John'. And this is the reason that sentences (21) and (22) cannot be interpreted attributively. The attributivist, then, faces one of two options: give a plausible account of the nature of the property of say being a John that accounts for its difference from ordinary predicates within an attributivist framework, or deny that 'Jean' and 'John' are synonyms – an intuition many speakers share.

My own idea about the difference between ordinary predicates and names, is that if their semantic content is in fact a property at all, then names must have what I call

“prescriptive properties” as their content. Properties that are true of individuals by enactment or by decree. Being stupid and being a whale are what I will call “descriptive properties.” These properties are true of individuals in virtue of objective facts that are independent of any intentional actions and have nothing to do with attributing them to any individuals. For instance, it is not sufficient to call Maude stupid, as a speaker might by using sentence (6), since being stupid is a property independent of its being attributed to any individuals – other factors are in play having to do with what it is to be stupid.

## **8. Other Objections to the Attributive Account**

There are at least three more objections to the attributive account concerning the analysis of attributive calling as an account of proper names. First, I argue that the account is not truly informative in a way that responds to Kripke’s worries. Second, I point out that property attributions subject to whim just as much as the meta-linguistic notion of calling understood as addressing a subject. Last, I argue that treating names as expressing descriptive properties has potential implausible consequences for an account of the nature of giving names.

### **8.1 Is the Attributive Account Truly Informative?**

Fara assumes that it is sufficient to prove that a claim is informative is that is falsifiable, and she shows that her schema for representing the semantic content of a proper name is indeed falsifiable, assuming that a name is a predicate. However, Fara’s assumption that falsifiability establishes the informativeness of a semantic analysis is questionable.

In fact, counterexamples showing that falsifiability is neither a necessary nor a sufficient condition for a claim’s informativeness can be found in Kripke’s own work. For instance, Kripke discusses the practice of stipulating the length of a meter for measurement purposes, in which we simply decide that a certain stick shall count as a meter in length. This claim is falsifiable, since the stick could have been other than a meter long, and yet the claim

is not informative due to its stipulative nature. Therefore, falsifiability is not a sufficient criterion of informativeness. Kripke also considers the long-standing puzzle of how an identity statement could be necessary and yet fail to be a priori. For instance, the fact that the celestial body seen rising in the morning then called “Hesperus” is identical to the celestial body rising in the evening known as “Phosphorus” – the planet Venus – and yet we failed to know that Hesperus was identical to Phosphorus. At one time, Hesperus is Phosphorus was informative, but it was never falsifiable. Therefore, falsifiability is also not a necessary condition for informativeness.

## **8.2 Property Attributions as Arbitrary**

On the attributive account, as discussed, being called a name is to be the subject of a property attribution. But, of course, any speaker can attribute any property they like to any individual they like whenever they like. The same is true of being addressed as. A speaker may address any individual in any way they choose. What then makes the attributive account one that can explain the stability of names? As before, an attributive account of the semantic content of names then must be constrained in some other ways as well. But what then is particularly attractive about the attributive account at all? As just illustrated, it is not informative in the way it should be and it cannot explain the stability of names, since it needs other constraints to do this work.<sup>4</sup> All that is left, then, is the advantage that it can allow for sentences like (5) and (6) to vary in truth value. But is this enough reason to accept it? Given the issues I have raised, I do not believe so. And there is yet another issue: the attributive account has odd consequences for a theory of acts of naming, or name acquisition.

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<sup>4</sup> Something to note about the attributive account is that it potentially inherits all of the features of semantic instrumentalism about names, except as applied to properties, since on this view, introducing a name just is to introduce a property.

### 8.3 The Attributive Account and Name Acquisition

Kripke, in raising the issue of informativeness, also asks another question about names that casts doubt on the idea that being called a name is a meta-linguistic affair. Specifically, he asks whether it is true that Socrates was called 'Socrates'? It is likely that the answer is "no." The fact that Socrates is addressed as 'Socrates' does not entail that this is the expression that was used to dub or name him initially.

The attributive account would explain the previous facts by appealing to the ambiguity of the notion of calling. It is of course true that Socrates is currently addressed as such, but this does not entail that he was named 'Socrates'. For the latter to be true, Socrates had to be attributed the property of being Socrates. According to Fara, being given a name, and therefore having a certain name, for example, her own name, cannot depend on how she is currently addressed. Concerning the acquisition of her own name, she 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).

Her explanation for the fact that her name is Delia Ruby Graff Fara, but she has never been so addressed, is that acquiring a name requires more than being addressed by it, it must be attributed as a property. However, given the fact that even property attributions are arbitrary, as I pointed out, it cannot merely be this fact that explains how an individual acquires a certain name as a stable means of identifying them.

Furthermore, the existence of names that we treat as synonymous, such as 'John' and 'Jean', just like 'stupid' and 'dumb', also illustrate that the attributive account cannot exhaust an account of name acquisition. If acquiring a name was simply to be attributed a certain property, then it should be perfectly acceptable to name an individual Jean by using the

expression 'John' to do so. It is false, however, that a speaker can give a name to an individual by uttering expressions other than their actual name – that name acquisition is entirely free of any meta-linguistic facts. If this were true, an individual could acquire a name that is never mentioned at all. And this seems wrong. Surely mentioning an expression must play a role in acquiring a name, even if this does not determine its semantic content.

### **9. Name Acquisition as a Meta-linguistic Performative Act: Naming and Calling**

I claim that the attributivist's complete rejection of meta-linguistic facts as connected in any way with names is based on impoverished notion of meta-linguistic facts. For instance, the attributivist argues that because meta-linguistic acts of calling are arbitrary one-off acts, and since our use of proper names does not fit this pattern, meta-linguistic facts are irrelevant concerning an account of names. This argument assumes, however, that the only way acts of naming could be meta-linguistic is if a speaker mentions a name by uttering it to address a certain individual. But meta-linguistic acts need not involve directly addressing someone with a particular expression. For instance, filling out a form for an individual's birth certificate that requires mentioning that individual's name is a meta-linguistic act. So is filling out documents to obtain a marriage certificate.

I propose instead that there is more to meta-linguistic acts of calling than the attributive theorist allows as the previous examples illustrate. Concerning names, I claim that an act of giving a name should be thought of as a type of speech act – a performative meta-linguistic speech act (Austin, 1962). 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 a couple is then married. Performative meta-linguistic speech acts are those that make changes in the world in a way that that change is tied essentially to the words mentioned in that act. Naming or coining terms would be examples of such acts.

So, that Quine is named 'Willard' is explained by the fact that his parents engaged in the meta-linguistic performative speech act of calling him 'Willard' where mentioning of 'Willard' was essential to achieve the end of giving Quine that name, unlike other non-meta-linguistic performatives such as promising. Now how does this idea apply to Fara's sentences (3) and (4)? Of course, if it seems obvious that sentence (3) could be false since the name 'Willard' may never get mentioned in connection with Quine ever again after he is so named. To explain this, I will invoke another concept – that of constative speech acts (Austin, 1962). A constative speech act is one that is descriptive or reportive in nature. For example, after engaging in the performative of promising by a speaker, a hearer might report this fact by stating that that speaker promised to do something. In making constative statements about meta-linguistic facts, a speaker may be reporting on either descriptive speech reports or on meta-linguistic performatives that have normative consequences.

I claim, then, that the reason that sentences (3) and (4) can vary in truth value is because those sentences can be interpreted as reporting on distinct kinds of facts – descriptive and normative meta-linguistic facts.<sup>5</sup> That is, meta-linguistic calling is itself ambiguous. As a descriptive statement, sentence (3) of course might be false, as it depends on facts about actual linguistic usage of expressions. My own way of marking this difference is to invoke the double-quote/single-quote distinction, since the use of double-quotes to mark direct speech reports is already familiar. The use of single-quotes and a general account of its nature I leave for future work, but I assume here that they are to be used when reporting on meta-linguistic performatives. This, at least, leaves room for an explanation of the

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<sup>5</sup> I invoke this distinction now, but I am not entirely committed to it, yet. It may need to be replaced with a different distinction. Developing this idea is taken up in a manuscript entitled "You Never Even Called Me by my Name: You Never Even Called Me by my Name: A Meta-linguistic Analysis of Competence with Proper Names."

difference Fara notes between sentences (3) and (4). I claim that sentence (3) should be displayed in this way:

(3)\* Quine was called “Willard.”

The double quotes indicating that it is about direct speech reports. In contrast, sentence (4), would contain only single quotes. In this case, indicating that a particular meta-linguistic performative had occurred, which I would write this way:

(4)\* Quine was called ‘Willard’

Because sentence (4)\* reports on a normative meta-linguistic fact, and its normativity explains why ‘Willard’ is Quine’s name as opposed to simply an expression used to address him.

While this idea clearly needs further elaboration, I sketch it here simply to illustrate that alternative explanations of Fara’s data are available. In other work (2020), I develop the idea in detail, explain why it is not subject to Kripke’s informativeness objection, and how it can be used to explain being competent in the use of a name.

## **10. Conclusion**

I conclude that the real issue, for the attributivist, centers around giving an account of 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. On the attributive view, the answer is to be found in an analysis of the phenomenon of attributive calling itself. On my reading of Kripke, it was this deeper kind of explanation he was seeking that the attributive account does not yet provide.

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