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Sense Without Reference*

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SENSE WITHOUT REFERENCE

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1 Introduction

Many people think that Frege allowed that expressions could have sense yet lack reference. The question I wish to raise is how one could justify the claim that a systematic description of natural language will make essential use of such a view.

There is some interpretative doubt about whether Frege held that expressions genuinely having sense, expressions capable of contributing to the expression of genuine thoughts, could lack reference, or at any rate, whether he held it for long. I am inclined to the view that he did hold it when he wrote “On Sense and Reference”, where he says of the definite description, “the least rapidly convergent series”, that it “has a sense but demonstrably lacks a reference”. However, by the time of the piece called “Logic”, dated 1897 and published only posthumously, he says that a sentence containing an expression lacking reference expresses at best a mock thought, a “Scheingedanke”, and this would seem to be something which is not a thought.¹ So I think that there is a case to be made for saying that at least by that time he had abandoned the view that sense without reference was possible. I will not engage in this exegetical issue, relying on the clear statement in “On Sense and Reference” to justify labelling “Fregean” the doctrine that sense is possible without reference.

This paper argues for an affirmative answer to its question as applied to proper names, as this expression is commonly used nowadays: semantically simple singular terms.² I argue that one can justify using a description of

natural language which is “Fregean” in just the following respect: it makes essential use of the possibility of empty proper names. In deference to Russell’s view that “what does not name anything is not a name”, I shall label any denial of this “Russellian”. A full account would have at least three parts: (1) an attack on arguments for the Russellian view;³ (2) a semantic theory which gives a recursive specification of meanings or truth conditions in a way that does not discriminate between empty and non-empty names; and (3) an account of the notion of a name-using practice which, likewise, is neutral between the case in which the practice involves an empty name and the case in which it involves a non-empty one.

The second task can be accomplished in more than one way. One could adopt the kind of descriptivist theory commonly (though controversially) associated with the historical Frege. On this view, a singular term is or abbreviates some kind of descriptive, effectively qualitative, condition, and its use in “primary occurrence” in a truth requires the unique satisfaction of this condition. However, there is no need for the relevant condition to be qualitative, in the way taken for granted in “descriptivist” theories. A theory neutral on this point, and which I shall take as my model in the present development of a Fregean position, has been provided by Tyler Burge (1974). In the semantics he develops, names are treated by axioms like

“ x (“Hesperus” refers to x iff $x = \text{Hesperus}$).

The setting is negative free logic: atoms with empty names are false, and universal and existential quantifier rules are modified. An axiom of the above form for an empty name like “Vulcan” is true, because the right hand side is false for each value of x , leading to the appropriate verdict that there is nothing to which “Vulcan” refers. One interesting feature of the theory, which I will carry through to my own discussion, is that the semantics associates names neither with an object nor with a description (in the usual qualitative sense of “description”).⁴

Hostility to this kind of approach may come from a reluctance to con-

sider alternatives to classical logic. The following is designed to disturb the reluctance. If one accepts a standard account of validity, according to which a valid argument is one such that, for each world at which the premises are true, so is the conclusion, one will reject the classical rule of universal instantiation, since, even though “Socrates” is (in fact) not empty, there are worlds at which “Everything is perishable” is true but “Socrates is perishable” is not (worlds at which Socrates does not exist).⁵ Rejecting the classical rule of instantiation is at least a step towards a free logic.

By contrast to the Burge-style approach, Russellian orthodoxy starts with the idea that a name is to be associated with an object, so an axiom for “Hesperus” will be based on the idea that

the reference of “Hesperus” = Hesperus.

Since, in the usual versions of such theories, the metalanguage does not contain primitive function symbols or a referential description operator, a formalized version would look more like:

(1) $\$x(\text{“Hesperus” refers to } x \text{ and } \forall y(\text{“Hesperus” refers to } y \rightarrow x=y) \text{ and } x = \text{Hesperus}).$

I call such axioms “bearer-specifying” because they affirm that the name has a bearer and go on to identify it. They cannot truly be affirmed by the theorist if the object language name has no bearer. In the next section, I give some general considerations in favour of a Fregean semantics, a semantics which can supply true axioms for empty names.

2 Some General Fregean Considerations

Suppose one believes that one can get close to specifying the knowledge involved in understanding a sentence in terms of knowledge of what it would be for the sentence to be true.⁶ What would be the corresponding thing to say about the knowledge involved in understanding a referring expression, say a name? A natural answer is that it is to know what it would be for the

name to refer. This is not knowledge of what the name refers to, but rather knowledge of conditions under which it would refer, knowledge, that is, of how something would have to be in order to be what the name refers to. Just as one might make some progress in saying what it would be to understand “snow is white” in terms of knowing that the sentence is true iff snow is white, so one might make some progress in saying what it would be to understand “Hesperus” in terms of knowing that the name refers to something iff that thing is Hesperus. In short, if the meaning of a sentence is its truth condition, a cognate thought is that the meaning of a name is its reference condition; and this analogy is one general consideration in favour of a Fregean approach.

Suppose, however, that we start with the Russellian idea that a semantic theory should associate a name with an object. Running the analogy in the other direction would lead to the absurd suggestion that semantic theory should associate a sentence with a truth value. Current orthodoxy inexplicably associates sentences with conditions but names with objects. The only plausible way to restore the analogy is to associate names also with conditions rather than objects.

A semantic theorist, as radical interpreter, must immerse himself in the language-using practices of his subjects. Vague as the notion of immersion may be, it is natural to suppose that some degree of it is sufficient for understanding. In that case, nothing else is necessary. So unless immersion in a practice covertly requires the existence of a referent if the practice involves a name, the Fregean view is imposed by the data of interpretation. The main part of this paper is devoted to trying to establish that it is not the case that the notion of a name-using practice requires names to have bearers.

We can give examples of how easily empty names can be introduced, whether as fiction, jest or through error, and point out that we feel a need to teach our children the “correct use” of various actual empty names (“Vulcan”, “Santa Claus”), which implies that they are meaningful. We can insist that

there is parity at the level of explaining behaviour. We can explain why many adults are excited by the thought of a trip to *Paris* in terms of their expectations that Paris is beautiful and has excellent restaurants, where the evidence for the relevant beliefs derives in part from the subjects’ “Paris”-utterances. In just the same way, there is a prima facie case for saying that we can explain why children are excited at Christmas in terms of their expectations that *Santa* will bring them presents, where the evidence for the relevant beliefs derives in part from the children’s “Santa”-utterances.

Cases in which the population under study is agnostic about, for example, whether there ever was such a person as Homer, or is divided on the question, are particularly striking. The Russellian theorist would need to resolve the issue. From his perspective, if “Homer” is empty, semantic theory has nothing to say about it: the activities relating to this mere sound do not constitute a name-using practice, and ordinary sentences containing it lack truth conditions. Yet it seems clear that semantic theory should be able to describe the relevant behaviour without risking falsification by the eventual discovery that the sceptics were right and there really is no such person as Homer.

We could not expect a semantic theorist to explore the historical origin of every name on the University’s register to see if it is genuine or is, rather, like “Paul R. Zwier” (Larson and Segal 1995: 161); nor need he be an astronomer, which he would have to be to distinguish “Neptune” from “Vulcan”; nor a theologian, which he would have to be to determine which, if any, of his subjects’ names for gods are empty; nor a chemist, which he would have to be to distinguish “phlogiston” and “ether” from “heat” and “air”; nor a literary theorist with sound views on the authorship of *Odyssey* and *Iliad*. To suppose otherwise is not merely implausible but potentially incoherent, for on a natural view the relevant investigations would take for granted that the names are intelligible, and would be guided by what that meaning is. This would underwrite the possibility of intelligible questions *whether* there is such a person as Paul R. Zwier, *where* Vulcan is supposed to be, if it exists, *what* phlogiston is

meant to be like, and *who* Homer was, if anyone. The questions to be investigated are naturally expressed in a way that makes essential use of, and thus presupposes the intelligibility of, the names in question. Semantic theory is one thing, specialist knowledge of non-semantic fact another.

A preference for a Fregean over a Russellian theory can be motivated for non-empty names. It would seem possible that the users of such a name, say “*a*”, which in fact refers to *a*, should fail to know that *a* exists, even if they have true beliefs to this effect. The failure of knowledge might derive from a deviant link in some causal chain, or from a serious lack of confidence (one can select an explanation to fit one’s theory of knowledge). A Russellian semantic theorist, however, is required to make an explicit affirmation of the existence of *a*. Since the theorist should affirm only what he knows, he is required to have knowledge that outstrips that of the speakers whose knowledge he is trying to describe. Moreover, in attributing to the speakers implicit knowledge of the semantic theory, he is attributing to them knowledge which, by hypothesis, they lack. No such contradiction threatens Fregean theories.

One can view a semantic axiom as if it were a stipulation governing the use of an expression. One cannot stipulate things into existence, so a Russellian axiom affirming the existence of an entity to which a name refers could not count as an axiom of semantic theory. By contrast, one can stipulate an “at most one” condition, as a Fregean theory does (for example, as developed by Burge). For one can stipulate that a tie for victory is defeat: if there is a group containing more than one candidate for meeting an “at most” condition, like that of being Hesperus, and each candidate in this group is as good as any other in the group but is a better candidate than any of the candidates outside the group, then no candidate counts as meeting the condition.

The familiarity of many of these arguments has not made them persuasive,⁷ especially to Russellians. I think that more persuasive considerations emerge from at the nature of name-using practices.

3 Name-using Practices

A necessary condition for the adequacy of an account of language is that it be able to provide an adequate description of its use, and this means in particular that provision should be made for a distinction between the practice of using the name “Aristotle” for the philosopher and the practice of using it for the tycoon. This distinction will either figure explicitly in semantic axioms for names, or will at least supply guidance about how the theorist is to reach and understand such axioms. If there is no sense without reference, one can individuate by appealing to the referent, just as I did in setting up the problem. But once one grants sense without reference, this cannot in general be the right way to individuate (though its correctness in the cases in which it is correct ought to follow from a correct general condition).

The general answer I offer is that name-using practices are individuated by their source in acts of name-introduction, where such acts can associate the new name with at most one object. This last condition ensures as a consequence that practices of using non-empty names with different bearers are different practices (though the converse does not hold), and this meets the requirement at the end of the previous paragraph. This source-based approach has two main rivals: a referent-based approach, characteristic of Russellian and Kripkean theories; and an information-based approach, characteristic of description theories of names. I suspect that it is dissatisfaction with theories of the latter kind that have driven people towards object-based, Russellian or Kripkean, accounts of name-using practices. What this paper supplies is the sketch of an alternative to both informational and object-based accounts.

Spelling this out in full detail is quite hard, but, in defence of the Fregean approach, I shall suggest that the task is not made significantly easier by having referents in the story. Kripke (1972) sketched a picture of name-using practices which start with a baptism, and are propagated causally from that starting point. What I shall suggest is that we can arrive at a Fregean source-based account by using essentially the Kripkean picture, but without thinking of the originating events, the baptisms, as essentially relating to objects.

3.1 A simple model

A first rough shot at stating Kripke's picture might be:

Two acts of using the name-type N belong to the same name-using practice iff there is an object x and a causal transmission relation R such that both acts are related to x by the ancestral of R .

The structure of his proposal is that there is an initiating event and a transmission relation. I say I can adjust the account of the initiating event and help myself to the same transmission relation.

For a Kripkean the transmission relation serves to put the recipient in epistemic contact with the referent, and this might make it seem that I cannot make use of the same transmission relation. But this is not so: this feature of the transmission relation results from the two Kripkean claims that transmission transmits knowledge of meaning, and that knowledge of the meaning of a name involves epistemic contact with its referent. It is only thanks to the second of these views that the transmission relation transmits knowledge of the referent. Once this is deleted, as it must be for a Fregean view, the transmission relation is neutral.

A Kripkean picture of an early part of a practice might be as follows:

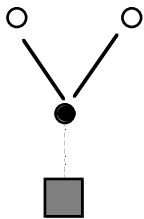


Figure 1

The filled circle represents the baptism, the square represents the object, and the open circles represent two subsequent uses belonging to the practice, in virtue of being related to the baptism by the transmission relation.⁸ Subsequent uses are related not only to the baptism but also to the baptised object. However, it is unclear that the relation to the object could do any work: so long as the baptism does invest the name with a meaning, we need only check whether subsequent uses are related appropriately to it in order to determine that they belong to the same name-using practice. The Kripkean referent thus appears to be idle in the account of the unity of a name-using practice, provided that distinct baptisms can be distinguished independently of which object, if any, is baptized.

The alternative I propose for a Fregean account adopts Kripkean ideas about transmission, while eliminating the object. This means that a “baptism” may be a baptism of nothing, which is verbally awkward but just registers the Fregean view that a name can be intelligibly introduced even if it names nothing.

Justifying the choice of this approach would require ruling out approaches based upon associated information, as would be implied by description theories of names. My reasons for ruling out such theories are of familiar kinds, which I will not rehearse directly here, though §3.2 and §3.3 reveal some inadequacies with description theories.

3.2 Duplicated sources: qualitatively the same information may inform different practices

Even when name-using practices coincide in what information is invoked, they constitute different practices if they originate in different objects. Suppose there are two speakers, S_1 and S_2 , each of whom knows just one of the twins, Jim and Tim, and each calls the¹one he knows Harry. S_1 's “Harry”-related information derives exclusively from Jim, S_2 's from Tim.¹ Qualitatively, their information may be identical (both affirm²“Harry is tall”, “Harry

is happy” etc.). But if they encounter one another, their apparently harmonious use of “Harry”-sentences provides merely an illusion of understanding: because their information derives from different sources, they are using the name in different ways (or, semantically, there are two different names with the same spelling). This result does not depend upon difference of object, for there is also difference of source: the “Harry”-uses of S and S lack a common source. The irrelevance of the object is made plain in the diagram (Figure 2).

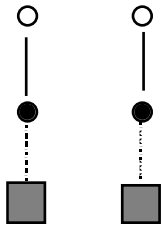


Figure 2

One can imagine a structurally similar case for empty names. Two name-introducing rumours might coincide in information, but if they have different sources, I think we should rule that two names have been introduced and that there is a mere illusion of understanding when the distinct practices meet.

3.3 Information involved in distinguishing practices?

Must we not appeal to associated information in distinguishing one who has authentically joined a practice from one who has tried but failed? Does not one who sincerely affirms “London is the capital of France” give one reason to suspect he does not understand “London”? Likewise, does not one who sincerely affirms “Santa Claus is a planet which affects the orbit of Mercury” give one reason to believe he does not understand “Santa Claus”?

In both cases, this is merely defeasible evidence of lack of mastery. In

the one case it would be defeated by, for example, the discovery that while in other respects a normal user of “London”, the speaker had been carried away by a dream about a new phase of British colonization. In the other case, it would be defeated by, for example, the discovery that while in other respects a normal user of “Santa Claus”, the speaker had come to believe an Ovidian fantasy in which the sledge driver had offended the gods by excessive jingling, and in punishment had been transformed into a silent planet.

It may seem that although in the case of a non-empty name there is no information whose possession is required for understanding, this is not so for empty names. Precisely because there is no bearer, contact with which could be involved in what makes for understanding, surely there must be a body of information which plays a crucial role. This idea may be encouraged by the accidental fact that some empty names are associated with very little information (“Vulcan”), and others, though suffering no dearth of information, generally permit access to the full richness only to those who have passed through a narrow gateway of information (“Shylock”). These are not essential features of empty names. We could well imagine that the speculation about Vulcan was not rapidly quashed, but continued over several generations, the information being enriched by various myths, so that some later users are quite ignorant of the basis of the original postulation; so some competent users might rationally doubt that Vulcan was a planet. Likewise, it could be the case that a competent user of “Shylock” should be unaware of the Shakespearean origin, and suppose the name to refer to some nineteenth century miser. He would, of course, have needed to learn the name from a competent user, for example, a user well aware of the Shakespearean origin; but he might never have known, or have once known but forgotten, that Shylock was a fictional character. The hypothesis that he has just started up a new and non-Shakespearean fictitious use of a like-sounding name would be discredited by his having some recognizably Shakespearean line on such matters as who Shylock’s daughter was and the kinds of contract into which he entered. One such line would be simple belief, but another would be recogni-

tion that others hold such beliefs, together with an account of their falsehood. (“That pound of flesh stuff was obviously just an anti-Semitic exaggeration of a normal, if exigent, business arrangement.”)

Here is a story about how a name-introducing rumour might begin, which reveals the way in which information may diverge, and follows the simple model. An over-imaginative, or self-deceiving, or evil tongue, T^0 , may start a rumour which is embellished by others. The rumour is that there’s a dragon, Fiamma, who lives in the mountain just south of the village and whose preferred diet is human babies. You hear the rumour from T^1 and I hear it from T^2 each of whom heard it, on separate occasions, from T^0 . You say that Fiamma is green, trusting to T^1 ’s embellishment, and I say she is red, trusting to T^2 ’s. By some standard, our T^1 Fiamma-related information has different origins; but there is a standard which rules that these different bodies of information have the same source, in T^0 . This is the standard we need: it correctly represents us as disagreeing about Fiamma’s colour. It rules as it does because, although the information that Fiamma is green is new to T^1 , and the information that Fiamma is red is new to T^2 , both these pieces of information were intended by their producers to link to Fiamma, so the “ultimate” origin lies further back, with T^0 . This is the source that is invoked by my proposal.

The view that no piece of information need be shared by all users in a practice has its analogue for empty names. Those who think that one can understand “Russell” without even knowing that its bearer is human will think that one can understand “Fiamma” without even knowing that its bearer is supposed to be a dragon: perhaps the rumour will develop, so that some say Fiamma is a gorgon, some say she prefers adults to babies, some that “she” is really a he, and some elders, wishing to reduce panic, claim she is vegetarian. These people disagree among themselves on the facts while agreeing on language, provided that their use of the name “Fiamma” has a common origin, and that each intends to speak of what the others speak of.

3.4 Fusion

Fusion of name-using practices provides a case in which an object of reference arguably dominates source in individuation.

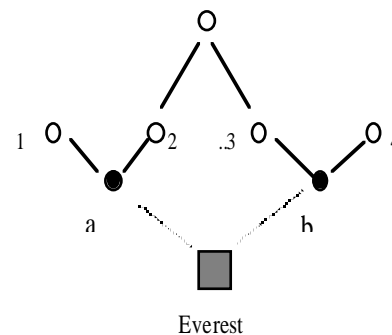


Figure 3

Suppose that one group of speakers (a) sees a mountain from the north side and calls it “Everest” and another group (b) sees it from the south side and calls it by a name which, coincidentally, sounds and is spelled the same. At first, the groups do not meet. But then the route through the range is discovered. North-siders and south-siders talk to each other freely using “Everest”. There is a strong intuition that what began as distinct name-using practices will eventually fuse. One way to describe this would be to say that at first there were two practices and then there was one. The object theory can account for this, as there is a single object; the source theory apparently cannot, for there are distinct sources.¹⁰

A similar structure can arise in the case of empty names, with a diagram just like Figure 3, save with the object omitted. Coincidentally, among both those who live on the north side and those who live on the south side of the mountain a rumour springs up about a dragon, Fiamma, who lives in the mountain just north of the village and whose preferred diet is human babies.

At first, the groups do not meet. But then the route through the range is discovered. North-siders and south-siders talk to each other freely using “Fiamma”. There is a strong intuition that what began as distinct name-using practices will eventually fuse. The object theory cannot account for any of this, as it cannot allow that there are any name-using practices in the story. But the story also presents problems for the source theory, as there are two sources but, on one account of fusion, a single practice.

I believe that in both cases, there is only an appearance of understanding in the initial encounters. For example, if (Figure 3) person 2 from the (a) practice meets person 3 from the (b) practice on the ridge, as contact is first established, it may seem as if they understand one another’s “Everest”-utterances. If I am right to hold that this is only an illusion of understanding, the source theory at least gets the early history right.

Communication can transmit knowledge. Suppose person 2 expresses knowledge with the words “Avalanche yesterday Everest”. Imagine that the first two words are not intelligible to 3, but that 2 explains them by signs and dumb-show. In connection with the third word, however, 3 indicates that he has no need for any explanation. Suppose that, before the utterance, 3 did not know that there was an avalanche on Everest yesterday. Suppose also, for reductio, that 3 understands what 2 said. Then, on any adequate account of knowledge by testimony, he ends up knowing that there was an avalanche on the north side of Everest on the previous day. However, it was just an accident that the sound 2 used for Everest coincided in its contribution to truth conditions with the similar sound as used by 3. Things could easily have been otherwise: the north-siders might easily have used “Everest” for the next mountain along. The method implicitly adopted by 3, homophonic translation, was not reliable. Knowledge is not acquired by unreliable methods. So 3 did not end up knowing that there had been an avalanche on Everest the previous day. The explanation is that 3 did not know what 2 said.

The source-based account thus gets the early part of the story right: at

the beginning, there is at best an illusion of understanding. To do justice to this, the object-based account has to add some further condition. It is not enough for understanding that speaker and hearer derive their use of a name from a common object: in the present case, at least, it seems that they need to know that there is an object to which they both intend to refer. The object-based account thus needs some further condition, not contained merely in causal history, but most naturally to be found in the intentions, beliefs or knowledge of the speakers, in order to get the first part of the fusion story right; in order, that is, to allow that merely deriving the use of a name-type from a common object is not enough for the uses to belong to a single practice. The connection is that uses which belong to a single practice permit immediate and genuine understanding.

The difficulty for source-based accounts is to explain the fusion of distinct practices. A constraint upon a successful account is that it should respect the intuition that nothing more is needed for (a)-siders and (b)-siders to understand each other, and thus for their practices to fuse, than for them to know that they both use “Everest” for the same mountain. There are various options, among which I suggest we take seriously an analogue of what it is natural for object-based theories to say in order to explain the distinctness of the practices before fusion: in addition to the origin of uses we must also look to the intentions and beliefs by which they are governed. The most obvious suggestion for object-based theories is that there should be a single object about which participants in an exchange belonging to the same practice aim to speak. The analogue for source-based theories suitable for a Fregean is that participants in such an exchange must intend to speak of a single object. The idea is that the shift in the scope of the quantification over objects means that although, setting aside fiction, the users must believe there is something of which they both speak, the theorist describing this use need not.

This seems an entirely proper thing to say about the empty case. There is no object such that either community can know that “Fiamma” stands for it. On the other hand, we do have some inclination to represent the fused

situation as one in which both north and south-siders intend to speak of the same dragon. Theorists can make sense of this without committing themselves to the existence of dragons. A sign of the presence of these coincident intentions is that north-siders view south-siders as well as north-siders as belonging to the community with whose practice they wish to accord and as potential suppliers of Fiamma-related information; they want to talk about whatever all these people, south-siders included, want to talk about. For south-siders, the position is analogous. In the absence of a dragon, the intentions cannot be realized. But they can be sustained by that fact that users have no evidence, or at least no decisive evidence, that there is more than one dragon (or less than one).

Returning to the “Everest” case: if, on the ridge, one party utters “Everest” while pointing to the mountain, and the other expresses agreement, mutual understanding is assured. On the present view, the explanation is that they come to appreciate that in using this word they are trying to speak of the same object. More happens: they come to know that there is an object concerning which both parties are trying to speak when using the word “Everest”. But this additional knowledge, though relevant to whether the parties are so related that they can transmit non-semantic knowledge, is, I claim, not required for semantic knowledge. For the latter, it is enough to appreciate the coincidence of the intentions.

What can “coincidence of intention” amount to, if not to one of the following: both intentions involve the same object, or both involve the same content? The first option is unavailable to the Fregean theorist, for the coincidence must be possible even in the absence of an object. The second option threatens to be circular, if the coincidence in content is in part determined by an agreement about how a name is to be used. There is a third option. In the “Fiamma” case, each party thinks: what the other is trying to speak of in using “Fiamma” is just what I am trying to speak of when I use that name. This commits the speakers, but not the theorist, to belief in coincidence of object. Just this belief is what seems crucial in the “Everest” case. The differ-

ence is that in one case the belief is false, whereas in the other it constitutes knowledge. Given that a Fregean view is committed to typical serious uses of empty names being ones which involve false belief, it would not be surprising if false beliefs are among those that bind users together into a common name-using practice. These practices resemble other social practices in this respect: it is enough for the relevant people to believe that something is so for it to be so. In the present case, it is enough, in normal circumstances, for people to believe they are party to a common practice for this to be so.

Some of the problems for the source-based account arose from the supposition that after fusion has occurred there is just a single practice, rather than two fused practices. The very notion of *fusion* needs careful handling, since it can lead to contradiction. Suppose distinct things, x and y , fuse to z at point p . We are tempted to say that to fuse is not to cease to exist, so that x and y continue to exist beyond p . But then it may seem that both must be z , and we may be driven to the contradiction that $x \neq y$ and $x = z$ and $y = z$. There are two coherent descriptions: what we call z is really two things, though occupying a region into which just one thing of its kind will normally fit; or to fuse is to cease to exist. To apply this to a real example: Woodstock Road meets Banbury Road at St Giles, which carries on to Carfax. One option is to say that there are two roads which occupy a common space through St Giles: St Giles is both (a short stretch of) Banbury Road and (a short stretch) of Woodstock Road. Another option is to say that there are three roads: fusing is ceasing to exist. There seems to me no reason to think that every case of fusion must be treated in the same way. We are free to see how best to understand the fusion of name-using practices, and thus check on the consistency of the final picture with a source-based account.

On the first option, the fusion of the name-using practices means that there are two practices occupying the same “region”, geographical and linguistic. Typical users in the post-fusion phase are masters of both, and their utterances are contributions to both. This is straightforwardly consistent with there being two sources. There is some oddness in speaking of two practices

after fusion, when everything goes so smoothly; and some oddness in saying that a single speech-act involving a single occurrence of a name involves two (specially related) uses; but then there is some oddness in speaking of two roads occupying the same space. The oddness derives from this option about how to understand fusions, rather than from the source view as such. It would require one to say that the previously discussed coincidence of intentions is only necessary and not sufficient for a single practice, since such intentions can be common to two fused practices; indeed, such intentions partially constitute the fusing force.

On the second option, we should say that there are three name-using practices in north-side/south-side cases. The idea that a new practice is inaugurated by the meeting on the ridge is not wholly implausible. But it is very implausible that the previous practices cease to exist, and that stay-at-home south-siders, those who had had no contact, even indirect, with those who had encountered north-siders, have unwittingly embarked on a new practice. The old uses are adequately sustained by those who were not party to the historic meeting.¹¹ The best development of this position seems to be to imagine the three practices as overlapping for a while in space and time, with the newest practice gradually driving out both the old ones. If this option seems best, the source-based account can adapt to it by seeing the inauguration of the new practice as precisely that: a new source, from which subsequent uses derive. The gradual ousting of the old practices arises because best practice becomes that in which the participants aim to speak of whatever the wider community, their side as well as ours, aims to speak of.

In sum, any difficulties here spring from the notion of fusion; they are not special difficulties for the source-based mode of individuating name-using practices.

3.5 Confusions

A given utterance may be beholden, in ways normally suitable for mak-

ing it part of a name-using practice, to two sources. In some of these multiple source cases, one may be at a loss (or in dispute) about how to individuate name-using practices. I learn the name “Harry” in the presence of Jim, but, without my realizing the shift, it’s Tim I mostly meet thereafter. My original “Harry”-related information comes from Jim; but the majority of my “Harry”-related information comes from Tim. To whom do I refer when I use “Harry”? The options are: Jim, Tim, both, neither, there’s no fact of the matter. To rephrase: should one count my possibly idiosyncratic name-using practice as one whose name refers to Jim, to Tim, to a Jim-Tim fusion, or to nothing? Or should one say there is no fact of the matter?

If the following diagram is appropriate to these cases, it may seem that object-based individuation is at no advantage compared to a source-based approach:

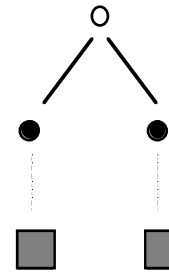


Figure 4

As there are as many sources as objects, it may seem that this case will be equally problematic for both approaches. However, the object-theorist is at an advantage when it comes to explaining the distinction between this case (*confusion*) and fusion. The top part of Figure 4 corresponds to the top part of Figure 3, yet for Figure 3 I assumed that all theorists would wish to say that after fusion we had a fully coherent situation of mutual understanding: either

a single practice, or two practices so fused as to resemble a single practice. Fusion can occur without confusion. It seems as if object-based theories can explain the difference: when two objects get into the story in this intermingled way, there is confusion; when practices relating to a single object mingle, there is fusion.

Fregean theorists will hold that confusion can occur even in the absence of an object, and so the object-based explanation just envisaged cannot be the full story. Suppose there are distinct and isolated “Fiamma”-using practices on each side of the mountain: they relate, as we feel inclined to say, to different dragons. Suppose a single intrepid trader finds a pass through the range and starts travelling back and forth. Should we say that his name-using practice belongs to the north-side practice? To the south-side practice? To both? To neither? Or that there is no fact of the matter? The same five options, and no reason of which I am aware to prefer one choice to another. So although I don’t have much to say about these cases, or an explanation of what makes them differ from fusions, it does seem to me that at least the most obvious object-based explanations will not work.

3.6 Fission

Evans gives what he calls a simplified version of the “Madagascar” example, which I shall treat as a degenerate case of the fission of name-using practices:

two babies are born, and their mothers bestow names upon them. A nurse inadvertently switches them and the error is never discovered. It will henceforth undeniably be the case that the man universally known as “Jack” is so called because a woman dubbed some other baby with the name. (1973: 11)

We could diagram a slight generalization of this story as follows:

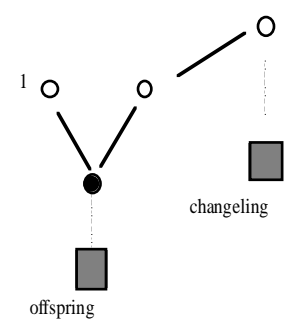


Figure 5

We envisage that some others (perhaps practical jokers on the nursing staff), represented by 1, continue to use “Jack” of the offspring, whereas the mother and various others, represented by 2, use it of the changeling, so that we have a case of fission. The mother’s later uses count as uses of the name for the changeling, despite her link to her earlier practice. (In Evans’s actual example, the first segment of the fission is not mentioned and perhaps does not occur: but we can see “bearer-shifting” as a degenerate case of fission.)

It indeed seems right to say that “Jack” refers to the man universally known as “Jack”, in which case there is an apparent problem for a source-based account of the individuation of name-using practices: baptisms do not individuate name-using practices, for the baptismal use of “Jack” does not belong to the same practice as its subsequent use. After the switch, the mother started calling someone else’s baby Jack, taking it to be her own. This use came to prevail. Unbeknownst to her, it inaugurated a new name-using practice, a distinct one from the short-lived practice inaugurated by a possibly more official baptismal ceremony. There are two names “Jack” in the story, just as there are (more than) two names “Aristotle”.

Should a source-based theory count the mother's first use of "Jack" for the changeling baby as an unwitting baptism? This may seem to be inconsistent with the facts: she is surely making some kind of mistake when, on first confronting the little changeling, she utters "Jack is hungry", even if the child before her is hungry; she is certainly using the name intending to conform with her previous intentions; and she is in causal contact with her original baptism of her real child. As with fusion, it may seem more realistic to think of a gradual process, allowing that at first the mother is in error, but then at some indefinite later point, utterances of the kind just envisaged come to be true or false in virtue of how things are with the changeling rather than in virtue of how they are with her real offspring. It is not impossible to see how an object-based account might achieve this. But can a source-based account?

On her first encounter with the changeling, there is a radical failure in the mother's referential intentions. She is trying to conform her current use to her earlier use; but if an earlier use enabled her to refer to her child, a later use which does not enable this is hardly in conformity with that earlier use. We can account for the sense that the mother has made a mistake in terms of the failure of her intentions, rather than in terms of the failure of what the mother utters to be true (if the changeling is indeed hungry). What is gradual, I suggest, is not the inauguration of a new practice, but our appreciation of this. We need to be convinced that this is not just a one-off error but a systematic departure; and we could know this only after some reasonable lapse of time, during which she still takes the changeling for her own offspring. If this does not happen, we do not judge the case to be the inauguration of a new practice, and indeed it would not have been: rather, it would have been simply a mistake, and subsequent uses would have conformed to the original practice. (Or if the offspring and the changeling were frequently swapped, we would be in the "confusion" cases already discussed.) Thus whether or not something counts as the inauguration of a new practice depends in part on what the future holds; just as whether or not a poisoning is a killing. When we think that the new practice gets a hold gradually, we are confusing the metaphysics

of the situation (if this is indeed a usage which is destined to become stable, then it is an inauguration of a new practice) with what we can know about it (the relevant knowledge is available only later).

This approach is supported by a comparison with empty names. T started the rumour about the dragon Fiamma by saying "In the mountains⁰ to the south of the village, there lives a dragon, Fiamma". Someone mishears this as "In the fountains near the mouth of the river, there lives a gorgon, Fiamma". Under the misapprehension, she continues what she takes to be the same tale, elaborating on how the gorgon likes to startle the villagers who come to bathe. Inadvertently, she has started a new rumour, and a new name-using practice. The name "Fiamma" has divided, or, if the original dragon-rumour dies out, we can say that the name has, as it were, switched bearers. The explanation seems to be that although the second user is trying to conform her use to that of the first, in this she radically fails; and this unifies the explanation of why we count her as starting a new rumour (about a new beast) with the explanation of why we count Jack's mother as having started a new name-using practice (about a new baby). In both cases, the event is an inauguration only if a practice descends from it; otherwise it is simply a mistaken attempt to continue an old practice.

4 Source a Disjunctive Property?

Since everyone agrees that, if a name is individuated purely syntactically, there are practices of using empty names and practices of using non-empty ones, the relevant notion of a source needs to mark out a non-disjunctive property of name-using practices. Yet I can imagine someone inspecting the concept of a source I have tried to develop and claiming that it is disjunctive.

I myself find it hard to engage with the objection, for I do not know what it is for a property (as opposed to a predicate) to be non-disjunctive in some absolute sense. What seems to me to matter is whether a property is

treated disjunctively or not in some context. Thus the property of becoming a parent is treated disjunctively in English employment law: becoming a parent by becoming a mother is one thing, entitling the possessor to a decent period of paid leave; becoming a parent by becoming a father is another, entitling the possessor to a much shorter period of leave. On the other hand, in another context, effectively the same property is treated non-disjunctively by the English welfare benefits system. Being a single parent entitles you to the same benefits whether you are a single parent by being a single mother or whether you are a single parent by being a single father. So the question I can understand is whether semantic theory treats the notion of source as disjunctive or not.

What I have recommended in this paper is that it be treated as non-disjunctive. Practices using empty and non-empty names are individuated in the same way, in terms of their source. Semantic axioms will take the same form for both cases. They will not be discriminated within the theory, whose form, therefore, is restricted by these considerations (e.g. non-Meinongian model theory cannot in any straightforward way do justice to empty names). While I recognize that my reasons for making this suggestion may fall short of being conclusive, I do not think that a reasonable response is merely to claim, as if reporting on the upshot of a metaphysical inspection, that the relevant notion of source is disjunctive. What would need to be done would be to give theoretical reasons for treating it as such.¹²

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¹Despite Bell's contrary opinion (Bell, 1990), the soundings I have taken among native speakers suggest that a Schein-F is something intended to seem an F even though it isn't an F. Thanks to Max Kölbel for discussion. There are very useful discussions of Frege's position in Diamond (1991), especially "Frege against fuzz".

²As Jonathan Barnes pointed out to me, this is a rather inadequate characterization of the relevant class of expressions. Most westerners have forename and family name, and it is hard to see how this complexity (if that is what it is) is to be characterized. Are book titles names of books? These issues deserves closer scrutiny. A related issue is that I exclude demonstratives. While I certainly think that it is important to consider how the considerations

of this paper relate to the use of demonstratives, I am unsure that the issues are logically connected. Both the view that the class of singular terms fractures into names and demonstratives, and the view that both are subsumed under a single category of singular terms, appears consistent with the main claim of this paper, viz. that there is a unified category of (empty and non-empty) proper names. Thanks to François Recanati and Ian Rumfitt for discussion.

³For which see Sainsbury (1999).

⁴Thus Bell (1990: 275), summarizing a sentence each from the *Grundgesetze* and the *Grundlagen* writes: "for Frege the sense of an expression is the condition that must be met by anything that is the reference of that expression. ... there can be a fully determinate, coherent, and intelligible *condition* which ... nothing fulfils".

The envisaged semantics also undermines any ultimate difference between reference and satisfaction. What we call reference is just satisfaction under a condition (like *being Hesperus*) capable of being satisfied by at most one thing.

Suppose the kind of haecceities invoked by the Burge-style theory I envisage turned out to be reducible to qualitative properties. Should one conclude that there is no difference between a Burge-style theory and a descriptive theory? The conclusion does not follow. I see a semantic theory as designed to state things which if known by speakers would explain their behaviour. But one might know something of the form "this has property F" without knowing anything of the form "this has property G" even if the property F is the property G. The space between a conventional descriptivist position and a Russellian one disappears only if conditions like *being Hesperus* really *abbreviate* qualitative conditions (as perhaps Russell himself thought). Thanks to David Sosa and Eric Loomis for discussion of this issue.

⁵The argument was mentioned to me (though not endorsed) by Yannis Stephanou. The case is only *prima facie*. Classical instantiation could be defended in a number of ways, including (as David Wiggins suggested) shifting to binary quantification, which would require the premise that Socrates is a thing; or, more simply and classically, by guiding one's formalization of the premise by the formulation "for all x , if x is a thing, then x is perishable".

⁶I take it for granted that what it would be for "Hesperus to be visible" to be true is not the same as what it would be for "Phosphorus is visible" to be true. This approach is, to put it optimistically, non-reductive: the distinction in question cannot be extracted merely from the nature of truth but must come from some "intensional" notion, in my opinion, following for example McDowell (1977) or Davies (1981), that of propositional attitudes.

⁷These considerations all have a *prima facie* character, for if there is a direct and decisive argument for the claim that a name must name, then this conclusion must somehow be accommodated in the methodology of semantic theorizing. Hence arguments against arguments for the view that every intelligible name must have a bearer (see Sainsbury 1999) are complementary to those offered here.

⁸The transmission relation is indicated by a solid line. The distinct relation which holds between a baptiser and the baptised object is shown by a broken line.

⁹The context of this occurrence of "Fiamma" is intensional: one cannot infer the existence of Fiamma from the existence of this intention. Our need to use names we know to be non-referring in describing intentions and other attitudes makes a strong case for the Fregean approach.

¹⁰Another version, pointed out to me by Maite Ezcurdia, involves two scientists postulating the "same" object as unobserved cause of some phenomenon: distinct sources but, eventually, a single practice.

¹¹ The phenomenon of deference could cause changes in a practice by, as it were, "action at a distance". If an expert to whom others defer changes his practice, their practice is automatically changed without their having any direct causal connection with the new usage. I can consistently stipulate that the example under discussion is not like this.

¹² Thanks to the British Academy for contributing to my costs involved in travelling to the World Congress of Philosophy at Boston in 1998, where parts of this paper were presented; to audiences at the World Congress, at Philosophy Departments in the Universities of Lublin (the Catholic University), Texas (Austin), Mexico City (UNAM), Glasgow and St Andrews, and at the Frege Conference in Bonn in October 1998; and (in addition to those mentioned in other footnotes) to Stephen Barker, Herb Hochberg, Fraser McBride, Philip Percival, Sarah Sawyer, Yannis Stephanou and David Wiggins; and to Keith Hossack, who gave me very detailed and helpful comments on what would otherwise have been the final draft.