A User's Guide to Proper Names, Their Pragmatics and Semantics
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In this chapter, we shall try to motivate and develop a foundational semantic of proper names. Our approach shall be motivated by some pragmatic considerations but we shall also use them to motivate a treatment of ontology of proper names, which could be seen as underlying a descriptive semantic treatment of proper names.

At the core of our proposal is a perceived need to account for the fact that a name can stand for multiple bearers. Our account was inspired by an article by Pelczar and Rainsbury, as well as more recent linguistic literature. We shall look in some detail at theories that try to explain a name’s ability to refer to multiple bearers by positing indexicality, and compare it with the usually less popular proposal to treat names as ambiguous.

We start by examining some current theories that point to the indexical or demonstrative character of proper names, and try to assess their advantages. In section 6.2.1, we look at some linguistic evidence that can be interpreted as a reason to think that proper names share some important features with indexical expressions. We then look at differences between ambiguity and indexicality, and try to support a claim that names are, in fact, ambiguous, rather than indexical.

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1Pelczar and Rainsbury, 1998.
In section 6.2.2, we briefly review – again – Kripke’s view on proper names, and focus on the points where incorporating either indexicality or ambiguity of proper names would be problematic. Having concluded that Kripke’s theory should be made more specific regarding its scope, we look for further inspiration in Kaplan’s account of ambiguity of proper names. We adapt his proposal of ontology of proper names and try to show why it is much less counterintuitive than a cursory look may suggest.

Having all this at our disposal, we put it to work in dealing with some problems concerning the functioning of proper names in real discourse. We use, once again (in section 6.8), Stalnaker’s notion of propositional concept and illustrate its usefulness in dealing with context resolution of proper names. Finally, we look at various kinds of data that are relevant to comparing the ambiguity view I champion with the indexicality view I try to argue against.

6.1 Outlining the Problem

Let us start by giving a preliminary outline of the discussion regarding the indexicality of proper names. This should enable us to clarify which problems we want to treat, and to identify some objections against a position such as we shall try to develop.

6.1.1 Indexicality, Overt and Hidden

When reading the pre-70s literature on the semantics of proper names, one can notice the almost omnipresent idealisation that there is one bearer for each name. The perfectly commonplace fact that a proper name, say ‘John’ or ‘London’, can refer to a number of individuals used to be left out of a theory of semantics of proper names. The one-bearer-per-name idealisation has been adopted by Fregeans, descriptivists, and causal theorists, as well as many others working within the analytic tradition.²

²For example, Frege, 1893, re-print in English 1952, Kripke, 1980, Linsky, 1977, and Dummett, 1973b.
Starting with Burge’s well-known article, indexicality of proper names has been discussed, and several explanations of their indexical behaviour have been proposed. Proper names have been described as being indexical in several ways.

Firstly, there is the discussion of the so-called ‘hidden indexicality’, which is usually connected with a Kripkean discussion of causal chains or chains of communication. Hidden indexicality was originally described in connection with the reference of natural kind terms, and only later attributed to proper names as well. It describes the semantically relevant properties of the ‘backward-looking’ connection between an utterance of a proper name and the origin of that name (the original baptism). It is related to the claim that proper names display direct reference, the implication being that speakers do not need to have individuating knowledge of their intended referent as long as they are connected, in the right way, to the chain linking them to it. The discussion of hidden indexicality also aims at describing further conditions under which reference can succeed (e.g., the role of the referent’s essential properties in the evaluation of counterfactual statements).

Secondly, there is the open or overt indexicality. As I mentioned above, this discussion started with Burge’s article (Burge, 1973), and has recently been taken up by Segal (2001), Haas-Spohn (1994), Recanati (1993), and others. Burge sees himself as defending a version of the predicate view, continuing a line of reasoning taken by Russell and Quine. He points out that we need to account for the fact that a name, say ‘John’ can refer to numerous individuals, and suggests that we should treat names as complex demonstratives consisting of a name-predicate and a demonstrative, thus analysing an occurrence of, for example, ‘John’ as ‘that John’. A proper name, ‘John’, then denotes all bearers of that name, that is, all referents that were given the name in an appropriate way. Together, these referents form the extension of a predicate, while the circumstances of a par-

\[ ^3 \text{Burge, 1973.} \]
\[ ^4 \text{We find this topic treated e.g., Haas-Spohn, 1994, and Lerner and Zimmerman, 1984.} \]
\[ ^5 \text{The locus classicus is Putnam, 1975a.} \]
ticular utterance help resolve the demonstrative, thus determining which John is intended at a particular occasion.

The name-predicate Burge has in mind is not an abbreviated cluster of descriptions, as it was on the descriptivist view. It is also not an abbreviation of an artificial predicate like ‘Socratizes’, as Quine once proposed.\(^6\) Names do not convey any information except that the bearer of a name ‘\(N\)’ is an entity that can be called ‘\(N\)’. Names are predicates in their own right, or, strictly speaking, they are general terms, which together with a copula and an indefinite article are parsed as predicates. In its referential use, a name functions as a predicate conjoint with a demonstrative. The demonstrative helps pick out the intended referent. Thus, Burge says, outside of a context, the sentence ‘John is 6 feet tall’ lacks a truth-value, much like the sentence ‘That book is green’. This is the gist of Burge’s proposal.

Others, chiefly Kaplan,\(^7\) have rejected the predicate approach. They want to account for the phenomenon of multiple bearers by postulating an *ambiguity* whereby a name gives rise to a potentially unlimited number of phonetically identical yet distinct names that form distinct words. Which name is used at a particular occasion is then determined by the context of utterance.

We have thus on the one hand the hidden indexicality – related to the origin of a name – and on the other hand either overt indexicality or ambiguity, both of which deal with the interpretation of a name in a particular context. We can see both of these discussions – one about the hidden, the other about either overt indexicality or ambiguity – as a response to related but distinct sets of problems, and as two steps in the treatment of the semantics of proper names. When describing the behaviour of proper names, we want to know how hearers interpret proper names in the context of a discourse. This task has at least two aspects. On one hand, we need to investigate the relation of proper names to their bearers. This relation helps us determine the truth or falsity of statements containing proper 

\[^6\text{Quine, 1961a, 140-143.}\]

\[^7\text{In Kaplan, 1990.}\]
names, and is thus a part of descriptive semantics of names. We need to try and spell out this relation in terms that are, at least in principle, accessible to the speaker so that she can meaningfully aim at making true statements using proper names – we need to make plausible foundational semantic claims. On the other hand, we need to determine how speakers and hearers arrive in their production and interpretation at the intended referents. The problem we have to deal with at this level is that proper names seem to have multiple bearers. Our task is to describe the process of interpretation (or perhaps disambiguation) of an utterance of a proper name. In order to describe the behaviour of proper names exhaustively, we might have to investigate both the hidden and the overt indexicality, that is, both the relation of a proper name to its referent, and its relation to the interpreter. Throughout this whole project, however, we have avoided a discussion of causal chains, and though that might deserve a further justification, we shall continue to do so. Instead, we shall present a view of how names are attached to their bearers in our proposal of ontology of proper names (in section 6.3.1). That is why we shall not discuss the hidden indexicality of proper names.

We shall focus on the second step, that is, the process of interpretation or disambiguation of proper names. There is a perception (e.g., in Haas-Spohn, 1994, and Recanati, 1993) that overt indexicality and ambiguity are competing explanations of the same phenomenon. We shall look at this claim in more detail, and see what the crucial differences between the two positions are. Our aim is to present a version of the ambiguity view, point out its advantages, and answer some of the objections mounted against it.

### 6.1.2 From The Indexical Point of View

François Recanati has presented a well-articulated version of the indexical view. It is more elaborate than Burge’s somewhat sketchy proposal on which it builds. Recanati wants to defend a number of theses: a) that proper names are directly referential; b) that there

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8Recanati, 1993, 140-143.
is a convention associating a name with its referent, and c) that a proper name ‘N’ means ‘the entity called N’. It seems plausible that we could read a) as amounting to a claim that the meaning of a proper name is its referent. Thesis c) is an offspring of the Quinean approach to names, which, as we saw, was taken up by Tyler Burge. At the core of Recanati’s approach is the claim that proper names do not have a meaning in the sense of a conceptual content. They are rather like predicates in the sense that a name ‘N’ can be truly predicated of an entity x just in case the x satisfies certain conditions – a proper name ‘N’ can truly be applied only to an entity called ‘N’. The convention that makes this happen (that makes it the case that an entity may truly be called ‘N’) is, according to Recanati, of a social kind, and forms a part of the extralinguistic context. On the other hand, that there are such conventions seems to be a linguistic fact, a part of what defines the category of proper names, and awareness of the existence of such conventions is a part of linguistic competence.

The linguistic convention associated with proper names can be spelled out as follows: “For each proper name there exists in principle a social convention linking that name to a definite individual, called its bearer. This individual is the referent of the name.”\(^9\) This general convention then refers to a specific social convention, which associates a particular proper name with its bearer.

\[\ldots\text{a specific social convention is involved for each proper name (and sometimes more than one convention, as when a name has more than one bearer). Each time a proper name is used, the linguistic convention is appealed to, and a social convention is thereby invoked, viz. a convention linking the name to some definite individual.}\]

In this framework, a proper name refers by linguistic conventions to whoever (or whatever) happens to be the bearer of that name; but who (what) is the bearer of the name is a contextual, non-linguistic matter, a matter of social conven-

\(^9\)Recanati, 1993, 139.
There are, Recanati admits, some differences between proper names and indexicals. Ordinary indexicals are ‘token-reflexive’, meaning that the referring relation holds between an expression token and its referent. In the case of proper names, however, reference is determined by a conventional relation that holds between a proper name as a \textit{type} and its referent. “A token of ‘N’ refers to an entity, which, in the context of utterance, has the property of bearing the name type ‘N’.”\footnote{Recanati, 1993, 141, notation adjusted for consistency.} If two entities bear the same name, the reference of the name will vary between one token and another, but the two entities share the same name type.

One may feel that Recanati fails to answer several relevant questions. The indexicality he describes is on a different level than the one involved in the resolution of a proper name in a context where the name may have a number of bearers. According to Recanati, the indexicality of a proper name (even one that only has one bearer) consists in a systematic reference to a social convention which is seen as part of the extralinguistic context. In fact, if one saw knowledge of the conventions connecting proper names to their bearers as a part of linguistic competence (arguing perhaps from the division of linguistic labour and the view of language as overlapping idiolects), proper names would not be indexical on Recanati’s view at all. He acknowledges that more than one name-convention may be associated with a name type, but says that “these conventions are not appealed to in the same contexts of utterance, and this is why the reference may vary from one token to the next.”\footnote{Recanati, 1993, 141.} We shall show that more than one name-convention (associated with the same name type) can be operative within the same context, and try to explain what guides successful interpretation in such cases.

Recanati says, “the reference of ‘N’ is the entity which is called \textit{N} in the context of the utterance.”\footnote{Recanati, 1993, 141, notation adjusted for consistency.} This does not account for...
the fact that a name ‘N’ can name a particular entity x even in abstraction of a particular context. In particular, that x can be called ‘N’ is not only a result of a successful use of that name in reference to x (that could be just a lucky coincidence), but also a consequence of a practice to use ‘N’ to refer to x.

If, following Recanati, we think of proper names as types, then we cannot but say that a token used at a particular occasion refers to the entity that bears the type. That is the only way in which Recanati can preserve direct reference in the sense that the meaning of a proper name is its bearer. If we think of proper names as types, we cannot say that a name refers to its bearer in abstraction of a context because then the meaning of that name would be all of its bearers. And that claim is not compatible with the direct reference thesis (and the singular nature of proper names) which Recanati wants to preserve. Moreover, Recanati does not describe the mechanism responsible for a name’s reference to a particular bearer in a context. He aims at providing descriptive semantics of names that could account for multiple bearers but as a foundational semantics his proposal falls short.

6.2 Names and Context Dependence

In this and following sections (6.2.1 to 6.7), we shall prepare the ground for our own approach to the problem of multiple reference, which is a version of the ambiguity approach. We start by motivating the need for an explanation of the multiple reference of proper names that should supplement the ‘standard’ descriptive semantic theories of proper names.

6.2.1 Variability of Proper Names

A proper name, for example ‘John’, can refer to different entities in different situations. In a given context, however, we usually know to whom a name refers. Various linguistic and non-linguistic features of a situation determine the context of interpretation. Outside a
context (or in an imperfectly determined one), we may be unable to determine a name’s reference: when I overhear some strangers talking about John, I am not likely to know whom they talk about. If, however, I overhear someone talking about Julius Caesar, I can assume she is talking about the Julius Caesar. This may be seen as a context-sensitivity of names, a feature which names share with indexicals and demonstratives.\textsuperscript{14} In order to interpret an utterance of a proper name, one needs to know the context in which it was uttered, and, in particular, the relevant parameters of the context. This is a hallmark of a context-sensitive kind of expression.

Reference of singular terms changes at different rates depending on the changes of the parameter the term depends on. For example, some indexicals sensitive to the time of utterance (‘now’, ‘yesterday’) are highly variable, while other indexicals, even if dependent on the same parameter of the context, are more stable (‘yesteryear’, ‘this month’). Varying rate of change is a characteristic which proper names – the context-dependence of which we are yet to describe – share with indexicals. The name ‘Anna’, allegedly the most common female name in the world, is much more variable than ‘Franklin Delano Roosevelt’ is. Evans brought to our attention that ‘Madagascar’ showed a change of variability over time.\textsuperscript{15} Nowadays, unlike four hundred years ago, there is usually no need to specify whether we use that name to refer to a part of the African continent or to the island east of it: other things being equal, we refer to the island.

While some names (like ‘Julius Caesar’) are so stable they might almost seem context-independent, other names can never be properly interpreted outside a context. Names of days are like this. When you hear, ‘Mary said she’ll come on Monday’, you will not know when to expect her unless you know when this sentence was uttered. Names for family members behave in a somewhat similar fashion. Common nouns such as ‘mom’ and ‘dad’ show similarity

\textsuperscript{14}Indexicals are context-dependent expressions. Demonstratives usually require a physical indication, e.g., pointing (deixis). However, because deixis can naturally be seen as a part of context, just like time, place, etc., I shall view demonstratives as a subclass of indexical expressions.

\textsuperscript{15}Evans, 1973.
with both the highly variable pronouns like ‘you’ and proper names like ‘John Smith’. In some situations, the common noun ‘mom’ can be capitalised, and can start behaving like a proper name, so that when speaking for example to my sister, I can say ‘I spoke to Mom yesterday.’ These expressions stand right in between deictic expressions and proper names.

We set out to find some linguistic evidence for a claim that proper names are context-dependent. The behaviour of various family-relation terms, names of places, and even people’s names points to just that. Does this mean that names are indexicals? Not necessarily: it seems that while all indexicals and demonstratives are context-dependent, not all context-dependent expressions are what we would usually think of as indexical. For example, how we interpret the term ‘bank’ depends on both the linguistic and the non-linguistic context, and this context determines whether the speaker is understood as referring to a monetary institution or a shore of a river. Yet, ‘bank’ is a prototypical ambiguous expression. In short, context dependence does not distinguish between indexicality, where one word can refer to different entities, and ambiguity, where the context helps determine which of the different homonymous words is used.

6.2.2 Problems for Rigid Designation?

In section 6.1.1, I claimed that some older (but still very influential) theories of proper names suffer from not accounting for the fact that names have multiple bearers. As a fair representative of such theories, I chose Kripke’s views. As we have repeatedly pointed out (for example in section 1.7.3), Kripke claims that it is common sense that “the referent of ‘N’ is N, where ‘N’ is replaceable by any name.” We have also seen that according to Kripke, descriptions, while they may help us find the

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16 Both the ‘Mom’ example and the ‘Monday’ example come from Pelczar and Rainsbury, 1998, 298-299.
17 Mainly as presented in Kripke, 1980.
18 Kripke, 1980, 25, footnote 3, notation altered for consistency.
6.3. Introducing Names Into Language

referent in the actual world, they do not become a part of what is said, the proposition. The semantic value of a proper name in every possible world is just its bearer – i.e., names are rigid designators. Furthermore, we have, in our own proposal (in the previous chapter, see 236) defended the view that rigid designation, one without metaphysical commitments, is indeed a feature of the behaviour of proper names in natural language.

On the other hand, we have already noted that in natural language proper names have multiple bearers. We shall want to try to reconcile the claim that the meaning of a proper name is just its bearer, and presumably just one bearer, with the observation that a proper name has potentially many bearers. If we want to preserve rigid designation, we need to say more about what a proper name is. Giving the individuation criteria of proper names is a precondition for accounting for their pragmatics.

6.3 Introducing Names Into Language

In this section, we shall investigate the ontology of proper names to with the view of reconciling the above-mentioned tension between the claim that names are rigid designators, and the fact that they have multiple bearers.\textsuperscript{19} We do not intend to give an exhaustive overview of the ontology of proper names – what we are interested in is a proposal that is capable of explaining the above-mentioned tension. In the latter part of this section, we shall turn our attention to some non-standard uses of names because Burge uses those kinds of cases to support his proposal. If, therefore, we can do at least as well as he does, it can count as a point in favour of the ontology we propose.

\textsuperscript{19}The following account is inspired by Kaplan’s ideas presented in ‘Words’ (Kaplan, 1990), but it is not intended to be an accurate account of Kaplan’s views.
6.3.1 What’s In a Name?

When thinking of names we can have, depending on our goals, several things in mind. For example, when deciding on a name for a baby, we can go to a bookshop and buy a book about names, a book of the ‘How to Name Your Baby’ kind. We expect to find in it names common in our culture together with some explanations about their origin and meaning. Names found in such books do not, per se, refer. They are a product of tradition. We shall call them protonames.

Some protonames are found in many cultures – we can view the names John, Johan, Jan, Jaanis, and Sean as instantiations of the same protoname, John – while other protonames are fairly language specific. In some traditions, the institution of protonames is not very important and parents aim at original names. However, people’s imagination is limited and so even in China, where there is a strong preference for innovative names, one ends up meeting people who have the same given name. In other countries, on the other hand, parents are allowed to give only names that appear in an official list.

We can think of protonames as capable of producing a variety of names. Thus John and Sean, while being instantiations of the same protoname, are two distinct names. There are many names around. Some names help form the repertoire of given names, which are usually chosen by parents. Other names are used to name families, and their application is usually determined by traditions such as passing the family name of at least one parent to the offspring. In the case of other types of names, such as names of villages and towns, mountains, and dogs and cats with pedigree, traditions determining their use are even more varied.

The basic function of names is that though they are non-refering on their own account, they can be used to introduce into language proper names in their referring function. This can be done in two

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20 Right now I focus on people’s names but we shall see that the account I present is applicable to all proper names.

21 This is, to a large degree, true of France and of most Slavic countries.
closely related ways. Following Kaplan,\textsuperscript{22} we can distinguish between naming and dubbing. Naming is a conventional way of introducing a name into linguistic circulation. To carry out a naming, a special setting is usually required. ‘Hereby I baptise you by the name ‘Henry” as pronounced by a priest can be an example of naming. Dubbings are less conventionalised than namings and do not require a special setting. Calling ‘Hi, Fatty!’ at someone can be an instance of a dubbing. We may thus see a naming as a dubbing that requires some kind of conventional setting. What dubbings and namings share is the resulting attachment of a name to a bearer. We can think of namings as a kind of dubbing but not vice versa. We shall therefore use the term \textit{dubbing} to encompass both namings and dubbings.

Dubbings introduce into the language what we shall call \textit{referring names}. A referring name consists of a name and a particular dubbing, i.e., a unique event of attaching the name to its bearer. There can be many referring names associated with one and the same name. George Bush, the current US president, and George Bush, the former US president, were dubbed using the same name but because their referring names originated in different acts of dubbing, their referring names are distinct.

We have now arrived at a picture which distinguishes protonames – non-referring entities usually handed down within a culture by a tradition; names, which are so to say their offspring; and referring names, always referring to a particular person, which are a result of ‘attaching’ a name to a particular bearer by an act of dubbing.\textsuperscript{23}

To keep track of the notions we have introduced in this section throughout the rest of the chapter, the reader may consult the following overview.

\textsuperscript{22}Kaplan, 1989b.

\textsuperscript{23}In this context, it should be mentioned that I think the semantic of names of fictional entities should be treated separately, and hope to do that in a foreseeable future. I shall try to argue that names of fictional entities are so unlike (normal, mainstream) proper names in their modal behaviour that we cannot expect an account of semantics of proper names to account for fictional names as well. In this way, I would hope to avoid some of the problems connected with non-referring proper names.
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Kind of entity</th>
<th>Referring or not</th>
<th>Examples</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Protoname, N</td>
<td>Non-referring</td>
<td>What the names ( \text{John} ), ( \text{Sean} ), and ( \text{Jan} ) share</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Name, N</td>
<td>Non-referring</td>
<td>( \text{John} ), ( \text{Sean} ), and ( \text{Jan} ) are distinct names</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Referring name ‘N’</td>
<td>Referring, consisting of a name and a dubbing</td>
<td>‘John’ as referring to John, that is ‘N’ as referring to ( x )</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

### 6.3.2 Non-standard Uses of Names

One may object that we are multiplying entities beyond necessity but before getting too worried about that let us have a look at some pleasant consequences of thinking about proper names in this way – our approach allows us to account for a number of uses of proper names that do not easily yield to rephrasing on other approaches.

Seeing names as predicates allowed for a unified account of some non-standard uses of proper names. Tyler Burge saw it as a part of the motivation of his proposal.\(^{24}\) We shall show that our present ontology accounts for these cases at least as well as Burge’s account.

Consider these sentences:

1. The transaction was traced to a Ralph Esteban.
2. John thinks he is an Einstein.
3. There are frightfully many Annas in this world.
4. The name ‘Seán’ is commonly spelled in various ways, for example as ‘Shaun’, ‘Shawn’, ‘Sean’ and, of course, ‘Seá’n’.

In the first sentence, we know the subject of our suspicions only by his name, \( \text{RalphEsteban} \), not his or her referring name. This allows for the possibility that it was a group of people who carried

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\(^{24}\)Burge, 1973, 429.
out this transaction, or that the name refers to a fictional person invented just for protection from prosecution. The indefinite article draws our attention to the fact that the author of this sentence is not in position to specify a referring name. Burge would interpret the indefinite here simply as an existential quantifier with the extension of the name-predicate, thereby missing both the fictional case and the case of a group of people assuming an alias.

My ontology does not improve on the standard interpretation of the second sentence. We still have to assume that being an Einstein refers to a concept, formed of some of the characteristic properties of the most salient Einstein (that is, of the Albert Einstein). On the other hand, I do not fare worse than Tyler Burge, who postulates that names are irreducible predicates, devoid of descriptive content.

Sentence (3) states that the name Anna has generated a remarkable number of referring names, i.e., that there are many people called ‘Anna’. Burge could paraphrase this sentence as being about the extension of the predicate Anna.

The last sentence, (4) is about the hypothetical protoname from which all of the names Shaun, Séán, Sean, Shawn originated. Burge does not seem to be able to express that those names have anything in common.

We have seen now that the ontology proposed in the preceding section allows us to account in an intuitively plausible manner for a number of non-standard uses of names. Part of the reason for this exercise was to show that one does not have to accept Burge’s proposal in order to account for cases like those presented above. We saw that using the ontology we propose, we can account even for some cases Burge’s framework cannot deal with.

### 6.4 Calling People by Their Names

When people refer to me by my given name, ‘Anna’, or even when they use one of the many diminutives commonly associated with my name, they all use the same referring name. The identity of a referring name is not based just on its phonetic form (after all, each
person pronounces it somewhat differently) or spelling. We should think of a referring name, ‘\(N\)’, as determined by a name, \(\mathcal{N}\), and a particular act of dubbing, \(D\), that is, ‘\(N\)’ = \(\langle \mathcal{N}, d \rangle\). A referring name, ‘\(N\)’, can undergo series of changes in the course of its use (e.g., when someone is baptised ‘William’, and is then called ‘Willy’ or ‘Bill’). These variations do not affect the identity of the referring name as long as they are recognised as staying within the limits of convention associated with that referring name (a person may commonly be called by an idiosyncratic version of her or his name) or the name component of it. More specifically, as long as the speaker uses a form of the referring name ‘\(N\)’ that is commonly associated with \(\mathcal{N}\) or the individual \(x\) who is called ‘\(N\)’, in her community, she usually manages to refer to \(x\) using ‘\(N\)’. For example, if someone is introduced to me as ‘Katherine’, I can stay on the conservative side and call her just ‘Katherine’ but I can also try to be a little less formal and call her ‘Kathy’, because that is a common form of that name. It may turn out, however, that this particular Katherine’s favourite form of her referring name is ‘Kate’, and that is what her friends call her. Using the appropriate referring name, however, does not, by itself, guarantee a successful communication. For that to happen, the speaker needs to meet further conditions, which we shall examine shortly.

When referring to people (or towns or dogs or what have you), we are usually not acquainted with the particulars of the dubbing ceremony by which their name was bestowed on them – nor need we be. The importance of dubbing is normative: a dubbing, \(d\), makes it the case that ‘\(N\)’ refers to \(x\) (that is, for example, that ‘John’ refers to John). This does not tell us, however, how referring names are interpreted on a pragmatic level.

In order to account for the interpretation of proper names, we

\[\text{\footnotesize \cite{footnote:1} There are local conventions that outline the amount of phonological and orthographic variation that is likely to be tolerated by hearers. There are also local conventions associated with the way both a name and a referring name acquire diminutive forms.}\]

\[\text{\footnotesize \cite{footnote:2} It is certainly also possible for a speaker who makes his intentions clear to start a new referring chain by dubbing the person } x \text{ as ‘} M \text{'}.\]
introduce a new parameter as a constituent of the context of use - a function that ascribes to referring name a degree of salience, \( \text{sal} \). An expression \( N \) as used in a context refers to the bearer of the most salient referring name ‘\( N \)’ in that context, where ‘\( N \)’ = \( \langle N, d \rangle \).

A hearer hears an utterance containing an expression \( N \), which seems to be intended as a referring name. Without the help of context, he may unable to tell which of the potentially many homonymous referring names the speaker intends. He interprets the expression correctly if he interprets it as expressing a proposition referring to the bearer of the most salient dubbing \( d \) of the name \( N \) within the context. The speaker, meanwhile, when making his utterance, intends – at least in the range of cases we now consider – to refer to a particular person. That is why she chooses a suitable referring name ‘\( N \)’ and makes sure (or makes it the case) that it is the most salient dubbing of the name \( N \) in the context. Let us illustrate this by a simple example. There are two friends, Tim and Tom. Tim’s sister’s name is Jane, and that also happens to be the name of his girlfriend. They talk about sibling rivalry. When Tim then says ‘Jane and I always tried to get out of each other’s way when the competition was too close’, Tom will correctly interpret him as talking about his sister Jane because her referring name is more salient than that of Tim’s girlfriend. If, on the other hand, Tim’s phone rings, and he reports later to Tom that it was Jane who called, he has to add whether it was his sister or girlfriend because without that, Tom is not in position to tell whom Tim intends to refer to. Tim may be intending to refer to his girlfriend Jane but without increasing the salience of her referring name his intention will be frustrated, and he will not manage to get his point across.

Interpretation is successful if the hearer interprets the name, in the given context, as firstly, determining a particular referring name, and secondly, if that is the same dubbing of a name as the one intended by the speaker. This is how referring names as used by speakers provide us with a standard against which we evaluate the success of the hearer’s interpretation. The speaker, in her turn, uses a name correctly if not only she makes sure that the referring name she uses is the most salient dubbing of that particular name in the
context, but also her intended referent was indeed dubbed by the name she uses to refer to it (that is, she cannot perform a new dubbing without ensuring that it is clear that that is what she does and that the intended audience can tell whom she intends to dub).

How can we square this picture with rigid designation? If we think of proper names as those entities which were the object of Kripke’s characterisation of rigid designation, ‘N’ refers to \(x\), then Kripke’s ‘proper names’ should be identified with our referring names. This is not surprising because only referring names refer (unlike pronouns and names). So while we could not accept Kripke’s claim that ‘John’ refers to John, because in his framework one could say that ‘John’ obviously can refer to many people, once we adopt the ontology proposed here, we can say that ‘John’, the referring name, does indeed refer to John, the person thus dubbed. In this way, we can defend the direct reference claim while accounting for a pragmatically important phenomenon of multiple bearers.\(^{27}\)

### 6.5 Individuating Names

We have looked into the context-dependence of proper names, and proposed an ontology that accounts for rigid designation while allowing for the explanation of some relevant pragmatic phenomena. We individuate referring names in a context by the name used and the dubbing. This implies that Tim’s sister Jane and his girlfriend Jane have distinct referring names because they were dubbed by distinct acts of dubbing. Furthermore, we have identified referring names as being the suitable candidates for filling the role of rigid designators. A very similar position has been outlined by Kaplan some time ago.\(^{28}\) It has become known as the ‘ambiguity view’, and its author formulated it very succinctly as follows:

\[
\ldots\text{two utterances of ‘Aristotle’ in different contexts may have different contents. I am inclined to attribute this difference to}
\]

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\(^{27}\)Of course, now we can say with more precision that it is names that have multiple bearers, while referring names have only one.

the fact that distinct homonymous words were uttered rather than to a context-sensitivity of a single word ‘Aristotle’. Unlike indexicals like ‘I’ proper names really are ambiguous.29

One of the tasks the ambiguity approach faces is to give identity conditions of distinct homonymous names. This applies to my approach as well – we may want to say more than that ‘N’ = ⟨N, d⟩. As I mentioned earlier, the individuating dubbing may be epistemically inaccessible to speakers.

Ulrike Haas-Spohn (1994) discusses the individuation of names at length, and raises a number of objections against the ambiguity view. Let us have a look at them. It is clear, Haas-Spohn says,30 that different senses of a phonetic form NF31 can arise because the uses of NF occurring in the actual world may belong to different causal-intentional networks, and each such network constitutes a different name of the form NF. More generally, distinct names are individuated by distinct usages, U.32 One could therefore disambiguate names by indexing them with the usages in which they are involved.

The question then arises how the distinct usages themselves are to be individuated. Haas’s solution – parallel to her solution of reference to natural kinds – is that name-experts are responsible for individuation. The crucial problem for the ambiguity approach is to specify when an utterance of the name form NF belongs to a particular usage U of NF, that is, when is it an utterance of the name NFU.

In my opinion, we can meet Haas’s challenge if we clearly distinguish a number of issues. Distinct usages, or causal chains, were proposed to provide a foundational semantics, or a speaker-oriented justification, to a Kripkean descriptive semantics. More specifically, Kripke claims that name ‘John’ applies to John because he was

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29Kaplan, 1989a, 562.
31I have altered Haas’s notation to avoid confusion with my usage.
32In the present context, we can think of both Haas’s ‘causal-intentional network’ and her ‘usage’ as being roughly equivalent to the familiar Kripkean ‘causal chain’.
dubbed using the name ‘John’. Kripke then suggests that we can posit a hypothetical chain linking each usage of the name ‘John’ with that dubbing event. Such a chain constitutes a usage in Haas’s sense.

One may object, though, that while there may be some plausibility to positing usages in Haas’s sense, it is unclear what function they are supposed to perform. If they are meant to be truth-warrants, and be a part of the descriptive semantics of proper names, that is, to play a role in justifying the use of a name to refer to particular person, then they seem superfluous. This is because we do not have to refer to a usage in order to see whether a name was used correctly – all we need to do is to find out whether the intended referent was indeed dubbed using a particular name. If usages are supposed to be a part of the foundational semantics of names, then they seem superfluous again, because on the pragmatic level of interpretation they do not help the audience decide which referring name was intended by the speaker. I suggest that the interpretation of names as used in a context is guided by principles such as I proposed.

Haas-Spohn further points out that if a speaker were to take two usages of \( NF \) to be one, she may fail to utter a proper name all together. A similar problem would arise if an entire community were mistaken in taking certain usages of a name form \( NF \) to be about one and the same individual, whereas in fact there would be two individuals involved who are being permanently confused. Haas-Spohn concludes that in such cases, the utterances of the name \( NF \) do not belong to any usage whatsoever and the sentences containing these utterances fail to express propositions, and have no truth-values. She concludes that this consequence does not appear unwelcome.

I think there is an interesting difference between the two cases Haas considers. In the first case, the speaker can be perceived as not expressing a proposition, which would lead to a halt in communication. In the second case, however, the reference of such a

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33 Using our terminology, we can say that the claim is that the referring name ‘John’ applies to John because he was dubbed using the name John.

34 Haas-Spohn, 1994, 138.
name can function on the communal level because everyone in the community shares the same misconception. We would need to go to look for different criteria of expressing a proposition in order to spell out what is happening. This will become clearer once we have introduced our notion of context.

Haas’s main criticism of the ambiguity approach is this:

...if proper names are ambiguous (...), then problematic cases do not involve error or uncertainty about properties of the context, but error or uncertainty about the words that have been uttered, i.e., about form, not content.\(^{35}\)

This indeed seems to be an unavoidable consequence of the ambiguity view. However, biting this bullet may not be as difficult as Haas-Spohn would make it seem. Her problem is that a hearer who misinterprets a speaker’s utterance containing a proper name fails to understand which words were uttered. That, however, just seems to be a different way of saying that the hearer failed to apprehend the proposition the speaker wanted to communicate. It may happen because the speaker’s and the hearer’s perception of the salience of a particular dubbing in the given context do not match. In other words, as Kaplan says, “semantics cannot tell us what expression was uttered or what language it was uttered in. This is a pre-semantic task.”\(^{36}\)

6.6  Context

In order to determine which referring name was uttered, the hearer needs to know the relevant features of the context. She needs to know which of a number of potentially competing referring names is the most salient one. That helps her to interpret the speaker’s utterance in the way it was intended. The speaker, for her part, needs to know which referring name the hearer is likely to consider

\(^{35}\)Haas-Spohn, 1994, 139.
\(^{36}\)Kaplan, 1989a, 559.
most salient, and adjust the context accordingly.$^{37}$

In general, hearers depend for identification of the intended referring name on antecedent speech acts, Gricean maxims, knowledge of the surroundings, and other pragmatic factors. Speakers have to take all this into account. The interplay between the speaker and the hearer is crucial to successful communication and use of proper names. To capture that interplay, we need a flexible notion of context. For this purpose, we shall make use of our favourite notion of context, that is our interpretation of Stalnaker’s notion.$^{38}$ Through the notion of presupposition, it takes into account both the knowledge of the surroundings and the antecedent speech acts, and via restrictions placed on an assertion, it incorporates some Gricean maxims. It was not developed for the purposes I intend to use it for but it is an attractive way of representing what happens in communication. And in the examples I introduce below, that is what I intend to do: analyse the effect an utterance containing a proper name has on the hearers.

As we have seen before (in section 3.3.4), each conversation participant is said to have his own context set, but it is a part of the definition of presupposition that each participant assumes that others presuppose everything he or she presupposes. If the participants’ context sets match, they give rise to a non-defective context. In the case of proper names, a particular referring name can be presupposed to be most salient in the context. For example, when I speak of Tony Blair, I usually do not have to make sure that my audience knows about whom I talk. There is one bearer of the name who is most likely to be the salient intended referent (i.e., the prime minister of Great Britain), and the context is, with respect to that referring name, usually non-defective.$^{39}$

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$^{37}$Pelczar and Rainsbury (Pelczar and Rainsbury, 1998) do not try to apply their ideas to the behaviour of names in contexts. What follows is my extension of ideas that originated with them.

$^{38}$Based on Stalnaker, 1978, and Stalnaker, 1981. We presented it mainly in section 3.3.4.

$^{39}$When a person working in argumentation theory speaks of Tony Blair, typically he does not have to specify which one he means either. The context
6.7 Dialogue and Norms

As a matter of fact, context sets of participants of a dialogue do not always match and, as a consequence, a dialogue does not always proceed the way it is supposed to. We saw previously, in section 4.4.5, that in order to characterise how a dialogue should work, Stalnaker proposes a few rules that have to be observed if a dialogue is to fulfil its purpose of manipulating the audience’s beliefs in a predictable way.\textsuperscript{40} We shall now investigate some problematic cases involving proper names, and see whether we can provide an explanation. Some problems arise when the speaker’s and the audience’s perception of a salience of a particular referring name differs,\textsuperscript{41} but though this may be a common cause of complications connected with the use of proper names, it is not the only one. As usual, things can go wrong in innumerable many ways. The examples presented below hopefully offer at least an interesting sample.

\textsuperscript{40}Let me repeat them here for easier reading. In Stalnaker, 1978, 325, it is said that: 1. A proposition asserted is always true in some but not all of the possible worlds in the context set. 2. Any assertive utterance should always express a proposition, relative to each possible world in the context set. 3. A proposition should have a truth-value in each possible world in the context set. 3. The same proposition is expressed relative to each possible world in the context set.

\textsuperscript{41}Henk Zeevat once asked me in a personal conversation what would happen if both the speaker and the audience were wrong about the salience of a particular referring name. My answer was that such a situation does not make sense – salience of a name is defined in such a relation to the context that whenever all sides agree a particular referring name is the most salient one in the context, it is so. On this level, there is no higher authority than the agreement of all participants.
6.8 Application to Problems

More than one referring name is salient to the same degree at the same time

Imagine a conversation about politics in October, 2000, in which someone says ‘George Bush has a record of being a conservative politician.’ The speaker has the presidential candidate in mind. If it were not previously established which George Bush we talk about, confusion might arise. This situation may run two distinct courses:

a) The hearers do not know how to evaluate this utterance because they do not know which proposition it expresses. They are aware of the presence of two competing dubbings of the name George Bush, and do not want to commit themselves to interpreting the utterance as expressing either of the two propositions it might express. They feel that their choice would be unsupported by facts, and therefore arbitrary. This is why they perceive the speaker as violating Grice’s principle ‘Avoid ambiguity.’\footnote{Grice, 1975, 46.} By being ambiguous, the speaker’s assertion also violates Stalnaker’s second principle, which states that an utterance should express a proposition that has a truth-value in every world of the context set.

Conscious of their predicament, the hearers demand that the speaker increases the salience of one of the relevant referring names. Their reaction is to ask something like ‘Which George Bush are you talking about?’ A question like this prompts the speaker to provide information that increases the salience of the referring name she intended (by saying, e.g., ‘I am talking about the younger one, the one who’s running for president.’), which then leads to a disambiguation of her statement.

b) The hearers do not perceive the speaker as ambiguous, and proceed to interpret the utterance ‘George Bush has a record of being a conservative politician.’ Let’s say that the speaker, Agnes, thinks that George Bush Jr. is a conservative, but his father is a liberal. One hearer, Bob, knows her views and agrees with her, but thinks that she talks about Bush Senior, while another hearer, Carol,
thinks Agnes talks about George Bush Jr. but thinks that George Bush Jr. is a liberal and his father is a conservative. We can capture this situation by the following propositional concept:

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Within this table, A stands for Agnes, B for Bob, and C for Carol. In the rows, we see propositions as they are understood by the participants, evaluated in the respective context worlds of the participants. In the columns, we see how the context is understood by each of the participants. The diagonal (squares A-A, B-B, etc.) then represents whether the participant in question sees – within the context as he or she understands it – the sentence as true or false. In this particular case, the rows tell us that A and C interpret the context in the same way (C knows that A talks about Bush Jr.), while B interprets the sentence differently. In the columns, we see that A and B share the same opinions.

This interpretation violates Stalnaker’s third principle, which says that the same proposition should be expressed with respect to every world of the context set. A situation where a different proposition is expressed in different worlds of the context points to a misunderstanding having arisen between the participants. This is different from a disagreement about facts, this is a case of understanding the utterance in question in different ways.

A repair of this kind of situation would be guided by broader pragmatic principles: As we said, Bob knows Agnes’ views and he further assumes that she is a rational person who does not change her views abruptly. That might give him a reason to double-check his interpretation, by asking Agnes, for example, “Are you really talking about Bush Senior?” The resulting propositional concept would then reflect the sameness of interpretation between all participants as well as their difference of opinion.
A particular dubbing of a pronoun has an overriding salience

Imagine I say: ‘I got this skirt from Julia Roberts. Not the Julia Roberts, my friend Julia.’ Now, if I did not add the second sentence, my statement would be misleading. If you heard only the first sentence, you could well doubt its truth. If, however, you hear the rest of what I have to say, you will have no good reason to doubt the truth of my claim. Had I said only the first sentence, I would have expressed the following propositional concept.

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$I$ stands for the speaker, $U$ stands for the hearer. We see from the propositional concept that while $I$ and $U$ agree on the facts, and I know I did not get a skirt from the Julia Roberts, and you know that there’s no reason why I could not have gotten a skirt from a friend, we differ in our interpretation of what was said.

Had I uttered only the first sentence, I would have violated Grice’s maxim of relation ‘Be relevant’. This maxim warrants that people should not change topic without warning. In this case, I would not have changed the topic explicitly, but I would have disregarded my knowledge of the common ground where the most salient bearer of the name Julia Roberts is the American actress. By using the name Julia Roberts to express a referring name with a very low salience, I would have violated Grice’s maxim in effect. This would have led to a violation of Stalnaker’s third constraint.

In this example the speaker respects and correctly perceives the common ground – so much is apparent from adding the second sentence. But we can think of a whole variety of cases where the speaker either unintentionally or intentionally does not comply with the common ground. A study of such cases can lead to a clearer view of what it takes to know a proper name.
A shift of reference occurs without knowledge or intention on the part of the speaker

We can try to use the apparatus I have just proposed to analyse Donnellan’s example, which Stalnaker discusses at length in his 1993 article.

At a party, a man is introduced to a student as the famous philosopher, J.L. Aston-Martin. The student had heard of Aston-Martin, and knew, before being introduced to this man, something of his work. He talks at length with the man at the party, and they become long term acquaintances. The student continues to believe that the man he was introduced to is the famous philosopher, but in fact he is a different person with, we may suppose, the same name. ... Donnellan suggests that when the student says, on the day after the party, ‘Last night I met J.L. Aston-Martin, and talked to him for almost an hour’, he refers unambiguously to the famous philosopher and so says something false.

Contrary to what Donnellan suggests in his further treatment of this case (see below), I think the student says something false not because his representation of Aston-Martin is dependent on the famous philosopher, but because in the world as he takes it, the man at the party and the famous philosopher are one and the same person.

When the student says on the following morning ‘I met Aston-Martin last night’ to a friend who was also at the party, their exchange can be represented as follows:

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S stands for the student, F for his friend. We see that although they interpret the utterance in the same way, they disagree on the facts.

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43Donnellan, 1970.
44Stalnaker, 1993, 310.
This propositional concept shows that the friend knows that the student did not meet the famous philosopher, and that both in the student’s and his friend’s world, the referring name of the famous philosopher has higher salience than the referring name of the man the student met at the party. If the student were informed at this point that the man he spoke to was not the famous philosopher, he would withdraw his statement, or at least, this is what we think would happen.\footnote{45}

Later, as the student’s representation comes to be more richly dependent on facts about the man at the party, it becomes possible to shift to a context in which these dependencies are normal ones, and the information that derived from the philosopher are the distortions. Which context is relevant to the interpretation of the student’s utterances of the name ‘Aston-Martin’ will, Donnellan says, depend on the point of the utterance, the relevant alternatives the student is trying to distinguish between.\footnote{46}

What proposition the student expresses by saying (*): ‘Last night I went with Aston-Martin to see the Yankees’, as he gets to know the man better, depends not only on the student’s intentions, but also on the shift in salience of the name ‘Aston-Martin’ within his circle of friends. We can suppose that the salience of the referring name of Aston-Martin, the student’s friend, will gradually increase over time until it becomes more salient than the referring name of Aston-Martin, the famous philosopher. At this point, when the student utters (*) he says something true, and that is not only because of his intentions, but also because of how he is understood.

\footnote{45}When we try to interpret the propositional concept above, we can see the limits of this method of representation: given our story, we can infer what the student thinks is the case, and we also know what his friend thinks is the case. We do not know, however, and that is a general point, what would the speaker (or, for that sake, the hearer) say if he or she were in a situation they consider non-actual. That is, both speaker’s and hearer’s beliefs are sometimes less defined with respect to counterfactuals than what the propositional concept presents them to be. The propositions as understood by agents (on the horizontals) sometimes express more than the agents themselves know.

\footnote{46}Stalnaker, 1993, 310.
Stalnaker’s example is similar to Evans’s Madagascar example. In both cases, the common ground is made defective through ignorance. Evans treats the Madagascar example by claiming that the island becomes the referent of the name *Madagascar* when, and only when, the island becomes the dominant source of information about the intended referent. In my view, what is responsible for the shift of reference is the increase of salience of that dubbing using the name *Madagascar*, according to which this name refers to the island.

**Layers of reference**

I want to suggest a view on shift of reference of proper names, which, while still rather sketchy, seems to yield intuitively plausible results. Shifts of reference are a result of an interplay between several kinds of reference. What is involved here is the *speaker’s reference*, which is the reference the speaker uses to guide her production. Speaker’s reference picks out the referent the speaker intends to refer to using a referring name. Secondly, there is the *communal reference*, which picks out the object that is perceived to be the salient referent of a name within a group or community. This reflects the hearer’s side of things. We should, however, imagine the audience to be extended to the whole relevant community. We could analyse the communal reference in counterfactual terms: the most salient referent (i.e., the bearer of the most salient dubbing of the name *N*) is what most members of a community would pick out were they a party to a particular use of that protoname. If I thus start speaking of Julia Roberts, then unless I make further provisions, I will be taken to refer to the American actress because within my community most people, were they presented with the name *JuliaRoberts*, would take it to refer to the American actress.

The third kind of reference we need to consider is the *semantic reference*, which characterises what a referring name refers to in abstraction of its use. Semantic reference is grounded in the bestowing

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of a name on a person by the act of the dubbing\(^{48}\) that is, ‘\(N\)’ = \(\langle N, d \rangle\). Unlike the speaker’s or communal reference, semantic reference is in principle not epistemically transparent. This – as we shall see later – is why in practice it functions usually only as a kind of default condition.

If everything proceeds as smoothly as it should, the three kinds of reference coincide and if they do not, speakers take it into account (this is the Julia Roberts case). Sometimes, though, by design or by ignorance, they split up and separate.

In Evans’s example, Marco Polo mistakenly identified the referent of the most salient referring name ‘Madagascar’ to be the island off the African coast. He wrote about Madagascar in his travel diaries, and his speaker’s reference led to the establishment of a communal reference in Europe according to which the name ‘Madagascar’ referred to the island. This eventually resulted in a new semantic reference, a new dubbing – it became all right by all semantic lights to use ‘Madagascar’ to refer to the island. This sort of example forces us to broaden somewhat our understanding of ‘dubbing’. So far, we have understood it as a particular act somewhat modelled on a name-giving ceremony for a child. This is not really applicable in this case. Here, we have to understand it as a hypothetical point at which it became correct to use *Madagascar* to refer to the island.

Stalnaker’s example is a little less complicated: the student’s reference to Aston Martin has over time built up a communal reference within his group of friends, where the most salient bearer of the name ‘Aston Martin’ became the student’s friend, and not the famous philosopher. Semantic reference remained unchanged because the name *Aston Martin* existed as a component of the referring names of the two men right from the start.

\(^{48}\)Which may then be said to start chains or trees of use, but as we argued these are not really an essential part of either the descriptive or the foundational semantics of proper names.
Some referring names may turn out to be referent-less

The following problem is presented to us by the history of science:

On March 26, 1859, a French medical doctor and amateur astronomer named Lescarbault claimed to have observed a planet closer to the sun than Mercury; he called it Vulcan. He calculated the planet’s movements and sent the information onto Jean Le Verrier, France’s most famous astronomer.

Le Verrier had already noticed that Mercury had deviated from its orbit. A gravitational pull from Vulcan would fit in nicely with what he was looking for. Le Verrier checked other reports and found that other astronomers had also seen a small black disc against the background of the sun. From his calculations, Le Verrier came to the conclusion that Vulcan was 13 million miles from the sun and that it took twenty days to circle that star.

Over the next few years, others reported seeing Vulcan and textbooks added the new member to their lists of planets. But there was controversy because some astronomers couldn’t find Vulcan. Le Verrier explained it away by saying that most of the time the planet would be lost in the sun’s glare. He said that the best time to observe Vulcan would be during a solar eclipse. The next eclipse would be on March 22, 1877.

Many astronomers had their eyes focused on the sun that day but no one could find the elusive planet. One year later two American astronomers observing a solar eclipse from separate places in Wyoming and Colorado claimed to have seen the lost planet. And they were the last persons to have seen Vulcan. If the planet really exists, no one can find it.49

The conclusion is that nowadays we do not believe that Vulcan exists. But how should we treat the reference of ‘Vulcan’?

I suggest the following: Mr. Lescarbault, thinking he saw a planet, thought he had performed a dubbing. His letter to Le Verrier, a highly respected astronomer, led to a spread of the refer-

49 Author unknown, was to be found in January 2003 at http://members.tripod.com/TonySakalauskas/index-2.html.
ring name ‘Vulcan’ within the scientific community. Lescarbault’s speaker’s reference resulted in the establishment of a communal reference. After 1887, it was discovered that the dubbing performed by Lescarbault was invalid because the ostensive element of the dubbing had failed. The semantic reference had therefore also failed because regardless of what he thought he saw, Lescarbault could not have seen the planet Vulcan. No one could – the planet does not exist. The semantic reference (based on the dubbing) eventually led to a failure of both the speaker’s and the communal reference.

What is interesting is that when Le Verrier was communicating with his colleagues about Vulcan, both the speaker’s and the communal reference were in order. Writing to his friend, ‘Vulcan takes 20 days to circle the sun’, Le Verrier expressed the following propositional concept.

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LV stands for Le Verrier, FA for his friend, a famous astronomer.

The communication was successful. Everyone in the astronomical community of pre-1877 would have agreed. What went wrong was the dubbing, and, as a consequence, the semantic reference.

This example illustrates that even though usually all we need to take into account is the speaker’s and the communal reference, there are cases where we have to turn to the semantic reference. When dealing with failure of reference, we can see one of the limits of the way we represent communicative situations: nothing in the propositional concept is inherently tied to reality. This is a consequence of using Stalnakerian epistemic possible worlds. As long as reference on the communal level functions smoothly, there is nothing in our representation to warn us of a deeper failure. This is intuitively plausible as long as what we aim at is a representation of beliefs of relevant agents (which was a part of Stalnaker’s motivation). A failure of semantic reference is not a part of this picture as long as the agents involved are not aware of it.
How does the reference to the planet Vulcan function today? I suggest that we can only speak of Vulcan in nonveridical contexts. Analysis of that sort of contexts, however, falls outside the scope of the present investigation.

Astronomers thought Vulcan existed. When it was proven not to exist, it more or less fell into oblivion. This does not always happen. Sometimes there is an entity that is shown to be a conglomerate of a number of people. This probably holds of Jonah, the prophet, and certainly is true of Bourbaki, a group of French logicians and mathematicians who authored a number of textbooks. In these cases even if we know that there is no particular person to whom the name refers, and semantic reference should fail, the communal reference is still largely successful.

Additional problems with private dubbings

The following example highlights the background of what it takes to use a form of a referring name that is appropriate in the context: Imagine a man, say Mr. Smith, who calls his wife Frances, ‘Honey’. Many people have pet names for their partners. Now imagine that a somewhat slow-witted visitor comes to dinner to their house, and hearing the man speaking to his wife comes to the conclusion that her name is Honey. And not just that, he starts calling her ‘Honey’, too.

Our intuition is that the man is wrong just as I would be wrong if I started calling my friend’s mother ‘Mom’. But what exactly is going on?

Imagine that you too were present when the visitor later told Mr. Smith, ‘Honey made an excellent dinner last night.’ Did he say something true? If we were to construct a propositional concept of what the visitor said, we would find out that none of the constraints and maxims we have so far considered were violated. This contradicts our intuition that something did go wrong. In order to account for it in a propositional concept, we introduce a new sort of constraint. This new constraint is based on social conventions regulating the use of names.
It seems that if someone is to know a particular name, he or she must not only know that a particular name can be used to refer to a particular person, but also which form of the intended referent’s referring name is appropriate in what context. It is an inextricable part of our ability to use names that we know whether to use a particular form of a referring name just in the family circle, in a circle of friends, or quite generally. We can capture this insight in the following informal constraint: ‘Use a particular form of a referring name only if it is appropriate in the context.’

The knowledge needed to comply with this constraint is not strictly linguistic. I could be fluent in English and yet not know how to properly address someone who was introduced to me as ‘Cardinal Smith’ or ‘my husband Jimmy’. A violation of this constraint can lead to misinterpretations.\footnote{That is, give rise to false beliefs: imagine a woman who sits in a café with a male friend and his mother. If both of them call the friend’s mother ‘Mom’, a third person will probably conclude that the male friend is either that woman’s brother or her husband.}

People occasionally violate this constraint. Sometimes they do it unintentionally – as illustrated by the example we just discussed, sometimes intentionally – name-dropping is an example of that. A person who mentions a celebrity by her/his first name insinuates a degree of intimacy with that person thus seeking to enhance his own social status.

6.9 Ambiguity versus Indexicality

In the three subsections below, I present some data that I see as relevant to the discussion between the two competing theories of the mechanism underlying the phenomenon of proper names’ having multiple bearers. The problem we have been facing is that both the ambiguity and the indexicality theory can be modified so that they become rather close in their predictions. An example of this is when we start indexing proper names applied to distinct bearers (e.g., John\textsubscript{1}, John\textsubscript{2}, etc.) in the indexicality theory.\footnote{Haas-Spohn, 1994, Chapter 4, 155.} Nonetheless,
I believe there is a core difference between the ambiguity and the indexicality approach (and that the ambiguity approach is to be preferred). The following is an attempt to prize the two theories apart, and, taking clues from different areas of research, to show that some data support one theory rather than the other.

**Translating Proper Names**

As we saw above,\(^5^2\) Ulrike Haas-Spohn introduced an argument in favour of the ambiguity view that compares the way the indexicality and the ambiguity theory deal with translations of proper names. She says:

> ...the German sentence ‘Wilhelm war ein aussergewöhnlicher Mensch’ could be translated as ‘William was an extraordinary person’ if it is about William the Conqueror, but not if it is about Wilhelm Busch; then only ‘Wilhelm was an extraordinary person’ would be a correct translation.\(^5^3\)

This points to the fact that a person’s name ‘\(N_1\)’ can form a distinct chain of use that is different from another person’s name ‘\(N_2\)’ even if those names are phonetically identical. A part of a tradition associated with a proper name can be the way it translates into other languages. This is true not only of person’s names, but also of names of places, so that for example Prague, in the Czech Republic, translates into German as ‘Prag’, but Prague, Ohio, does not. If ‘\(N_1\)’ and ‘\(N_2\)’ were the same name, as the indexicality theory predicts, this phenomenon would be more difficult to explain. An advocate of the indexicality view would have to claim that names with different subscripts should be treated, at least sometimes, as distinct names. However, this modification seems to compromise one of the core claims of the indexicality view – the claim that all people called ‘\(N\)’ share the same name, \(N\). On the other hand, we have to admit that the idea of adding subscripts has been introduced into the

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\(^5^2\) On p. 270.

\(^5^3\) Haas-Spohn, 1994, 135.
indexicality theory independently of potential problems with translations, and it does the job of accounting for translation of proper names.

Determiners Resurfacing?

The indexicality view claims that names should be analysed as consisting of a determiner and a predicate. The determiner Burge has in mind is ‘that’. On the other hand, in some languages, like Greek, Italian, Basque, and German, proper names are, either sometimes or often, used with a definite article. This has been viewed as supporting Burge’s theory and deserves closer examination.

Native speakers of the above-mentioned languages do not think of this construction (that is, for example of ‘il Giovanni’) as indicating that names are predicates. Indeed, they seem to be surprised by this proposal. As a matter of fact, there is a number of languages where a construction of a proper name with a definite article can occur, and we shall see that an explanation of these cases does not constitute a straightforward support of Burge’s proposal. In German, for example, proper names can appear either with a definite article or without it, thus allowing for ‘Ich habe mit Hans/dem Hans gesprochen.’ German speakers perceive the difference as purely one of style (the variant with a definite being a less ‘correct’ one), again indicating that they do not see the article as functioning as a genuine determiner.

We can actually find examples of proper names commonly used with a definite article in English as well. Just consider ‘the Nile’, ‘the Thames’, ‘the Ukraine’, or ‘The Titanic’ and ‘The Hague’. Most of these constructions can be seen as contracted from the likes of ‘the river, Thames’, ‘the ship, Titanic’. They are puzzling semi-idiomatic constructions, and for explanation of their presence one usually has to delve into the history of their usage. But regardless of what the proper analysis of these constructions is, English speakers certainly do not see them as containing a normal definite article, so that ‘Nile’ in ‘the Nile’ would be a predicate or a common noun.\textsuperscript{54}

\textsuperscript{54}Some of these examples are suggested in Segal, 2001.
However, we do not even have to go to atypical constructions to start doubting Burge’s approach. Examples from spoken English also point to the optionality and special function of a determiner in those constructions where it appears thus casting doubt on the claim that a demonstrative should be seen as an integral part of a proper name construction. Consider:\textsuperscript{55}

1a) I live in London.

1b) I live in the London (that is in England).

1c) I live in that London.

2a) Mother is trying to get in.

2b) The mother is trying to get in.

2c) That mother is trying to get in.

3a) This is the/that John (I mentioned yesterday).

3b) *This is John I mentioned yesterday.

The sentence 1a) can be a perfectly idiomatic response to the question ‘Where do you live?’ posed in most ordinary contexts. In the same context, for example if the addressee is visiting New York, 1b) or 1c) would sound weird.

Sentence 1b) can be used without the added clause with a suitable intonation (‘I live in the London’) where other Londons (e.g., London, Ontario) are not out of the picture. There, the determiner functions in the same way as in the Julia Roberts example (on p. 276), emphasising that the referring names with the highest salience in non-specialised context is intended. In sentence 1b) with the added clause, the determiner provides an anaphoric connection to that clause. In 1c), the ‘that’ functions as a genuine demonstrative—this sentence can be used when pointing at a map.

\textsuperscript{55}For examples 1a-d) and 3a,b) I am indebted to Gabriel Segal, Segal, 2001, 560-1.
Example 2a) and 2b) are slightly different. Imagine sitting in a restaurant with your sibling, waiting for your mother. Across your sibling’s shoulder, you watch the entrance, and utter 2a). The natural interpretation is that it is your mother struggling with the door. In 2b), the definite article has again an anaphoric function. It could refer to the mother of someone in your company (for example if you are having lunch with a friend and a host of his relatives). And if you utter 2c), you are probably reporting the sight of some woman with a babe in her arms who is trying to negotiate the entrance.

We can easily think of situations where 2a), 2b), and 2c) have each a different reference. The difference between 3a) and 3b) highlights the fact that at least sometimes omitting the (anaphoric) determiner or demonstrative can result in an ungrammatical sentence.

The examples above have shown clearly that a proper name functions differently when prefaced with a determiner. There are rules that regulate when a determiner can be used and when it cannot. Burge’s theory does not address this issue. Adding or losing a determiner can be responsible for a change of referent or result in a sentence that is hard to interpret. Burge does not account for this kind of evidence, which leaves his theory in trouble.

### 6.9.1 Learning from Aphasia

There is yet another area from which we can gather clues relevant to deciding whether we prefer the ambiguity or the indexical theory. The data I am about to present, concern the way language, and proper names in particular, are stored in our brains. My aim is to introduce circumstantial evidence to support the claim that proper names are a category of their own, and thus imply that they do not have a hidden structure of a determiner and a predicate (or a common noun) as Burge suggests. This undertaking only makes sense if we believe that there is a connection between the way our brains function and the way we speak, and that is an assumption I am willing to make.

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56Of course, it could also be your mother-in-law.

57I discuss some of these rules a little further on.
Aphasia is a specific language impairment that can be caused by injury or lesion in the language zone. The impairment is often modality-specific, that is, it may concern specifically the understanding or the production of spoken or written word.

In some cases, aphasia affects only a specific class or cluster of terms, e.g., only names of animate entities or only verbs of movement. One certainly would not want to claim that every specific semantically defined class of terms that can be affected by aphasia also constitutes a syntactic category. Fortunately, the fact that proper names can be specifically impaired is not the only fact that can be introduced in the present context, although it is the first issue we are going to introduce.

Of a particular interest to us are cases where while proper names are affected, other parts of the language function remain intact. These cases fall under the description of so-called ‘anomia’. Although anomia concerning proper names has been described and studied only for the last 15 years or so, we can find it mentioned in medical literature going as far back as the 15th century. It is therefore clearly not just a byproduct of the interest in proper names within the philosophy of language.

In a clear-cut case of proper names anomia, such as presented by Semenza and Zettin, the patients’ command of personal and geographical names was severely disturbed, while common nouns were unaffected, even difficult ones. The patients could, however, retrieve a name when it was presented in a common noun context. For example, in answer to the question ‘What sort of bird lives in the San Marco Square in Venice?’ they would say ‘colombo’ (pigeon), but they could not retrieve the name ‘Colombo’ (Columbus) when asked who discovered America.

58 It can also be a symptom of a degenerative disease, such as Alzheimer’s, but these cases are usually more complex and involve a whole scale of symptoms. That is why I will try to exclude the.

59 Cases are also reported where this happened the other way around – proper names were the only part of language production left.

60 For example in Guainerio, 1481, cited in Benton and Joynt, 1960.

In some cases of proper name anomia, geographical names are relatively less affected than names of persons. Like in other cases of anomia, predicates and common nouns in these anomia patients are intact. The interesting and surprising feature of these cases is that the more readily the geographical name turns into a predicate (e.g., America/American), the more likely it is to be spared. ‘Australia’ will be retrieved more easily than ‘Mount Everest’ or ‘The Thames’.

We can observe a dissociation of impairment between common names and predicates on the one hand, and proper names on the other. In all these cases, the functioning of demonstratives and pronouns remain unaffected. From the viewpoint of Burge’s theory, a case where proper names are affected while common nouns, predicates, and determiners function normally, is very hard to explain. From our viewpoint, this is a welcome piece of supporting evidence.

Recent research has also shown that proper names are more likely to be affected by naturally occurring retrieval blocks than other kinds of words. This means that even in healthy speakers, proper names may be harder to recall than other kinds of words. There is also a lot of anecdotal evidence pointing to age-related loss of names in both healthy subjects and in people affected by degenerative diseases, such as Alzheimer’s. However, in these all cases there are a lot of complicating factors (e.g., their frequency, age of acquisition, and the role of their bearers in a person’s life) and the research of this particular problem is still inconclusive.

It is quite well known that proper names are especially vulnerable to the tip-of-the-tongue phenomenon (TOT), which is different from the kind of cases described above in being not a case of

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63 To put it more precisely, the more common/frequent is the adjective derived from the geographical name, the more likely is the name to be intact.
64 For an overview see Semenza, 1997, 117-118.
65 Some theorists hold that some names are more likely to be spared because they were acquired early, while other claim that names that are more frequent are more likely to be left intact. The jury is still out on this issue because the two explanations both rely on largely coinciding data. See Goodglass, 1993.
decay of proper names but just a temporary blockage or delay in retrieval. The tip-of-the-tongue phenomenon has been studied by Burke, MacKay, and Wade, 1991, among others. The issues connected with TOT have prompted the some researchers to develop an explanation in terms of an interactive activation theory of language, better known as the Node Structure Theory (NST). According to NST, the activation of the lexical node for a common name (like ‘baker’) can benefit from multiple converging semantic connections with the semantic system. That is why common nouns are relatively less vulnerable to TOT than proper names are. The activation of a lexical node representing a proper name (like ‘Baker’) is thought to spread from the semantic system to the lexical node only via propositional nodes for specific individuals (that is, via connections between a name and information concerning a particular person, e.g., ‘Mary Baker’, ‘John Baker’, etc.). These propositional nodes may receive any amount of converging semantic information about the individual, but there will still be only a single, therefore vulnerable, connection in their output for the activation of the phonological form in the corresponding lexical node. That is why even if the bearer of the name is highly familiar, his or her name (e.g., Baker) is more prone to TOT than his or her occupation (e.g., baker). This explanation also applies to the so-called baker-Baker paradox, which can be observed in tasks that require learning names and occupations belonging to unfamiliar faces. It has been demonstrated repeatedly that the name ‘Baker’ presented as a proper name is harder to recall than the same word presented as an occupation (baker). All these phenomena are compatible with the idea that the link between a proper name and its referent is a weak and arbitrary one.

None of these data present a knockdown argument against Burge’s theory. If a name was indeed composed of a demonstrative and a predicate, and that predicate was a ‘simple’ one, that is, not further analysable, all of these phenomena could still occur even though

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67 The data in this paragraph is, again, drawn from Semenza, 1997, 117-118.
the sense in which such an unanalysable predicate would still be a predicate is dubious. Moreover, we have shown that there are some problems with the functioning of the demonstrative part of Burge’s analysis. In particular, if we assume with Burge that the demonstrative in question is ‘that’, then the problem was to explain why a proper name preceded by ‘that’ tends to have a different referent than a proper name without it. When we look at the claim that the fact that in some languages a proper name is preceded by a definite article supports Burge’s theory, we found problems with that as well. Burge’s explanation seems counterintuitive to speakers of those languages (for example Greek or German). Looking at examples from English, we found again that the behaviour of names with and without a definite article and with or without a demonstrative is markedly different. This leaves the advocates of Burge’s theory with the task of explaining why and when the demonstrative part of a proper name surfaces, and why proper names (at least in English) behave differently when preceded by a definite article or a demonstrative.

We then looked at data pointing to differences in the functioning of proper names and common nouns in the brain. We saw that the functioning of proper names can be impaired even where common nouns are well preserved. Burge’s advocates could say that this is compatible with their theory because the kind of predicates or common nouns they had in mind was very special. They could claim that proper name predicates are susceptible to specific damage (anomia) because, being devoid of semantic content, they form a special kind of expressions. In other words, advocates of Burge’s theory could even accept the NST explanation of the functioning of proper names if they modified their theory enough. We should note, however, that Burge’s theory modified this extensively is almost equivalent to the ambiguity theory we have been defending. It becomes very hard to see in what sense his proper names are like predicates or common nouns once he accounts for all the facts that highlight their differences from these two kinds of terms.
6.10 Conclusion

The goal of this chapter was to investigate the indexical, demonstrative or ambiguous nature of proper names. We have examined some linguistic data showing that names are context dependent, and then turned our attention to the two basic lines of explanation of this phenomenon. The indexical theory, first advocated by Burge and later defended by Recanati, Haas-Spohn, and others, proved to be more resilient and flexible than one might have expected. We have, however, built on Kaplan’s approach, and developed an explanation of ontology of proper names that enabled us to account for some less-common uses at least as well as the indexical approach. At the same time, our ontological framework has made more plausible the claim that names are ambiguous rather than indexical. Our approach also enabled us to reconcile the rigid designation claim with the fact that names (in Kripke’s sense) have multiple bearers.

We used again some parts of Stalnaker’s apparatus together with some insights from Grice’s speech-act theory, this time to account for the resolution of names in a given context. The concept of context I used does not help us decide between the two competing theories (indexical and ambiguity approach), as it could be easily accommodated within either, but does add plausibility to an attractive way of thinking about resolution of names. It also seems that the only way in which the advocates of the indexical theory could account for some of the examples would be by indexing names, which would a move towards an ambiguity view. The data from aphasia support, in my view, the ambiguity view rather strongly. Yet even here, the indexicality view could be modified so as to accommodate them. However, I hope to have convinced the reader that a version of the indexicality view that is modified enough to account for all the data I have collected is as good as indistinguishable from the view I advocate. I hope to have shown that the ambiguity view, up till now something of a Cinderella of the proper name arena, is much more attractive than one might think at first sight, and that it deserves close attention.