

# Names as incomplete descriptions

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XX International scientific conference of young scientists in the field of humanities and social sciences. Languages and meanings. Novosibirsk 2022.

# Proper names

- Rigid designators (Kripke 1972)
- Covert descriptions
  - *Socrates = the most famous Greek philosopher*
- Overt descriptions (Kneale 1962)
  - *Socrates = the individual named 'Socrates'*
  - Quotation theory

# Kripke on quotation theory

- Horses = the creatures called 'horses'?
  - It is a property of horses (that they are called 'horses')
  - But they have many other common properties
  - Bearers of the name John have not so many common properties
  - The property of having a name becomes defining
- Vicious circle?
  - Whom do you call Socrates?
  - The one, ~~whom I call Socrates~~ who is named Socrates
  - To have a name and to be referred by the name are two different properties

# Names and numbers analogy

- Geurts 1997:
  - A house (or a carriage) can have a number, say, 3
  - That does not mean that 3 now refers to that house/carriage
  - The same with name
  - Having a name does not imply that the name now refers to that object
  - Name *'Mississippi'*, reference *'The Mississippi'*
  - Name – one of the properties of the object and can be used to refer to it
  - Like any other property

# Names and descriptions analogy

- Definiteness effect
  - *There is {\*John/\*the philosopher/a philosopher} available*
  - *Half of {Belgium/the country/\*some countries}*
- Generic use
  - *{The light bulb/Coca Cola} was invented by an American*
- Anaphoric and bound use
  - *I have a poodle named 'Horace'. {Horace/My poodle} is three years old.*
  - *If a child is christened 'Bambi', then Disney will sue Bambi's parents*

# Problem 1

- Contrast
  - *The president might not have been the president*
  - *Mary might not have been Mary*
  - Probably the former is true while the latter is false
- However
  - *The teacher might not have been the teacher*
  - Groups with the latter, not with the former
- Explanation
  - The second use of *the president* is predicative, not referring (presuppositional)

# Predicative use

- Globally unique definite descriptions
  - Can be used predicatively
  - Also called ‘complete descriptions’
  - *“Had things been slightly different, there might have been an F (in the circumstances), but no more than one”*  
[Ramachandran 2008:251].
- Incomplete descriptions (and names)
  - Usually cannot be used predicatively
  - *The teacher might not have been a teacher*
  - *Mary might not have been named Mary*

# Predicative use

- Incomplete descriptions (and name)
  - Require a special context to be used predicatively
- *The teacher might not have been the teacher*
  - *The teacher might not have been working as the only teacher in our school*
- *Mary might not have been Mary*
  - *The actress playing Mary might have been given another role*



# Problem 2

- Contrast (Maier 2009):
  - *Mary is called Mary*
  - *The person called Mary is called Mary*
  - The former is a contingency while the latter is a tautology
- Maier 2009:
  - Rigid presuppositions
  - *Someone is called Mary*
- Compare:
  - *The person called JS-15 is called JS-15*
  - *Someone is called JS-15*

# Generic use

- *The person called Mary is called Mary*
  - “On one salient reading at least, this variant expresses an analytic, tautological truth” (Maier 2009:257)
  - So, there is another reading
  - If ‘*the person called Mary*’ is referential, than the whole phrase is not a tautology but a contingency
  - So, we have yet another non-referential use
- Generic use:
  - *The tiger has stripes*
  - *The person called Mary is called Mary*

# Generic use

- Names can be used generically:
  - *Coca Cola was invented by an American*
- *Mary is called Mary*
  - Why does not generic reading come to mind?
  - Maries are not a homogenous class of people
  - It does not make much sense to talk about a class of Maries or a typical Mary
- Then why is the generic reading is preferable here?
  - *The person called Mary is called Mary*

# Pragmatics

- Gricean implicatures (Grice 1975):
  - Usage of a name implicates that the speaker is familiar with its referent
  - Usage of *'the person called Mary'* produces an implicature that the speaker is not familiar with Mary
  - But a specific non-familiar referent would require an indefinite article – *'a person called Mary'*
  - The only interpretation left is the generic one
- *The teacher is a teacher*
  - Referential contingent or
  - Generic tautological

# Problem 3

- *Mary is happy*
  - Where does the impression of rigidity come from?
  - *“A possible world isn't a distant country that we are coming across, or viewing through a telescope... A possible world is given by the descriptive conditions we associate with it... Possible worlds are stipulated, not discovered by powerful telescopes” (Kripke 1972)*
- Let us stipulate a world (Bazzoni 2018):
  - *If Mary were called Gertrude, Mary would be happy*
  - Here *Mary* looks like a rigid designator

# Derigidification

- *If Mary were called Gertrude and had a friend called Mary, then Mary would be happy*
  - The last mention of *Mary* is ambiguous
  - Hence it is not a rigid designator
- Could *Mary* be just an homonymous name?
  - But which individual is referred by the second homonym?
  - Counterfactual situation corresponds to a set of world
  - With potentially different hypothetical Maries in each world
  - Does the homonym refer to the whole set of Maries?
  - Then it is not a rigid designator either

# Yet another analogy

- *If the teacher were a pupil instead, the teacher would be happy*
  - *The teacher* looks like a rigid designator
- *If the teacher were a pupil instead and took lessons from another teacher, the teacher would be happy*
  - The last mention of *the teacher* is ambiguous
  - Hence it is not a rigid designator
  - It is unlikely that *the teacher* is homonymous in this sentence

# Conclusions

- Names and incomplete descriptions are very similar
- A contrast between them is explained by:
  - Predicative use or
  - Generic use
- The impression of rigidity
  - Is applicable to both names and incomplete descriptions
  - Arises when the counterfactual situation lacks other individuals satisfying the description
  - In the presence of such individuals, the impression of rigidity vanishes



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Thanks for your attention!  
Questions?