

Proper Names and the Pragmatic View of Reference

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Abstract

In my paper, I attempt to outline and motivate a novel account of proper names reference. The view, simply put, is that the reference of a proper name is determined, on an occasion of use, wholly by pragmatic factors, and not by its semantics. This is in contrast to most of the views propounded in the contemporary literature on names, which tend to claim either that reference is constitutive of the semantics of a name (e.g. Kripke 1981; Kaplan 1990; Sainsbury 2013), or that reference is determined by a semantic character that takes particular contextual factors as arguments (e.g. Pelczar and Rainsbury 1998; Matushansky 2008; Sawyer 2010; Rami 2013). The view is partially motivated by consideration of how reference should be accounted for within a radical contextualist account of semantics and pragmatics as propounded by Travis (e.g. 1978; 2008). Travis argues that the truth-conditions of predicates and sentences are determined by pragmatic factors on an occasion of utterance, and are not part of their semantics. Since the reference of proper names contributes to the truth-conditions of utterances containing them, I suggest that reference determination should be considered a pragmatic phenomenon, in order to best cohere with Travis's general picture. I outline the general commitments of such an account of name reference with regard to communication and provide a few details of how reference works on the account. In order to show that pragmatics alone can plausibly account for the reference of a class of expressions, I provide arguments that suggest terms such as 'Mum' and 'Dad', when used as bare referring expressions, might work in just this way. I compare such terms to proper names and suggest that the pragmatic account of reference can plausibly be extended to names.

References

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