

CALL ME ISHMAEL*

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Abstract

A careful study of naming constructions is essential for the understanding of the syntax and semantics of proper names. Cross-linguistic analysis of verbs of naming shows that they take a small clause complement and therefore argues that a proper name is essentially a nominal predicate, whose contents mentions the name itself. The indexicality of proper names in argument positions can be compositionally derived from their independently motivated internal complexity.

1 Introduction

In this paper I will address the question of the syntax and semantics of proper names. Although there are vast quantities of philosophical literature on proper names, little of it addresses the issue from the syntactic point of view. If we view the standard theories of proper names in this light, we can come up with two major proposals:

- (i) Proper names are directly referring **rigid designators** (Kripke (1980)), or **indexicals** (Recanati (1997), Pelczar and Rainsbury (1998)). Under this view, they are necessarily syntactically simplex.
- (ii) Proper names are **definite descriptions** Frege (1983), Russell (1911), Searle (1958), Kneale (1962), Burge (1973), Katz (1977, 1990, 1994), Geurts (1997), Elbourne (2002), Liu (2004), etc.). These definite descriptions can be then viewed as syntactically simplex or complex.

I will provide arguments for a proposal fitting the second description based on the behavior of verbs of naming (1). The syntax of naming constructions argues that proper names are essentially predicates, whose contents mention the name itself (thus requiring a quotation theory, cf. Geurts (1997)). In argument positions proper names become rigid

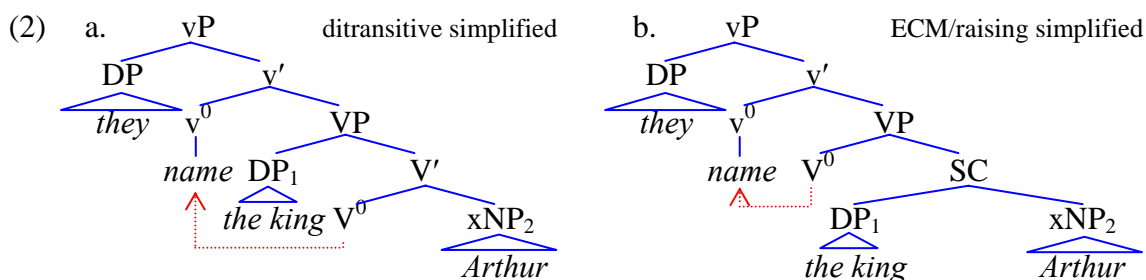
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due to their internal complexity, which allows them to combine with an indexical, and definite as a result of combining with a definite article (null in some languages, overt in others).

- (1) a. **Arthur** was named the king of all England. argument
 b. The king of all England was named **Arthur**. ?

The structure of the argument is as follows. Although the first impression given by verbs of naming is that they have the ditransitive structure, represented in (2a), I will provide a list of arguments that verbs of naming take a small clause complement, having the structure as in (2b). This means that proper names must enter syntax as predicates.



I will then turn to proper names in argument positions and show that there they have the internal syntax of definite DPs (cf. Geurts (1997)). The indexicality of the proper names (*rigidity*, according to Kripke (1980)) can then be compositionally derived from their semantics in naming constructions.

2 Naming constructions

The first impression given by constructions such as (3) is that they are ditransitive. This impression is however misleading. In this section we will argue that verbs of naming take a small clause complement.

- (3) Call me Ishmael.

The first argument that the second noun phrase (henceforth, xNP₂) in (3) is a predicate comes from the fact that it cannot be passivized. It is a general property of English that to passivize, a DP has to start out as the object of a verb (or of a preposition, in pseudo-passives). GOAL and THEME can both do so:

- (4) a. **Marie** was given a book. GOAL
 b. A book was given to Marie. THEME

However, in naming constructions only DP₁ can passivize, which means that xNP₂ does not behave like the THEME object in English (see also Hornstein and Weinberg (1981) for a note on the difference between naming constructions and ditransitives):

- (5) a. I was called/christened/named/baptized Al.
 b. *Al was called/named/baptized me.

Another, relatively minor argument, is the behavior of naming and nomination constructions with animate subjects, where, the interrogative is *what* rather than *who*:

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- (6) a. What/*who was Caesar nominated?
b. What/*who did they christen the boy that Mr. Earnshaw found?

Likewise, anaphora of the name can be expressed by the pronominal predicates *so* and *that*. No other pronoun (and in particular no anaphor like *itself*) can appear as xNP₂.

- (7) Latimeria is called latimeria/that/so/*it/*itself after Marjorie Courtney-Latimer.

If the structures involved were ditransitive, these facts would be unexpected, but if xNP₂ is a predicate, we do not expect animacy marking in interrogation and anaphora.

Further evidence comes from comparing naming verbs to verbs of nomination, which Stowell (1989) analyzes as containing a small clause. One interesting property that they show is that they can appear with a bare nominal predicate:

- (8) a. The queen appointed her lover treasurer of the realm.
b. Anne's death made George (the) king of England.

As Stowell points out, the omission of the definite article is conditional on there being only one individual satisfying the predicate at every given moment:¹

- (9) We named him public enemy *(number 1)/*enemy of the state.

Strikingly, in languages where names can appear with definite articles (the so-called *preproprial articles*) in argument positions, they cannot do so in naming constructions, except with modification:

- (10) a. Ich habe den Karl gesehen. Bavarian German (Nina Rothmayr, p.c.)
I have the-Acc Karl seen.
I have seen Karl.
- b. Ich habe ihn (*den) Karl genannt
I have him-Acc the-Acc Karl called
I called him Karl.
- c. Die Polly wird *(die) neue Mary Poppins genannt
the Polly was *(the) new Mary Poppins called
Polly was called the new Mary Poppins.

In colloquial Icelandic, Northern Norwegian and Northern Swedish argument proper names are also preceded by a definite article (Delsing (1993), p. 54). Other languages with preproprial articles include the Uto-Aztec language Pima (Marcus Smith, p.c.), Modern Greek (Dimitra Papangeli, p.c.), European Portuguese (Jairo Nunes, p.c.), and certain dialects of German (Gerhard Schaden, Nina Rothmayr, p.c.). If names are used predicatively here, this is an obvious analogue of bare predicate definites in (8) (see also article drop with nominal predicates in French (Kupferman (1979), Pollock (1983), Boone (1987), Longobardi (1994), Chierchia (1998), Roy (2001), Matushansky and Spector (2003), among others), Dutch (de Swart, Winter and Zwarts (2004)).

¹ This may be why superlatives allow article drop relatively easily (as Borthen (1998, 2003) shows for Norwegian).

In Northern Norwegian, the preproprial article takes the form of a 3rd person pronoun (examples by Peter Svenonius, Øystein Alexander Vangsnes, p.c.):

- (11) a. ho Marit så han Øystein
 she Marit saw he Øystein
Marit saw Øystein.
- b. han Øystein så ho Marit
 he Øystein saw she Marit
Øystein saw Marit.

In naming constructions (as well as in some others, such as vocatives, play-acting and sometimes possessives) this *preproprial article* disappears (Delsing (1993))!

- (12) a. Dæm døpte barnet (*ho) Marit naming
 they baptized child.the (she) Marit
They baptized the child Marit.
- b. Han heter (*han) Øystein.
 he is-called he Øystein
He is called Øystein.

Other languages with special preproprial articles include Catalan (Louise McNally, p.c., see Longobardi (1999)), Maori, Tagalog, and Malagasy (Campbell (1991) as cited by Delsing (1993)).

However, our strongest argument for a small clause analysis of verbs of naming and nomination comes from languages with morphological Case-marking. The Case on xNP₂ is predicative.

2.1 Predicate case

In Syrian Arabic (Nisrine Al-Zahre, p.c.), in both naming and nomination constructions xNP₂ bears Accusative, which is the predicative Case there (as can be seen from the fact that it remains the same in passivization):

- (13) a. salma laqqabat walad-a-ha Ṣaliy-an naming
 salma nickname.Caus-Prf child-Acc-her Ali-Acc
Salma nicknamed her child Ali.
- b. walad-u-ha luqqiba Ṣaliy-an passivization
 child-Nom-her nickname.Pass-Prf Ali-Acc
Her child is nicknamed Ali.
- (14) a. salma Ṣayyanat walad-a-ha wazir-an naming
 salma nominate.Caus-Prf child-Acc-her minister-Acc
Salma nominated her child as a minister.
- b. walad-u-ha Ṣuyyina wazir-an passivization
 child-Nom-her nominate.Pass-Prf minister-Acc
Her child was nominated as a minister.

- (15) Salma i\$tabarat walad-a-ha wazir-an ECM
 Salma consider-Prf child-Acc-her minister-Acc
Salma considers her child to be a minister.

Likewise, xNP₂ in naming and nomination constructions is not marked as in ditransitive constructions in Hungarian, where the predicate Case is Dative (Veronika Hegedüs, p.c.), and in Russian, where predicates are marked with Instrumental (Bailyn and Rubin (1991), Bailyn and Citko (1999), Pereltsvaig (2001), etc.).

2.2 Case-doubling

Case-doubling, i.e. the appearance of the same Case-marking twice in the same clause, is a characteristic property of small clauses (especially in secondary predication, even in languages that don't have it in primary predication).² For example, Modern Greek small clauses exhibit Case-doubling: the Case on xNP₂ is the same as that on DP₁ (data due to Dimitra Papangeli, p.c.):

- (16) a. Theoro to Yani ilithio Greek ECM
 consider-1sg the-acc Yani-acc idiot-masc-acc
I consider Yani an idiot.
- b. O Yanis theorite ilithios passive
 the-nom Yanis-nom considered-3sg(passive) idiot-nom
Yani is considered an idiot.

Case-doubling can be diagnosed by passivization, which renders DP₁ Nominative. In Case-doubling languages this is reflected in the Case of xNP₂.

Importantly, Case-doubling also happens with verbs of naming and nomination:

- (17) a. Diorisa to Yani diefthindi nomination
 appointed-1sg the-acc Yani-acc director-acc
I appointed Yani (the) director.
- b. O Yanis dioristike diefthindis passive
 the-nom Yanis-nom appointed-3sg(passive) director-nom
Yani was appointed (the) director.
- (18) a. Vaftisa to Yani Petro naming
 baptised-1sg the-acc Yani-acc Petro-acc
I baptized Yani Petro.
- b. O Yanis vaftistike Petros passive
 the-nom Yanis-nom baptised-3sg(passive) Petros-nom
Yani was baptized Petro.

There is no accepted theory of Case-doubling, but while “copying” the Case of the subject onto the predicate can be a kind of agreement, no relation is commonly assumed

² Case doubling also occurs in Japanese and Korean with inalienable possession. This might be relevant: Massam (1985) and following her Cho (1998) argue that Korean Case doubling involves ECM. This is suggestive when one recalls that possessives is one of the environments in Northern Norwegian where the prepositional article disappears).

to exist between two internal arguments of a ditransitive verb that would permit to connect their Case-marking. The existence of Case-doubling with verbs of naming and nomination therefore further confirms that they project a SC structure. The same effects obtain in German and Latin (though this is harder to show for the former, since proper names do not decline).³

2.3 Other predicate positions

Proper names can be small clause predicates with ECM/raising verbs (including copula) as well as secondary predicates. The predicative *be* is one obvious example; another is the Dutch raising verb of naming *heten* (Eddy Ruys, p.c.):

(19) I am Sam.

(20)

zij	heet	Marie	Dutch
she	be-named	Marie	
<i>She is named Marie.</i>			

One might be tempted to believe that this is an identity statement, but name predicates can be coordinated with regular predicates (examples due to Jim Higginbotham, p.c.):

(21) a. The Pope called himself John-Paul and a devout Christian.
 b. I am Sam and a Catholic.

As the following example shows, proper names can appear as secondary predicates and as complements of ECM verbs other than verbs of naming:

(22) Born [**PRO Charles Lutwidge Dodgson**], the man who would become **Lewis Carroll** was an eccentric and an eclectic.

The fact that proper names may appear in what is known to be predicate positions lends further support to the idea that at least sometimes they might function as predicates. It also argues against treating the use of proper names with verbs of naming as a special instance of *mention*, since such an analysis would not extend to the cases discussed in this section.

However, while some verbs of nomination allow infinitival, indicative or subjunctive complements (though sometimes with a subtle change in meaning), verbs of naming do not.

(23) a. They proclaimed Arthur to be the king of all England.
 b. The prince declared that the war was inevitable.
 c. Sir Gawaine chose that Dame Ragnell be a beauty by day and a hag by night.

(24) a. Earnshaw named the foundling Heathcliff.
 b. *Earnshaw named the foundling to be Heathcliff.
 c. *Earnshaw named that the foundling is/be Heathcliff.

³ If this is correct, then German does have ECM, albeit restricted.

Among possible explanations that might be envisaged is a syntactic one (naming verbs c-select an xNP complement, as was argued by Stowell (1991) for many ECM verbs), and a semantic one (an embedded verb would introduce an event argument, which would be incompatible with the semantics of naming verbs). We leave this question as a topic for future research.⁴

To summarize, we have adduced a number of arguments that verbs of naming take a SC complement (like verbs of nomination, which are clearly ECM):

- The preproprial definite article on the proper name in an argument position is dropped in naming constructions
- Case-marking of the proper name is that of a predicate and can be realized either as the dedicated predicative Case or Case-doubling
- Proper names can function as both primary and secondary predicates

By Occam’s razor proper names in argument positions have to incorporate the meaning that they have in predicate positions, just like argument DPs incorporate the meaning of corresponding NP predicates. The meaning that we will give for predicate proper names will also allow us to account for modified and complex proper names in a way parallel to modification inside DPs.

3 Analysis

Apart from the idea that proper names are predicates, we will assume that they are not even simplex predicates. Instead they have one more argument slot besides the $\langle e \rangle$ one, for the naming convention:

(25) $\llbracket \text{Alice} \rrbracket = \lambda x \in D_e . \lambda R . x$ is a referent of $[\Theta \lambda I \sigma]$ by virtue of the naming convention R

Clearly, ours is not an approach where an artificial predicate $\lambda x . x = \text{Alice}$ is created.⁵ For one thing, the contents of the name quote the (phonological form of) the name itself. We believe that this is obligatory, since proper names are not amenable to substitution in naming constructions (Sylvain Bromberger, p.c.). The other important innovation is the additional argument slot for the naming convention, which we will shortly motivate.

3.1 Predicate names

Since proper names can appear as predicates with raising and ECM verbs, as well as function as secondary predicates, the argument slot for the naming convention that we have proposed can be saturated by a free variable, whose value will be discussed in the next sub-section. However, our reason for introducing this argument slot is the behavior of proper names in naming constructions.

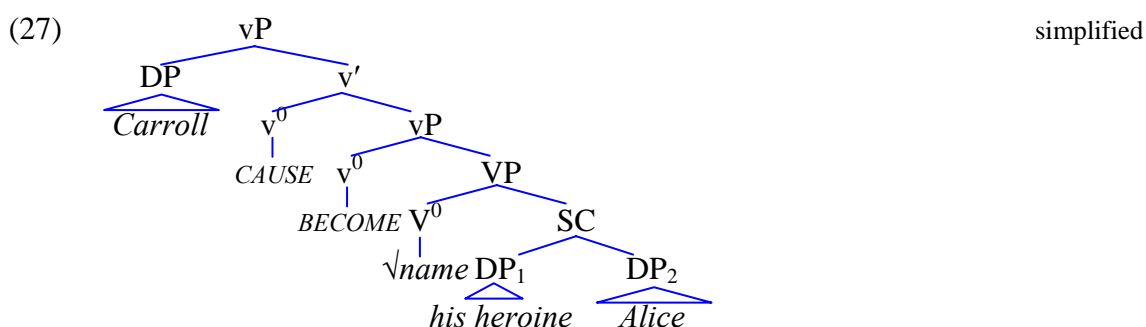
⁴ A proper name cannot appear with verbs like *seem* or *believe* due to a scalarity constraint on their complement (Matushansky (2002)).

⁵ Proper names in naming constructions make the definite description theories where proper names abbreviate an artificial predicate (Aristotle = “the one who *Aristotelizes*”) also rather difficult to maintain.

Consider the interpretation of (26). On the one hand, the inference “Alice is AI” has to hold, but on the other, the fact that this is a result of a nicknaming action also has to be incorporated into the theory:

(26) $\llbracket \text{Alice is nicknamed AI} \rrbracket \approx \text{Alice is a referent of } [\Theta\lambda] \text{ by virtue of } \textit{nicknaming}$

Given that verbs of naming are not intensional, they cannot take propositions of the kind “Alice is AI” as their argument. This is why we have to assume the reverse: the naming verb (actually its root) is an argument of the proper name, even if the small clause with the name head is structurally its complement. The agentive v^0 introduces the *become* component of the meaning, and the structure is topped by a causative v^0 head.⁶ This makes verbs of naming rather different from Hale and Keyser (1993) and Harley (2003), especially given that no incorporation is involved:



An additional argument in favor of having a bi-clausal structure associated with verbs of naming, suggested to me by Danny Fox, is modification by *again* (von Stechow (1996), Beck and Johnson (2004)):

(28) You can't call her Griselda again.

(16) can be used in a situation where the challenge is to give a doll different names (a) without repeating oneself, which means that *again* can be attached higher than CAUSE, or (b) without repeating someone else (causing the doll to have the same name), which means that *again* can be attached lower than BECOME.

To return now to verbs of nomination, the difference between them and verbs of naming is that in the latter case, the verb is an argument of the small clause, while nomination verbs are associated with the more conventional structure where the small clause is an argument of the causative nomination verb.

The fact that the naming small clause can appear with ECM verbs), suggests that the argument slot of a naming relation R can be saturated by a free variable. What variable is it? To answer this question, we need to consider proper names in argument positions.

⁶ The reason why we choose this structure over $[cause [become [his heroine Alice]] \textit{by naming}]$ has to do with the semantics of the construction. In some Arabic cultures, a woman drops her own name when she bears a child and instead becomes Umm plus the name of her child, as in Umm Kulthum (*umm* means “mother of”). However, you cannot name someone Umm Kulthum by naming her son Kulthum, which means that the naming predicate has to be internal to the CAUSE one.

3.2 Argument proper names

If proper names are predicates in the naming construction, then in argument positions they must be definite descriptions. This is not a new idea, and various arguments have been proposed in favor of this hypothesis, some of which we will list below.

The first reason to believe that proper names are definite description is the fact that the definite article is overt in some languages (see section 2) and with some proper names (which Strawson (1950) calls *quasi-names*, see Burge (1973), Geurts (1997), Elbourne (2002), and Borer (in press)):

- (29) a. the Thames, the Pacific, the Alps...
 b. the States, the Netherlands, the Sudan...

Secondly, proper names in argument positions have bound variable uses (Geurts (1997)) and E-type uses (Elbourne (2002)), just like definite descriptions:

- (30) a. If a child is christened 'Bambi', then Disney will sue Bambi's parents.
 b. Every woman who has a husband called John and a lover called Gerontius takes only Gerontius to the Rare Names Convention.

Thirdly, proper names can be used generically (Geurts (1997)):

- (31) The light bulb/Coca Cola was invented by an American.

Though there are many more arguments in favor of the definite description hypothesis (see Geurts (1997) and Elbourne (2002), among others), proper names do not behave exactly as definite descriptions. The main difference between proper names and definite descriptions is that argument proper names are *rigid* (Kripke (1980)), i.e. they refer to the same individual in various possible worlds. One consequence of that is that they are opaque in intensional contexts, as shown schematically in (32).

- (32) Mary considers Peter to be a fool.
 a. \Rightarrow The individual called Peter in w_0 is a fool in Mary's belief-worlds.
 b. \Rightarrow ,/ The individual called Peter in Mary's belief-worlds (who might be John in w_0) is a fool in Mary's belief-worlds.

The inference in (32b) is generally considered invalid because proper names have to be interpreted *de re* (but see Geurts (1997) for counter-examples). To explain why proper names usually do not have a *de dicto* reading, it has been suggested that they contain an indexical:

- (i) Burge (1973) suggests that the meaning of argument proper names contains a demonstrative (*that Alice*), while Larson and Segal (1995) propose that the null *that* is present in the syntax (see Elbourne (2002) for arguments against this view).
 (ii) Recanati (1997) and Pelczar and Rainsbury (1998) propose the indexical of *the naming convention in force between the speaker and the hearer*.
 (iii) Liu (2004) makes use of *the relevant linguistic community*.

In all these approaches, including mine, proper names refer to one individual due to the hidden definite article (overt in many languages) or the demonstrative. This also makes

them compatible with there being more than one person with a particular name (as long as we consider only the universe of the discourse).

The facts and analysis presented above not only provide independent evidence for a definite description analysis with a “quotation” predicate but also make it follow from compositionality. To do so, we need a contextual indexical of the naming convention in force between the speaker and the hearer:

- (33) $\llbracket \text{the Alice} \rrbracket_c = \lambda x . x$ is a referent of $[\Theta\lambda I\sigma]$ by virtue of **the naming convention in force between the speaker $_c$ and the hearer $_c$**

Saturation by a contextual indexical argument is always available:

- (34) a. The airport is close (to here).
 b. She is a close friend (of mine).

Morpho-syntactically, we propose that the ability to omit the article is a morphological property of a particular lexical item or of a class of lexical items, and the same for the choice of a special prepropriial article. One of the arguments that can be proposed in favor of this hypothesis is the fact that modified proper names, where no local relation can be established between the proper name and an article, always appear with articles (except when modification is by evaluative adjectives (*poor Mary*) and possibly some others – see Borer (in press)):

- (35) a. the *(French) Mary Poppins restrictive
 b. the *(young) Mozart
 c. the *(incomparable) Callas non-restrictive

In languages with special prepropriial articles such as Tagalog (Norvin Richards, p.c.) or Catalan (Louise McNally, p.c.), the article is regularized in modification contexts, thus further confirming that the matter is morphological.

- (36) Li diuen *(el/*en) Lord Nelson francés.
 him call-3sg *(the/the-PrPr Lord Nelson French
They call him the French Lord Nelson.

While unmodified proper names appear with the special prepropriial article *en*, modified proper names must take the usual definite article *el*.

Another argument in favor of the hypothesis that article omission is morphological comes from the fact that lexical properties of the proper name may play a role. Thus in some dialects of Italian with prepropriial definite articles (Longobardi (1994, 1999)) the article may (and must) be omitted only with masculine proper names:

- (37) a. *(la) Maria
 *(the Maria
 b. (*il) Gianni
 (*the Gianni

If the gender of the lexical item plays a role in whether the article is present, the issue is not syntactic or semantic.

3.3 Complex and modified proper names

That proper names can now be treated as definite descriptions (cf. Frege (1983), Russell (1911), Searle (1958), Kneale (1962), Burge (1973), Katz (1977, 1990, 1994), Geurts (1997) and Elbourne (2002)) *and* as indexicals allows us to extend our compositional semantics to complex and modified proper names and derive the entailments associated with them:

- (38) a. $\llbracket \text{the Miss Alice Liddell} \rrbracket \approx \iota x . x$ is a miss AND x is a referent of $[\Theta\lambda\iota\sigma]$ by virtue of the naming convention in force between the speaker and the hearer AND x is a referent of $[\lambda\iota\Delta\lambda]$ by virtue of the naming convention in force between the speaker_c and the hearer_c
- b. $\llbracket \text{the famous detective Sherlock Holmes} \rrbracket \approx \iota x . x$ is famous AND x is a detective AND x is a referent of $[\Sigma E \blacklozenge \lambda \square \kappa]$ by virtue of the naming convention in force between the speaker and the hearer AND x is a referent of $[\eta \circ \lambda \mu \zeta]$ by virtue of the naming convention in force between the speaker_c and the hearer_c

The fact that in our theory complex proper names are derived by predicate modification allows us to obtain the entailment that Sherlock Holmes is Sherlock and that Sherlock Holmes is Holmes, and deal correctly with titles and descriptions preceding the proper name. The same holds for modification, restrictive or non-restrictive:⁷

- (39) a. the older Miss Challoner there are two people named Miss Challoner
 b. Richard the Lionhearted there is more than one king named Richard
- (40) the charitable Miss Murray Anne Brontë, *Agnes Grey*, p. 165

A special case is temporal and modal modification of proper names (see Kayne (1994), Gärtner (2004)), which is something that names do and definite descriptions seem not to until we draw a parallel with kinds (cf. Kripke (1980)), which permit both temporal and modal modification:

- (41) a. the Paris of my youth/that I knew
 b. The human of that era was not yet fully bipedal.

However the interpretation of (41b) is obtained (and there it does seem to be predicate modification), the same strategy will work for (41a).

3.4 Other determiners

Another correct prediction of our syntax and semantics is that proper names should be able to combine with determiners other than (the covert) *the*, and to appear in the plural:

- (42) There are relatively few Alfreds in Princeton. Burge (1973)

⁷ I have nothing to say about the ordering in (39b), discussed in Longobardi (1994) et seq.

The meaning of the subject in (42) can be paraphrased as “few people named Alfred”. This reading is fully expected, given our semantics for predicate proper names, and the same happens with genericity:

(43) Some Alfreds are crazy; some are sane. Burge (1973)

Other determiners are also allowed:

- (44) a. ...but no Catherine could I detect, far or near.
 b. There’s a Mr. Smith to see you, sir.
 c. This Rover of yours has overturned the garbage again!

Finally, the meaning shift when conversion to a common noun takes place e.g. in scalar contexts supports the hypothesis that proper names are interpreted as suggested above:

(45) He is **such a (typical) John** – he always has to appear as the subject of a sentence!

Here the name is no longer “proper”: *John* is interpreted as *a (typical) representative of the kind defined by being named John*. The difference between (42) and (45) is that (45) assumes that there are properties that all people called John share.

4 Summary

If verbs of naming appear with predicate proper names and these predicates contain an argument slot for the naming convention, we can deal with several issues that have accumulated in syntax and semantics of proper names:

- Argument proper names are (usually) definite descriptions (hence the article in many languages)
- The rigidity of argument proper names is due to the contextually supplied indexical of the naming convention between the speaker and the hearer
- Complex and modified proper names are composed just like other DPs and their entailments are accounted for.
- Quantified and indefinite proper names are predicted by the general fact that a predicate NP can combine with any quantifier

Several issues suggest themselves as topics for future research:

- Limits of cross-linguistic variation: many languages (e.g. Georgian) use the benefactive structure for naming constructions (cf. *She was given this name in honor of her grandmother*). How is this construction related to the small clause one we have examined? What does it say about the meaning of proper names?
- Default and non-default names: as Zimmermann (to appear) notes, a place or a person may have more than one name or change names over a period of time. Can our lexical entry for proper names make reference to the time of naming, in the same way common nouns are specified for a time argument?
- How similar are proper names and kind names (Kripke (1980))?

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