PROPER NAME CHANGE[†]

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ABSTRACT: Gareth Evans (1973) adduces a case in which a proper name apparently undergoes a change in referent. 'Madagascar' was originally the name of a part of Africa. Marco Polo, erroneously thinking he was following native usage, applied the name to an island off the African coast. Today 'Madagascar' is the name of that island. Evans argues that this kind of case threatens Kripke's picture of naming as developed in *Naming and Necessity*. According to this picture, the name, as used by Marco Polo, referred to a part of the African mainland, since he was connected to the latter by a historical chain of communication. Since *we* are historically connected to Marco Polo, the name, as it is used today, still refers to the African mainland. But it doesn't. The aim of the present paper is to give a conclusive account of the phenomenon adduced by Evans, which is compatible with Kripke's picture.[1]

Keywords: proper names, reference change, Saul Kripke, Gareth Evans.

CONTENTS

1. Speaker's reference and semantic reference

The problem for Kripke's picture has two parts. The first part is this: How can a speaker who is connected to an object x by a Kripkean historical chain of communication use a proper name to refer to an object y distinct from x? The question can be answered by means of Kripke's Gricean apparatus of speaker's reference and semantic reference (Kripke 1979).[3] In general, the *semantic referent* of a designator is given by "a *general* intention of the speaker to refer to a certain object whenever the designator is used" (1979, 173). The general intention of a speaker is not tied to a particular occasion. It is rather directed towards *any* occasion on which a name is going to be used. It might be understood as a general commitment to non-deviant usage of the name. On Kripke's picture, this intention is parasitic. The semantic referent of a proper name is given by the general intention of a

speaker to refer to the same object as the person from whom she received the name whenever she uses the name. The *speaker's referent* of a designator, on the other hand, "is given by a *specific* intention, on a given occasion, to refer to a certain object." On a given occasion, a semantic referent and a speaker's referent of a proper name are determined whenever the specific intention of the speaker, on that occasion, *coincides* with her general intention. They coincide if the speaker believes that the object she wishes to talk about, on a given occasion, fulfills the conditions for being the semantic referent. According to Kripke, there are two ways in which the specific intention of a speaker may coincide with her general intention. (i) In the "'simple' case (...) her specific intention is simply to refer to her semantic referent, that is, her specific intention is [by definition] her general semantic intention" (1979, 174). Applied to proper names, in the simple case a speaker uses a name, on a particular occasion, with the (specific) intention to refer to the same object as the person from whom she received the name. (ii) In the "'complex' case" the speaker has a specific intention which is *distinct* from her general intention, but which she supposedly believes to determine the same object as the one determined by her general intention. As regards proper names, in the complex case a speaker uses a name, on a particular occasion, with the specific intention to refer to *x*, and she believes that *x* is the same object the person from whom she received the name is referring to. This belief has a (semantic) reference-preserving function. If the speaker's belief is correct, then speaker's referent and semantic referent of the name are identical. If her belief is false, then they are distinct. I will call the use of a name by a speaker with a specific intention which is distinct from but nonetheless coincides with her general intention a *complex use* of the name. Furthermore, I will say that a complex use is correct if the speaker's reference-preserving belief is correct, and that the former is incorrect if the latter is incorrect.

Since Marco Polo believes that he is following native usage, his use of the name 'Madagascar' is historically connected to a part of the African mainland. The question was this: How is the fact that he uses 'Madagascar' to refer to the great African island to be accounted for? Given the apparatus of speaker's referent and semantic referent, this question has a straightforward answer: Marco Polo uses the name, on a particular occasion, with the specific intention to refer to the great African island. The latter is thus the speaker's referent of the name, as used on that occasion. At the same time the name refers to a part of the African mainland, since he has the reference-preserving belief to be following native usage -that is, the part of Africa is

the semantic referent of 'Madagascar', as used on that occasion. Hence, this case is an example of an incorrect complex use of a name.

Let's go on to the second part of the problem.

2. From speaker's reference to semantic reference

Since *our* use of the name 'Madagascar' is historically connected to Marco Polo's, one would expect that the part of Africa still is the semantic referent. But it isn't. The island is the semantic referent of the name, as it is used today. It follows that it is possible for a speaker's referent of a name in an incorrect complex use of the latter to become a semantic referent of that name. How is this possible?

According to Kripke, an initial baptism or dubbing has the function to fix the semantic referent of a name. This is the standard form of (first-order) assignment. I will maintain the thesis that an incorrect complex use of a name can have the same function as a dubbing. More precisely, a complex use of a name 'NN', whose semantic referent is x, for y can assign y to 'NN' as a semantic referent. How can we show this?

First, a couple of assumptions about dubbing. In order for a speaker A to assign an object x to a name 'NN', A must stipulate that x be called 'NN', and secondly, A must have the particular role or one role out of a set of possible roles in the linguistic community which are required for dubbing x 'NN'. The set of possible roles in a community C is determined relative to the role of x in C, the context c of the stipulation which determines a role for 'NN', and the existing name conventions for x. If x is a baby and 'NN' is supposed to be its ordinary name, then A must be one of the parents or somehow connected to the parents; if x is a heavenly body and 'NN' is supposed to be its ordinary name, then A must be an astronomer; if x is a politician and 'NN' is supposed to be a nickname which is not supposed to go on the open market, then A can be anyone; etc.

The following test (T) provides the means for deciding whether or not the role which A in fact has is one of the roles required for dubbing x 'NN' -that is, whether A has succeeded in assigning x to 'NN':

(T)
A stipulation (at t_0) in c by A, who has a certain role r, that x be called 'NN' is successful, if (and only if)

(1) if there were a speaker S who knows (i) x, (ii) that A has r, and (iii) that A called x 'NN' in c, then S would use 'NN' for x (at t); and

(2) if an expert E for some name 'NN*' ('NN*' ≠ 'NN') reacted to S's use of 'NN' (at t) by saying (something like) "This is *not* NN," S would go on using 'NN' for x.

The decision procedure encapsulated in this test is roughly the following. First, consider a speaker S in the life of whom x has a certain function and who is capable of evaluating A's role with respect to x. If there is none in the actual linguistic community, look at a counterfactual community. Then check whether S ever uses 'NN' in order to talk about x. If S doesn't, we have a result: x is not the semantic referent of 'NN'. Otherwise consider all experts from the same linguistic community as S's who actually or possibly react to S's use of 'NN'. If there is none, then A's stipulation was successful: x is the semantic referent of 'NN'. If S gets a reaction and does not go on using 'NN' for x, then A's stipulation was not successful. If despite all reactions S goes on using 'NN' for x, then A's stipulation was successful.

Test (T) is the key for showing that an incorrect complex use can have the same function as a dubbing. It registers whether a stipulation that x be called 'NN' has a certain actual or counterfactual *effect* in the linguistic community. The presence or absence of this effect indicates whether or not x has been assigned to 'NN' as a semantic referent. We can now say that if a complex use of 'NN', whose semantic referent is x, for y has exactly this effect, then y has been assigned to 'NN' as a semantic referent; in other words, if the incorrect complex use has the very same actual or counterfactual effect in the linguistic community as a dubbing, then it has the same function as a dubbing. The following test (T*) is just (T) applied to an incorrect complex use instead of a stipulation:

(T*)
An incorrect complex use (at t_0) in c by A, who has a certain role r, of 'NN' for y assigns y to 'NN', if (and only if)

(1) if there were a speaker S who knows (i) y, (ii) that A has r, and (iii) that A used 'NN' in c to refer to y, then S would use 'NN' to refer to y (at t); and

(2) if an expert E for 'NN' or 'NN*' ('NN' ≠ 'NN*') reacted to S's use of 'NN' (at t) by saying (something like) "This is not NN," S would go on using 'NN' to refer to y.

The point is that if an incorrect complex use (from now on abbreviated as -u) of 'NN' for y passes (T*), then y is the semantic referent of 'NN'. When

does a *-u* pass (T*)? The strategy of the latter is parallel to the one of (T). We consider a speaker *S* with the required knowledge and look whether *S* uses 'NN' to refer to *y*. If *S* uses 'NN' for *y*, then her motivation to do so arises as a result of *A*'s use of 'NN' in context *c*. Now we consider all experts from the same linguistic community as *S*'s who react to *S*'s use of 'NN' by saying "This is not NN."

The reaction may take two forms: (i) "She is not *NN* -whoever she is!"; and (ii) "*She* is not NN (but rather NN*) -whoever NN is!", where 'NN' and 'NN*' are distinct names. As regards dubbing, it is possible that 'NN' occurs in a stipulation for the first time and that *x* is dubbed for the first time. In this case no expert will react to *S*'s use of 'NN', and the counterfactual (2) in (T) comes out true. In the present case, however, 'NN' already has a (semantic) referent which is distinct from *y*. Thus, an expert for 'NN' will possibly react (in form (i)) to *S*, provided there are experts for 'NN' in the linguistic community. If there are no such experts left, (T*) is inapplicable to *A*'s *-u* of 'NN'.

Speaker *S* goes on using 'NN' for *y*, despite a reaction by an expert *E* for 'NN' -"This is not NN -whoever this is!", where 'this' makes a demonstrative reference to *y*- only if *E*'s correction is irrelevant to *S*. And that *E*'s correction is irrelevant is a consequence of the relation between the *significance* of the *-u* of 'NN' for *y* and the significance of the convention that *x* (rather than *y*) is called 'NN'. The significance of a *-u* can be construed as a function of two parameters. First, the significance of the *context* of the *-u*. *A* can use 'NN' for *y*, for instance, in the street or in an exam or in a book or in a scientific laboratory. Intuitively, the significance of the use of 'NN' for *y* in a scientific laboratory or in a book is greater than the significance of the use of 'NN' for *y* in the street or in an exam. Second, the significance of speaker *A*. Here the significance of the use of 'NN' for *y* is greater if *A* is, say, a public figure or a distinguished member of the scientific community, as opposed to someone less recognized. The significance of the convention that *x* is called 'NN' depends on the *currency* of 'NN' in the community. The convention is of great significance if *x* is commonly referred to as 'NN' and it is of little significance if 'NN' is barely used for *x*. It is not assumed that significance could be measured numerically. The present intuitive concept of significance is a comparative concept. One *-u* is more significant in the community than another; but we need never say how much more. I will call a *-u* which passes (T*) and thus has a reference-fixing function *creative*. The condition for the creativity of a *-u* can now be stated as follows: a *-u* by *A* of 'NN' for *y* in *c* (at *t*) is creative if and only if the

significance of the fact that A uses 'NN' for y in c is greater than the significance (at t) of the fact that x (rather than y) is called 'NN'.

How does the second form of the reaction come in? If y does not have a name yet no expert E^* will possibly react to S by saying, "This is not NN, but rather NN* -whoever NN is!", since there is no expert E^* for 'NN*' ('NN*' ≠ 'NN') in the linguistic community of S. If, on the other hand, y does have a name already, then an expert E^* will possibly react to S. Whether the significance of a given -u renders E^*'s correction irrelevant then depends on the significance of the convention that y is called 'NN*' -that is, on the currency of 'NN*' in the linguistic community.

Suppose that in ancient times a heavenly body a was dubbed 'Han' by some unknown astronomer and that this is an unimportant historical fact known only to a small fraction of today's community of astronomers in which a is widely ignored. Suppose also that the contemporary distinguished astronomer Jones makes the important discovery of certain peculiar features of a heavenly body b which too had been widely ignored by contemporary astronomy. In a 'historical moment' Jones informs the community of astronomers about the discovery. On the basis of a piece of historical misinformation he believes that b is Han, and as a result uses the name 'Han' in describing b: "A peculiar feature of Han is... ." Consequently many others use 'Han' in discourse about b. Now suppose that Smith, an expert for 'Han', points out that b is not the object which was dubbed 'Han' in ancient times, but rather a. However, what matters is not that Jones discovered *Han*, but rather that he discovered certain peculiar features of a certain heavenly body. Thus, it is very plausible that one will regard Jones' use of 'Han' to refer to b in the 'historical moment' as a reason for following him, rather than Smith's remark as a reason for not following him. This is an example of a creative incorrect complex use of a name.

Things would not look much different if an expert Schmidt pointed out that a long time ago b was dubbed 'Pan', say, on the basis of certain calculations by some unknown astronomer. If, however, the name 'Pan' were the community-wide used name of b, then things would look different. Here we should say that Jones, in using 'Han' for b, made a mistake which he could easily have avoided and which does not give reason to follow him in referring to b as Han.

Let us now return to the case of 'Madagascar'. Is Marco Polo's incorrect complex use creative? First, there is no doubt that Marco Polo has a highly significant role in his linguistic community. Second, the fact that the history of the name of the great African island is traced back to Marco Polo's

incorrect complex use indicates that the context of the latter is of considerable historical significance. Third, before Marco Polo the name 'Madagascar' probably was not used at all in his linguistic community. After all there might have been a few experts. Fourth, for all we know the island did not have a name before Marco Polo in his community. But let us make the weaker assumption that it bears the name 'Z' and that there are a few experts for 'Z'. Let's apply (T*). Consider a speaker S with the required knowledge. The important question is this: If an expert E for 'Madagascar' and an expert E^* for 'Z' reacted to S's use of 'Madagascar' for the island, would S *go on* using 'Madagascar' for the island? Since the significance of the fact that Marco Polo used 'Madagascar' for the island is greater than the significance of the fact that a part of Africa is actually called 'Madgascar' and than the significance of the fact that the island is actually called 'Z', it is plausible that S would go on. This result is supported by our intuitions about the case of 'Han', for the latter is of the same kind as the case of 'Madagascar'. Hence, the puzzling fact that after Marco Polo the semantic referent of 'Madagascar' is the great African island can be accounted for in terms of the notion of a creative incorrect complex use of a name.

What does exactly *change* when a speaker's referent of a name in an incorrect complex use becomes a semantic referent of that name? The problem for Kripke's picture might appear to be insurmountable on the basis of the following line of reasoning. Suppose that an unambiguous name 'NN' has an individual x as its semantic referent. Such cases as the 'Madagascar' case show that the semantic referent of 'NN' can shift from x to another entity y, such that x is replaced by y. In accounting for this reference change, an intention by a speaker or a group of speakers to refer to y must play a certain role. But according to the apparatus of speaker's reference and semantic reference, a speaker's referent of a name is always 'accompanied' by a semantic referent. Thus, even if it were possible to show that the intention to use 'NN' to refer to y is somehow dominant, it would still be impossible to show that the semantic reference of 'NN' really shifts from x to y, that x completely disappears from the scene.[3] The problem with this argument is its major premise, namely that what must be explained is how the semantic reference of a name can change.[4] But why assume that the semantic reference of a name can change? Is it plausible to say that the 'Madagascar' case is a case of reference change? If it were, it would follow that long after Marco Polo -to make sure that everyone agrees that the semantic referent of 'Madagascar' is the island- the semantic referent of the name, as used by natives and sailors who have never heard of Marco Polo,

nor of any person who has heard of Marco Polo, would be the great African island. But this consequence is absurd. So if the reference does not change, what changes then? It must be the name. And that is perfectly accounted for by the notion of a creative incorrect complex use. If the use of 'NN' by a speaker A at t_0 to refer to y is creative, then y is assigned to 'NN' as a semantic referent. But this non-standard assignment does not undermine the semantic relation between 'NN' and x. The result is that the name has two semantic referents, x and y. In accordance with the practice of calling homonymous names distinct names, we can say that in a creative incorrect complex use of a name 'NN_1' whose semantic referent is x, a new name 'NN_2' whose semantic referent is y is introduced. Metaphorically speaking, the name being used splits up into two names. Analogous to a dubbing, A's incorrect complex use of the name marks the starting point of a new historical chain of communication in which y is preserved as the semantic referent of the name. That is, if a speaker S receives 'NN' from A and uses it with the required reference-preserving intention, then 'NN', as used by S, refers to y. How about the use of 'NN' by A herself? It is a consequence of Kripke's semantic picture that as long as the mistake remains undetected there is no doubt that 'NN', as used by A, refers to x, since A remains historically connected to x. If, however, the error is pointed out to her, then she may go on using the name in accordance with her own use at t_0 and from that point on distinguish between 'NN_1' and 'NN_2'. Hence, on the present account proper names don't change in reference, but proper names change.

Evans uses the 'Madagascar' case to support the description theory. With respect to this kind of case he claims: "It is clear that the Causal Theory [=Kripke's picture] unamended is not adequate. It looks as though, once again, the intentions of the speakers to use the name to refer to something must be allowed to count in determination of what it denotes" (1973, 216). What interests us in the present context is not the details of Evans' account of the phenomenon[5], but rather his general claim that one can only account for it on the basis of the *information* about a certain object which a speaker associates with the name. The general picture appealed to is the following. A speaker S associates with the name 'NN' a certain body of information i_1 about an object x. Consequently, if S uses 'NN' with the intention to refer to x then x is the semantic referent of 'NN' (assuming that 'NN' is not ambiguous). Now suppose that S uses 'NN' with the intention to refer to y and associates with 'NN' a certain body of information i_2

about y. It is claimed that x may still be the semantic referent of 'NN' as used by S. So let's assume that x is still the semantic referent. Now, the important thesis is that y would have been the semantic referent of 'NN', as used by S, if and only if S had associated with 'NN' a body of information i_3 which sufficiently *differs* in a given way from i_2. I shall call this condition '(E)'.

The following argument can be given to show that (E) is not necessary. Suppose that the semantic referent of 'NN' is x ('NN' being unambiguous). Suppose further that S uses 'NN' with the specific intention to refer to y and associates with 'NN' a certain body of information i_1 about y. This is an incorrect complex use (-u) of 'NN'. Let us assume that the context of the -u is an everyday context and that S is a 'normal user'. Assume, moreover, that 'NN' is the community-wide used name of x. Thus, the significance of the fact that x (rather than y) is called 'NN' is greater than the significance of the fact that S uses 'NN' for y, such that S's -u does not pass test (T*). Hence, the -u does not have a reference-fixing function. Now consider a possible world w in which S uses 'NN' with the specific intention to refer to y. Suppose that in w S associates with 'NN' exactly the same body of information i_1 which she associates with the name in the actual world. That is, the mental biography of S in w is qualitatively the same as that of S in the actual world. Since the semantic referent of 'NN' as used by S in the actual world is x and since in w S associates with 'NN' the identical body of information i_1 as in w, it follows, according to condition (E), that the semantic referent of 'NN' as used by S in w is x, rather than y. But now suppose that w differs from the actual world in the following respects. First, S is some distinguished authority in her linguistic community. Second, the context of the -u is of great historical significance. Third, the name 'NN' is used only by a very small number of speakers. That is, in w the significance of the fact that S uses 'NN' for y is greater than the significance of the fact that x is called 'NN', such that in w the -u passes (T*). Hence, in w the -u is creative, whereas in the actual world it is not. This shows that condition (E) is not necessary: the question of whether an incorrect complex use of a name is creative is independent of the information the speaker associates with the name. Hence, Kripke's picture unamended *is* adequate, since the present account of the phenomenon adduced by Evans is compatible with it.

I conclude the present paper with some remarks on an alleged non-descriptivist alternative to the present account of the phenomenon. Consider the following theses. Whether the speaker's referent y in a given incor-

rect complex use of a name at a time t becomes a semantic referent is not a matter of certain social features of the 'atomic' use of the name at t. It rather depends on whether the name attains a certain *currency* as a name for y in the linguistic community, no matter who uses it and when. However, the information the speakers associate with the name is no crucial element in the evolution of y into a semantic referent of the name. The account is purely social and thus compatible with Kripke's semantic picture. Kripke himself seems to be suggesting a similar picture, though very tentatively, when he says:

> I find it plausible that a diachronic account of the evolution of language is likely to suggest that what was originally a mere speaker's reference may, *if it becomes habitual in a community*, evolve into a semantic referent. And this consideration may be one of the factors needed to clear up some puzzles in the theory of reference (1979a, 182-83, my emphasis).[6]

How plausible is such an approach? Consider the following case by Evans:

> A youth A leaves a small village in the Scottish highlands to seek his fortune having acquired the nickname 'Turnip'. Fifty or so years a man B comes to the village and lives as a hermit over the hill. The three or four villagers surviving from the time of the youth's departure believe falsely that this is the long departed villager returned. Consequently they use the name 'Turnip' among themselves and it gets into wider circulation among the younger villagers who have no idea how it originated (1973, 225-26).[7]

According to the theses above, we should say that the name 'Turnip' has caught on to B, since it is harmoniously used for B among the members of the community. But now suppose A returns one day and the older villagers immediately identify him as Turnip. It is very unlikely that the reaction of the villagers concerning B will be: "It appears after all that Turnip did not come from this village," rather than "It isn't Turnip after all." This makes it plausible that the semantic referent of 'Turnip' as used by the villagers is still A and only A and that they were engaged in "massive falsehood" of him. Mere currency of the name in the community is not enough for a speaker's referent to become a semantic referent. Thus it seems that this proposal fails to be an alternative to the present account of the puzzling phenomenon in terms of the notion of a creative incorrect complex use of a name.

Notes

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1 Kripke does not give a conclusive account of the phenomenon. He makes a few very tentative remarks (see n. 6). The account to be presented here differs from the account suggested in these remarks. I discuss the latter briefly in the last paragraph of this paper.

2 Kripke (1979) emphasizes that the apparatus of speaker's reference and semantic reference is applicable to his semantic picture of names as developed in (1980), but he does not go into detail.

3 Evans (1982, pp. 388-89) gives such an argument.

4 Even Kripke seems tempted by this view of the matter. Cf. (1980, p. 163).

5 His view can be found in (1973, pp. 216-27) and (1982, pp. 388-91).

6 In the last sentence of the quote Kripke is referring to the 'Santa Clause' case and to the 'Madagascar' case both mentioned in *Naming and Necessity* (1980, pp. 93, 96-97, 163). His remarks about the 'Madagascar' case in the *addenda* are consistent with the theses above.

7 Evans does not use this case for critical purposes, but I do.

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