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On the Theory of Naming Predicates

Abstract: *The paper is intended as a critical reflection on the theoretical hypothesis put forward by Kleiber (1981) according to which the meaning of proper names is an abbreviation of the naming predicate to be named /N/(x). The author's approach falls into a cumulative perspective: the deceleration of the strong and weak points of the naming predicate theory is not intended as a rigid diagnosis of the argumentative force of the system proposed by Kleiber in 1981. On the contrary, it is an efficient manner of building the personal theoretical model, by tackling the problems retained and by identifying the pertinent research directions.*

The core thesis is that the naming predicate is not the meaning but the proper noun itself as a lexical item: it joins together, within a virtual non-empty open referential class, individual (or discrete) occurrences regarded as particular entities sharing the denominative feature to be named /N/(x), acquired by virtue of a particular name assignment convention. The meaning, as a principle generating the referential class, is not equivalent to the naming paraphrase to be named /N/(x), although the naming feature is part of the semantic content of proper names. The naming feature to be named /N/(x) is presupposed, not asserted, by the proper noun: it corresponds to the initial performative act of naming (I name you PN) and it is imposed as a condition of use for the name (the prior naming condition).

The meaning of proper names, defined an a ensemble of its conditions of use, contains three semantic presuppositions: the existential presupposition of the virtual non-empty open referential class of particular entities (accounting for their status of nominal predicates); the uniqueness presupposition of discrete referents (accounting for the particular entity ontological status of individual occurrences) and the prior naming presupposition (accounting for the establishment of the referential class). The first semantic presupposition brings the proper noun close to the categorematic individuating nouns class. The other two presuppositions set the proper noun apart from the common noun whose referents are never defined as particulars: they are not individually submitted to a prior naming act. For common nouns, the designation is achieved by a general naming convention. Contrarily, for proper nouns the designation requires, apart from the presence of a general convention, the prior existence of certain particular naming conventions.

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1. The merit of relaunching, from a unifying linguistic perspective, the debate on the semantic status of the proper names goes to the French linguist G. Kleiber (1981), whose reflections have become a reference model.

After demonstrating that both the theory of the semantic vacuity of proper names and the descriptivist one are inadequate, as they are not successful in eliminating the semantic (especially the problem of the linguistic status) and referential problems (observing meaning-reference subordination rule[1]), G. Kleiber proposes the analysis of the meaning of proper name in terms of predication, as an **abbreviation of the naming predicate *to be named /N/ (x).*** The semantic content of proper names is made up of an element shared by the entire category: the naming feature *to be named* and a differentiating element, /N/. Furthermore, contrary to the claims of J. Rey–Debove (1978: p.251-270), *to be named /N/* does not represent an "*autonymic connotation"*[2], but the denotative meaning of the proper name, as Kleiber shows that "*it is not a case of autonymy, since* to be named *doesn't have a metalinguistic status, and /N/ cannot be considered as an autonym to the proper name*" (op.cit: p.391), but it has the status of "*a linguistic sign whose signified is an homomorphic graphical or phonic sequence"* (op.cit:p.399).

2. We believe that Kleiber's theory has certain irrefutable advantages.

2.1. The solution allows for the marrying of two theoretical positions which might seem incompatible at first sight, namely the theory according to which the proper noun has a notional content with the theory that the proper noun does not describe the referent. This is due to the fact that the intension of the proper noun does not concern the intrinsic characteristics of the referent, which are to be illustrated by the common noun, but an extrinsic quality acquired through the designation process, i.e. that of *to be named /N/(x).* This was in fact illustrated in the significance of the Greek term *onoma kurion* (translated in Latin by *nomen proprium*): the authentic name, the name that truly names, a significance lost in the current interpretation (name that actually belongs to an individual). We might also consider, following the model proposed by E. Coşeriu (1962), that the proper noun is a "*second degree sign*", as compared to the common noun: the former denotes referents that may also be designated by a common noun, while the reference is established by virtue of a feature acquired by language, unlike the latter, for which the reference is established through the natural features of the referent. This does not involve an axiological criterion imposing a noun category on the other, but a ranking according to the immanent or acquired nature of the designated individual's properties. The proper noun primarily acts as a performative, in the

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[1] According to this Fregean rule, any expression which makes reference to a particular fact is certainly endowed with meaning.

[2] J. Rey–Debove talks about the "*autonymic connotation*" as the case when the connotator of a linguistic sign is its autonym, the latter being defined as a sign of a sign, a sign whose sense is another sign.

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sense that its association with an individual, by the act of social registration of a name, manages to ascribe to the referent a quality which shall be integrated in the set of the existing qualities defining its identity: the property of *to be named /N/(x)*.

The descriptive character of proper names thus distinguishes itself from the descriptive character al of common nouns by the particular type of description concerned. The description made available to the speaker by the meaning of proper names concerns the property of the referent being attributed a phonic sequence, which, in principle[3], agrees with this individual alone. The distinction at the level of phonemes must not be correlated nevertheless with distinction at the level of the inherent features of the individual, since they operate at non-equivalent levels. The only correlation is that between the phonic sequence concerned and the other phonic sequences occurring in the position of the /N/ element, in the structure of the naming feature *to be named /N/(x*), inside the linguistic category of proper names in a given language.[4]

Unlike the proper noun, the common noun describes the referent in terms of its intrinsic properties. This observation led several researchers to attribute proper names a non-descriptive character, as opposed to common nouns, considered as descriptive, and, furthermore, to argue for the semantic vacuity of proper names. But the distinction descriptive / non-descriptive doesn't apply to the entire description field, but to one of its segments: the natural description. Only in this respect is the dichotomy applicable. Beyond it, there applies the distinction between the denominative description, specific to the proper noun, and the natural description, characteristic of the common noun, as types of description of real facts by means of language, as indirect means of describing reality.

2.2. The analysis in predicative terms of proper names leads to an widening of the empiric range of data under consideration, the research being thus able to account for all the various constructions featuring proper names. The immediate consequences of the extension of the research subject appear at all levels of analysis (morphological, syntactic, pragmatic, semantic).

2.3. Kleiber's theory allows us to explain the cases where the proper noun no longer designates a particular individual. The distinction between the proper noun and the common noun is not expressed by the distinction between the singular and the general term, since the proper noun covers both sides of this logical– grammatical distinction, as it can appear both in a referential and in a non-referential position. The only difference between the proper and the common noun, from a logical– semantic perspective, concerns the nature of the predicates assigned to the referent: denominative (extrinsic) predicates – for the proper noun, inherent (intrinsic) predicates – for the common noun. Additionally, one notices a higher degree grad of independence of the proper noun, as concerns its compatibility with the other

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[3] As a consequence of maintaining the causal link of use of any proper name, there appears the impossibility for each individual to have a proper name different from the name of any other individual, since this would have led to overstraining of the speakers' conversational memory whose negative effects would have led to communication failure.

[4] cf. the Saussurean concept of *value.*

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logical predicates in the context, the lack of selectional restrictions being accounted for by this different character of the predicates assigned to the referent.

3. Kleiber's theory can nevertheless be criticized for showing a tendency to tackle the problems brought up by the semantic status of proper names exclusively from the perspective of discourse uses. Thus Kleiber's starting premise for *" justifying the pertinence of the hypothesis of abbreviating a naming predicate*" is *"the need for a predicative analysis of the proper noun"*(p.332). But its argument is based on the distinction between the use of proper names as singular terms defined or as general terms: *" Semantically there is no reason to distinguish the use of Jean as a singular term (cf. Jean dances) from its use as a general term (cf. A certain Jean came to see me)"*, but *" on the contrary there is, and it is the most important aspect, an undeniable semantic connection between the two uses of the form Jean* (...), *the common element being the naming predicate 'the individual named Jean'!* (loc. cit). Furthermore, *"a speaker can just as well use a predicative proper name, without obligatorily having the ability to use it as a singular term"* (op.cit:p.334).

The distinction between *singular (definite) term / general term* points to the referential or non-referential position which the proper noun may occupy in an utterance: it is a singular definite term when the speaker uses it to perform a unique definite reference act, while it is a general term if it performs a predication act. Kleiber then borrows from Burge (1973:429), the distinction between the unmodified proper noun (without determinants) and the modified proper noun (by determinants), which he correlates with the distinction singular definite term / general term: the use of the proper noun as a singular definite term corresponds to the unmodified proper noun, while the use as a general term corresponds to the modified proper noun. Thus it implicitly leads to postulating an interdependence relation between the type of act performed and the presence or absence of determinants. Furthermore, Kleiber considers that the unmodified proper noun is "*the abbreviation of the iota uniqueness operator and the naming predicate to be named /N/ (x), as, in the absence of the iota uniqueness operator, that is of the operator indicating that the object with such and such property is the only one exhibiting this property, it could not be associated with a particular absent individual"* (p.347). The difference between unmodified proper names and the modified ones consists in the fact that, although both are abbreviations of the naming predicate *to be named /N/(x)*, only the former also contain the *iota* uniqueness operator, since they point to a single particular fact.

4. It can be noticed that Kleiber's theory is constructed by successive reduction operations, which, for reasons to be presented in the following subchapters, we cannot take for granted.

4.1. An analysis of proper names exclusively from the perspective of discourse uses implies leaving out the aspects brought into play by proper names as units of the linguistic system, in the absence of an actual context, an unjustifiable fact especially as the theoretical hypotheses put forward concern the meaning of proper names, that is precisely their semantic features as lexical units. If we were to reduce proper names to their referential or non-referential role in an utterance alone, then the abbreviation of the naming predicate would be nothing more than the significance of proper names, not their meaning.

4.2. Assigning proper names to the two wide categories represented by the singular defined terms and the general terms, means considering only those proper names which, in a given utterance, have a referential position, with the aim of making a definite reference to a

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single precise particular entity or which occupy a non- referential/predicative position. Consequently, we inexplicably omit proper names which, while occupying a referential position, point to a plurality of referents or no precise referent, being dislocated.

We also point out the ambiguity of the phrase *general term*, which denotes either phrases used predicatively or lexical items applied to individual occurrences. In the latter use, general terms are contrasted to singular terms, which concern a single occurrence, such as *sky, sun, moon* etc. But it is an acknowledged fact that proper names, at linguistic level, are, on a par with common nouns, nominal predicates / general terms, that is lexical units applicable to a theoretically unlimited number of individual occurrences.

4.3. Assimilating the syntactic distinction between proper names without determinants and proper names with determinants to the discourse distinction between singular definite term / general term is not grounded, since not all unmodified proper names are singular definite terms and, vice-versa, not all modified proper names are general terms.

There are proper names without a determinant which are not used to perform an act of unique definite reference to a precise referent, as in (1):

(1) Mitică is the Bucharest citizen par excellence'.

where *Mitică* has a generic use and, furthermore, it is a dislocated proper name. Conversely, there are proper names with determinants used as general terms:

(2) He acts as if he were Michelangello.

Therefore, the presence or absence of determinants does not depend on the singular definite term or general term status of the proper noun.

4.4. Considering the proper noun as an abbreviation of the naming predicate *to be named /N/ (x)* leads to postulating an identity relation between proper names and the naming paraphrase *to be named /N/*. Thus, sentence (3) would be considered by Kleiber as equivalent to sentence (4):

(3) Andrei is drawing.

(4) The individual x named / Andrei / is drawing.

But the naming feature is semantically presupposed in (3), given the preliminary naming condition. It is one of the intrinsic properties of the proper noun and it governs any of its uses, to refer to a precise particular entity. In (4), on the contrary, it is asserted, not presupposed, as the naming paraphrase *the individual X named Y* or *the only X named Y* plays the part of a didactic designation: it asserts the existence of a stable naming connection between the individual X and the name Y, the truth value depending on the actual assignment of the property *to be named Y* to the individual X. For that reason, although we support the hypothesis of the proper noun as a nominal predicate joining together individual occurrences of the same type based on the property of having the same name, we do not however share Kleiber's opinion that proper names are abbreviations of the naming predicate and that, implicitly, their meaning is represented by the naming predicate. If by *meaning* we understand that which is conventionally linked to a linguistic expression, then the meaning of

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proper names is made up of all the semantic features whose function is to restrict their field of use. The meaning thus covers the use conditions of proper names, without thus becoming the use itself: to turn the meaning into a predicate is equivalent to accepting that it applies to individual occurrences joined together, by virtue of certain common properties. These in turn, as meaning, are predicates assigned to occurrences and so on, endlessly.

It is not the meaning, but the proper noun as a lexical item that is a nominal predicate assigned to individual occurrences forming the extension of the noun and individually verifying the intension. The meaning, as a principle generating the referential class, is not equivalent to the naming paraphrase *to be named /N/(x)*, although the naming feature belongs to the semantic content of proper names. We thus diverge from Kleiber (1981:p.385), for whom *"the naming predicate to be named /N/ is the only semantic content of proper names"*, the proof being the fact that "*the only possible linguistic paraphrase for a proper name corresponds to the entity (object or being) named N"*. In our opinion, the naming feature *to be named /N/* is a property presupposed (not asserted) to be acquired by virtual referents of the proper noun, by a naming act, which takes the form of a performative utterance of the type *I name you PN*. The name assignment is achieved by merely producing the performative utterance, which, as Austin(1968) stressed, is neither true nor false. It manages to act upon the extra-linguistic context, by introducing the naming property in the class of properties possessed by particular (virtual) entities, only to subsequently become the feature leading to the delimitation of the referential class. The preliminary naming becomes a condition of use for proper names: they designate only particular entities considered as having already been assigned the proper noun. It is for this reason that we argue for the introduction of a semantic naming presupposition in the semantic content of proper names, alongside the semantic existential presupposition of the virtual non-empty open referential class of particular entities. The potential referents of the proper noun (nominal predicate) must first of all meet the preliminary naming condition, by virtue of which they acquire the property of being bearers of the name, just as potential referents of common nouns must satisfy the condition of possessing the core properties forming the sense/ intension.

However, although both are nominal predicates/general terms, at the level of language, the proper noun and the common noun exhibit a series of distinctive features.

(i) The potential particular entities forming the extension of a proper name have the property of being bearers of the name, by virtue of the fact that they have been named this way: the naming feature is not an inherent property, but it is acquired through a speech act (the primary naming act). Contrarily, virtual referents of a common name possess the properties contained in the meaning of the name, by their nature, and not by virtue of the naming act. Thus, any (virtual) referent, in order to be considered an element of the extension of a proper name, must have previously been assigned the name concerned, but, in order to be included in the extension of a common name, it is by no means necessary for the particular entity to have already been assigned the common noun, but it must possess the properties retained on the establishment of the referential class designated by the common noun.

(ii) Both the proper noun and the common noun are coded units, but the social convention linking a proper name and a particular extra-linguistic segment presupposes the existence of a number of particular assigning conventions equal to the number of individual

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occurrences that make up the referential class. The direct ratio established between the number of particular conventions and the number of occurrences is imposed by the ontological status of the occurrences: they are conceptualised as unique particulars/ entities. Conversely, the social convention governing the stable referential relationship between a common name and a particular extra-linguistic segment designated does not impose any particular convention, since the occurrences are not regarded as unique.

The primary naming act whereby a referential category is assigned a linguistic sign, so that it be subsequently indirectly referred to by means of the sign, is also present both in the case of the proper noun and in that of the common noun. The primary naming has an arbitrary character, in a Saussurean sense, since the choice of the name to designate the referential category is totally independent of the intrinsic referential properties. But the manner of establishing the referential class is different: for the proper noun, the individual occurrences are regarded as particular entities possessing the naming feature *to be named /N/*, acquired by an *ad hoc* naming convention; for the common name – the occurrences are illustrated as non-unique entities possessing intrinsic properties of the same type.

The prior naming is a condition which, for proper names, regards both the referential class as a whole and its members individually, while for common nouns it regards only the class as a whole. If the existence of the primary naming act is presupposed to be reiterated for every individual occurrence to which the proper noun applies, the same is not true of the common noun, which is governed by a social/ general convention alone, not by particular naming conventions as well.

(iii) At the discourse level, we can refer to a particular entity, delimited in space and time, by a proper name only if the name used was actually assigned, while we can resort to a common name (obligatorily accompanied by determinants) without being constrained by the prior naming condition, since the common noun had never been assigned to the particular entity, based on any of its inherent properties. We are not additionally compelled to know if the common noun has been employed before to refer to the particular entity concerned. The success of the reference act is predicted, for proper names, by the meeting of the prior naming condition, and, for common nouns, by meeting the descriptive adequacy condition.

Therefore the hypothesis that we support is that both proper names and common nouns *name* the reality, since they have been assigned to certain extra-linguistic segments so as to form a constant referential connection thus allowing us by employing the names X to refer to the entities Y, about which it was established that they are designated by the (common/ proper) name X. It is for this reason that (common/ proper) nominal items are to be considered as coded units taking over the role of general terms / nominal predicates assigned to individual occurrences, either by virtue of a general convention (common nouns), or by adding, beyond general convention, certain particular conventions (proper names).

The prior existence of a primary naming act is necessary in order to name reality, since we cannot name objects by a noun, be it proper or common, unless the objects have been conventionally associated to these nouns, in order to function as substitutes for the objects.

If one and the same referent can be named by various common nouns, according to the selection performed among its inherent properties, the only ones responsible for its assignment to a referential class or another, it cannot be named by a proper noun, unless, as a unique particular entity/ referent, it has previously been named in such a way.

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The ontological status of the referents (their obligatory conceptualisation as particular entities) and the prior naming presupposition account for difference between sentences (5) and (6):

(5) *The place where flowers are sold is named a flower shop.*

(6) *The particular entity being assigned the name /N/ is called /N /.*

If a denominative utterance contains, in referential position, a phrase pointing to determined particular entities, as in (7) and (8):

(7) *This place is named a flower shop.*

(8) *a. This city is named Constanța.*

b. This man is named Bogdan.

we notice that the truth value of the sentences is governed by different criteria. The first sentence is true if and only if the referent exhibits the properties considered as forming the meaning of the common noun *flower shop*. The sentences under (8) are true if and only if the referent exhibits the property of being the bearer of the proper name, by virtue of a prior naming act of the type:

(9) *a. I name this town Constanța.*

b. I name this man Bogdan.

It is important to point out the fact that the former naming utterances are performative utterances (neither true nor false), while the latter naming utterances are observational: they describe a state of fact, which is true or false, by contrast either to the degree of descriptive adequacy of properties of the referent to the (conventional) meaning of the common noun, or to the degree of denominative adequacy, resulting from contrasting the denominative feature presupposed by the proper noun used to the name actually assigned to the particular entity, by performative naming.

4.5. Another respect in which we do not share Kleiber's (1981) opinion is the status of /N/ in the naming feature *to be named /N/*. Contrary to J. Rey-Debove's (1978) opinion, Kleiber (1981, 1984, 1994) manages to demonstrate that /N/ is not autonym, as, unlike common nouns, for which the naming relation has a metalinguistic character, for proper names the denomination is non-metalinguistic (conventional, ordinary): it does not concern the linguistic code, but a property acquired by the particular entity by speech.

But Kleiber considers that /N/ is not a proper name either, since, given the fact that its meaning is the naming predicate *to be named /N/(x)*, it would mean that */N/* be endlessly substituted by *to be named /N/(x)*. For that reason, the author opts for the solution *"a sign signifying the homomorphic phonic or graphical sequence*" (1981, 1984).

Or, if we take into account that any proper name contains a presupposition as to the existence of a prior naming act, which takes the form of a performative such as:

(10) *I name you /N/.*

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then /N/ in these primary structures can not be considered anything else but a proper name dislocated, assigned to a particular entity. But the naming feature *to be named /N/* corresponds precisely to this primary performative utterance and, for that reason, /N/ is to be considered as a displaced proper name. The circularity reproach is, from this perspective, unsubstantiated, given that the naming feature *to be named /N/* is presupposed, not asserted by the proper noun, unlike the naming paraphrase, which asserts the denominative relation, it does presuppose it. If /N/ were not a proper name, as claimed by Kleiber, it would mean that, in the didactic denomination (11):

(11) *His name is Ion.*

a) either *Ion* is neither a proper name nor autonym (being an ordinary denomination), but a sign signifying the homomorphic graphical/ phonic form, as in the performative denomination:

(12) *I name you Ion.*

In this case one should accept the existence of two homonymous lexical units: the proper noun *Ion* and the sign *Ion*, whose signified is its signifier itself, a mysterious sign obligatorily accompanying any proper name, since it must meet the prior naming condition, where the denominative utterance inevitably appears.

b) or *Ion* is a proper name and then it can be paraphrased (cf. Kleiber) by *to be named /N/*, thus leading to the utterances:

(13) **He is named the individual named /N/.*

**He is named is named /N/.*

** He is named I name you /N/.*

which utterances are unaccounted for and unacceptable.

We consider that, in the naming feature *to be named /N/*, as in the performative or didactic denominations, /N/ is a dislocated proper name and that *to be named /N/* is part of the meaning of the proper noun, without exhausting it, since the naming feature appears only as a result of the presupposition of existence of the prior naming, contained by any proper name.

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