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## Recognizing the Referent <sup>1</sup>

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**Resumen:** *En este artículo muestro que de una manera trivial, como defiende Glezakos, no hay puzzle. Sin embargo, este es el caso solamente cuando no se hacen suposiciones teóricas. Argumento que el puzzle puede formularse independientemente de la distinción sentido/referencia, tratando de responder a la pregunta teórica acerca de la relación entre el significado y los perfiles epistémicos de los enunciados de identidad. Contrariamente a Glezakos, defiendo que es posible vincular diferentes perfiles epistémicos a cada esquema de identidad. Como leo el puzzle, este puede ser un problema para aquellos que sostienen que el significado es explicado por la referencia y aceptan los dos esquemas de perfil epistémico.*

**Palabras claves:** *Sentido. Referencia. Perfil epistémico. Significado. Reconocimiento.*

**Abstract:** *In this article I show that in a trivial way, as Glezakos holds, there is no puzzle. However, this is the case only when no theoretical assumptions are made. I argue that the puzzle can be posed independently of the sense/reference distinction by trying to answer a theoretical question about the relation between the meaning and the epistemic profiles of identity statements. Contrary to Glezakos I claim that it is possible to attach different epistemic profiles to each identity schema. As I read the puzzle it may be a problem for those who hold that meaning is explained by reference and accept the epistemic profiles of the two schemas.*

**Key words:** *Sense. Reference. Epistemic profile. Meaning. Recognition.*

Stavroula Glezakos argues for a striking dilemma against Frege's puzzle: either there is no puzzle or the puzzle cannot be posed prior to and independently of any theoretical position about names because "It turns out that, in order to generate his puzzle, Frege must invoke that which he seeks to establish the purported necessity of: the theoretical account of *Sinn*" (2009, 202).

Glezakos' argument is based on the premise that we should tell what *determines* a name-containing identity sentence's form and, a neutral way to do it is by saying that a sentence has the form  $a=a$  when the same name flanks the identity sign, and  $a=b$  when distinct names flank the identity sign. Thus, sameness/difference of name is at issue. This issue is settled by assuming that sign/reference combination is a necessary condition for name individuation, but she later on imposes a condition of *recognition* of the name's referent in order to recognize a truth value for the identity statement. This recognition condition turns both schemas epistemic and semantically on a par and, since no difference between them emerges the puzzle dissolves. She then goes on to consider another way to determine sameness/difference of name: a difference of *sense* at least in part renders a difference of names. But she rightly points out that this way of settling the issue amounts to using the sense/reference distinction and it is not a legitimate move.

I will try to show that in a trivial way, as Glezakos holds, there is no puzzle when no theoretical assumptions are made. I argue that the puzzle can be posed independently of the sense/reference distinction by trying to answer a theoretical question about the relation between the meaning and the epistemic profiles<sup>2</sup> of identity

statements. Contrary to Glezakos I claim that it is possible to attach different epistemic profiles to each identity schema. As I read the puzzle it may be a problem for those who hold that meaning is explained by reference and accept the epistemic profiles of the two schemas.

Let's turn now to the way Glezakos presents the puzzle, she writes:

Frege maintained that two name-containing identity sentences, represented schematically as  $a=a$  and  $a=b$ , can both be made true by the same object's self-identity but nonetheless, differ in their epistemic profiles. According to Frege, sentences of the form  $a=a$  are knowable *a priori* and are uninformative; those of the form  $a=b$  are often informative, and cannot always be known to be true *a priori*. Frege solves his puzzlement by locating a source of this purported epistemic difference between the identity sentences: the distinct *Sinne*, or senses, expressed by the names that the sentences contain (2009, 202).

But stated this way we may wonder where is the puzzlement? Why is it puzzling that the identity statements differ in their epistemic profiles? The puzzle may be expressed by the following question: How can two true identity statements not differ in meaning but differ in cognitive value? This question is puzzling if we were to assume at least two things (a) that meaning is explained through reference, and (b) that we can grasp the sentence's meaning and its epistemic profile when it is *a priori*. With these assumptions in place we can say that both sentences mean the same but are not known in the same way *notwithstanding the same proposition can be grasped*.<sup>3</sup> Therefore a way to resolve the puzzlement is by making a difference in sentence's meaning to the effect of explaining why they are not known in the same way. Let me quote Frege at length on this issue, he says:

Equality gives rise to challenging questions which are not altogether easy to answer. Is it a relation? A relation between objects, or between names or signs of objects? In

my *Begriffsschrift* I assumed the later. The reasons which seem to favor this are the following:  $a=a$  and  $a=b$  are obviously statements of different cognitive value;  $a=a$  holds *a priori* and, according to Kant, it is to be labelled analytic, while statements of the form  $a=b$  often contain very valuable extensions of our knowledge and cannot always be established *a priori* [...]. Now if we are to regard equality as a relation between that which the names 'a' and 'b' designate, it would seem that  $a=b$  could not differ from  $a=a$  (i. e. provided that  $a=b$  is true). [...] If the sign 'a' is distinguished from the sign 'b' only as object (here, by means of its shape), not as a sign (i. e. not by the manner in which it designates something), the cognitive value of  $a=a$  becomes essentially equal to that of  $a=b$ , provided  $a=b$  is true. A difference can arise only if the difference between the signs corresponds to a difference in the mode of presentation of that which is designated (1892, 56-57).

I believe that the motivation for the sense/reference distinction can be stated in the following argument form:

1.  $a=a$  is *a priori* true and uninformative.
2.  $a=b$  is true and often informative and cannot always be known *a priori*.
3. Given 1) and 2) it follows that  $a=a$  often differs in cognitive value from  $a=b$ .
4.  $a=a$  means that the object is identical to itself.
5.  $a=b$  means that the object is identical to itself.
6. Given 4) and 5)  $a=a$  and  $a=b$  do not differ in meaning.

Therefore, from 3) and 6)  $a=a$  and  $a=b$  do not differ in meaning but differ in cognitive value.

These theoretical assumptions support the puzzling conclusion that both sentences mean the same but are not known in the same way *notwithstanding the same proposition can be grasped*. Notably, Glezakos claims that "[...] Frege portrayed himself as describing a puzzle that can be posed prior to and independently of any particular theoretical position regarding names [...]" (2009, 202). But this assertion is controversial because as Glezakos herself accepts, Frege poses the puzzle using identity

schemas instead of sentences, and those schemas belong to a theory: logic. Frege later on characterizes their epistemic profile as theoretically framed, at least since Kant, as Frege acknowledges. Thus, it is hard to say of Frege that he portrayed himself as describing a puzzle that can be posed prior and independently of *any* theoretical position about names. He had a position in his earlier work *Begriffsschrift*<sup>4</sup> where only reference provided an account of name's meaning and it is in his "On Sense and Reference" that he becomes aware of the fact that his former theory is not good enough to explain the difference in cognitive values of sentences of the forms  $a=a$  and  $a=b$  provided they are true. Consequently, I hold that the puzzle is not devoid of theoretical commitments, it requires some assumptions to be posed but not the sense/reference distinction, it only requires the claims (a) that meaning is explained through reference, (b) that we can grasp the sentence's meaning, and that (c)  $a=a$  cases are knowable *a priori* while  $a=b$  are not in general known *a priori*.

## 1. That the puzzle dissolves

Glezakos dissolves the puzzle by holding that if sign/reference combination is necessary to individuate a name and to determine the sentence's form, then in order to know the truth of each kind of sentence *we must be able to recognize* the referent of the name. In that sense both kind of sentences are epistemic and semantically on a par because in both cases meaning is exhausted by reference and recognition of reference is required even for  $a=a$  cases. Therefore there is no distinction between a sentence being known *a priori* and a sentence being known otherwise. In a nutshell this is Glezakos' argument against Frege's premises (1) and (2) and she holds it to be independent of any theoretical commitments. She says:

*Without making any theoretical commitments, we can say that a sentence has the form  $a=a$  when the same name flanks the identity sign, and  $a=b$  when distinct names*

*flank the identity sign (2009, 203. The emphasis is mine).*

*[...] if an identity sentence's form is determined by sameness or difference in the names that it contains, then there will be no in-principle epistemic divide between sentences of the form  $a=a$  and  $a=b$  (2009, 204).*

However, there seems to be a gap in explaining the previous implication: how does it follow a no in-principle divide between sentences of the form  $a=a$  and  $a=b$ ? Here is the missing link:

*[...] the ability to recognize that the name is the same seems to involve the ability to recognize that the referent is the same. If this is the case, then an identity sentence of the form  $a=a$  is not, in principle, recognizable as true in any way different from a true sentence of the form  $a=b$ . In both instances, once one knows that the referent is the same, one knows that the sentence is true. If one does *not* know this, then, whether the sentence is of the form  $a=a$  or  $a=b$ , one does not know (let alone know *a priori*) that the sentence is true (Glezakos, 2009, 205).*

To make her case she takes schema  $a=a$  that paradigmatically has been held to be knowable *a priori*, and claims that sentences of that form may not be known *a priori*: "It is clear that someone may encounter the same name twice and go on to deny the truth of an identity sentence containing only that single name" (Glezakos, 2009, 204). In support of her claim she cites Kripke's puzzle about belief in footnote 8. But this is a highly controversial claim. Is it true that "Paderewski=Paderewski" has got the form  $a=a$  in the belief attribution? According to the story Peter believes of a person named 'Paderewski' that he has musical talent and believes of a person also named 'Paderewski' that he doesn't have musical talent. Peter does not know that the name refers to the same person and hence does not know the truth of the sentence "Paderewski is Paderewski". He does not take the name to be the name of the same thing and, therefore by his lights, there is no sentence of the form  $a=a$ . Are we entitled to theoretically describe the case as one of the form  $a=a$ ? To settle the

question about what Peter believes we must first resolve the issue of the logical form of the belief in the subject's belief box and later on we can claim that he believes a statement of a given form. Strictly speaking, we are not entitled to say that he "denies the truth of an identity sentence containing only that single name" because he is not considering such a statement in the first place. "Paderewski is Paderewski" doesn't seem to be of  $a=a$  form in Peter's belief box. At this point it is worth noticing that I applied a distinction between what the semanticist may say and what in ordinary discourse could be said. The case is puzzling only to the semanticist who has theoretical commitments like those regarding logical form and meaning. It is misleading, at best, to say that the subject denies the truth of an identity sentence containing a single name. In addition to these reasons and in favor to the claim (c) that  $a=a$  cases are knowable *a priori* we should recall that Frege's argument is posed by using logical schemas instead of sentences and,  $a=a$  is a truth of logic. There are two issues that come apart, on the one hand the claim that  $a=a$  is an identity schema that is assumed to be true by default and on the other hand to find out which of the many natural language identity sentences can be translated as such. If I am right it still seems that Frege is able to maintain that schemas of the form  $a=a$  are uninformative and knowable to be true *a priori*.

Let me propose a last objection to the claim that *recognition* of reference is a necessary condition both to individuation of names and knowledge of the truth of the statement. Glezakos states her claim that there is no difference in epistemic profiles, as follows:

If one does *not* know this, [that the referent is the same, or believes the referents to be different] then, whether the sentence is of the form  $a=a$  or  $a=b$ , one does not know (let alone know *a priori*) that the sentence is true (2009, 205. The text between square brackets is mine).

The salient point here is her remark: "let alone know *a priori*". It is the key issue at stake because this is what makes the difference in

epistemic profiles. What has to happen to make both schemas equal regarding their conditions for knowledge? It is not in ordinary discourse that we call a piece of knowledge *a priori*, this qualification belongs to philosophy. Ordinarily it is quite clear that not everyone knows when an identity statement is true in the strong sense intended by Glezakos, that is to say, by recognizing the referent. Maybe God knows all true identity statements. But to say that  $a=a$  is known *a priori* is to say that it is *justified* without appeal to experience. If a distinction is drawn between knowledge acquisition and knowledge justification it trivially follows that all knowledge begins with experience, but this later claim cannot cancel the thesis that some knowledge can be justified *a priori*, that is to say, once it is acquired it is justified without support from experience.<sup>5</sup> We may come to know that a particular identity statement is true after empirical investigation, but could it really be the case that "Aristotle is Aristotle" *must* be known to be true by recognizing beforehand that the name 'Aristotle' refers to the same person in both occurrences? Aren't these standards too high? Wouldn't it suffice *to assume* that the name has a bearer and that the bearer is the same to know it to be true? Frege says:

If anything is asserted there is always an obvious presupposition that the simple or compound proper names used have a reference (1892, 69).

It is obvious that Glezakos is not willing to grant that, she wants to obliterate two distinctions: one for the statement's epistemic profiles and the other for the difference between acquisition and justification of knowledge by pointing to ordinary language and its use. And of course, a way to do it is by describing a case where these distinctions are not at issue; and there are certainly such cases. For instance, we don't need to know or employ the distinction between knowledge acquisition and justification when we perform an elementary addition in order to know whether the result is true or correct, neither in general do we need to recognize the bearer of the name in order to know that *if* the name refers, the

identity statement “Aristotle is Aristotle” is true, because it is usually the case that people take the name to be the same. They may be mistaken, of course, but this is not the kind of context that is relevant to raise the puzzle. It is well known that Frege was not concerned with theorizing about natural language,<sup>6</sup> but trying to produce a formal one where names are not ambiguous. In logic our claims to knowledge are conditional and we need not recognize the bearer of the name for  $a=a$  statements in order to understand them and to recognize that they are true. Statements of the form  $a=a$  and the form  $a=b$  occur in theoretical contexts where the requirements have to do with theoretical commitments. In Frege’s case, ‘ $a$ ’ and ‘ $b$ ’ are to be names and they must have a referent.<sup>7</sup> They may occur in an argument form where customarily premises are *assumed* to be true and the conclusion must follow from them. There’s a difference between knowing that the premises are true and assuming them to be true. It is the second case that matters to logic and to Frege’s semantics, therefore we are entitled to hold that in *that* context  $a=a$  is *assumed* to be true *a priori*.

The puzzlement then runs as follows. We need to assume that meaning is reference to reach to the conclusion that both schemas mean the same; assume that we can grasp the meaning, that  $a=a$  can be known to be true *a priori* while  $a=b$  in general is not known *a priori*, and reach to the conclusion that both sentences mean the same but are not known in the same way *notwithstanding the same proposition can be grasped*.

## 2. Conclusions

Central to the claim that there is no puzzle is the recognition condition used in order to identify the sign/referent combination and to determine a truth value for the sentence. But this condition goes against the practice in formal languages of assuming, for the sake of argument, that the name is not ambiguous, that it has a referent, and that the statement is true. It is under this practice or context that Frege poses his puzzlement. It is clear that only by imposing the requirement of recognition of the bearer

of the name all identity statements have the same conditions for knowledge. But this is not the context where the puzzle is meant to arise. We can certainly dissolve some philosophical puzzles by eliminating theoretical assumptions. For instance, in his famous paper “A Puzzle about belief” Kripke warns us:

But beware of one source of confusion. It is no solution in itself to observe that some *other* terminology, which evades the question whether Pierre believes that London is pretty, may be sufficient to state all the relevant facts. I am fully aware that complete and straightforward descriptions of the situation are possible and that in this sense there is no paradox (1979, 147).

A way to evade Frege’s puzzle is by describing the case under a daily common context where no theoretical assumptions are made. We can certainly hold that people make mistakes, we can say that they don’t know many true identity statements, that they take tokens of the same type name to refer to different bearers while they do, in fact, refer to the same one. We can evade the puzzling question of how two sentences mean the same but are not known in the same way *notwithstanding the same proposition can be grasped* by ignoring the relevant assumptions.

## Notes

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2. ‘Epistemic profile’ is Glezakos’ terminology. She does not explain its meaning but I take it to be the manner in which we gain knowledge. I am assuming that ‘epistemic profile’ is synonymous with Frege’s expression ‘cognitive value’.
3. I am aware of the fact that it is controversial to claim that the identity of meaning implies identity of epistemic profiles, but it seems to me that Frege holds that meaning is transparent to the subject and thereby knowledge of meaning

would also be transparent for him. For instance, in (1906, 197), Frege says: “Now two sentences *A* and *B* can stand in such a relation that anyone who recognizes the content of *A* as true must thereby also recognize the content of *B* as true and, conversely, that anyone who accepts the content of *B* must straightway accept that of *A*. (Equipollence). It is here being assumed that there is no difficulty in grasping the content of *A* and *B*. The sentences need not be equivalent in all respects. For instance, one may have a poetic aura, and this may be absent from the other. Such poetic aura will belong to the content of the sentence, but not to that which we accept as true or reject as false. [...] The poetic aura then or whatever distinguishes the content of *A* from that of *B*, does not belong to what is accepted as true; for if this were the case, then it could not be an immediate consequence of anyone’s accepting the content of *B* that he should accept that of *A*”.

4. In *Begriffsschrift* Frege claims that the *conceptual content* that matters to logic is reference and extension. He says of the sentences “the Greeks defeated the Persians in Platea” and “the Persians were defeated by the Greeks in Platea” that they have the same *conceptual content*: “[...] even if a slight difference of sense is discernible, the agreement in sense is preponderant. Now, I call the part of the content that is the same in both the *conceptual content*. Only this has significance for our symbolic language; we need therefore make no distinction between propositions that have the same conceptual content” (1879, 3).
5. I’m following Kant’s claim “But although all our knowledge begins *with* experience it does not follow that it arises *from* experience” (2007, BI, 2). On his part, Frege says in (1897, 2): “Although each judgement we make is causally conditioned, it is nevertheless not the case that all these causes are grounds that afford justification. There is an empirical tendency in philosophy which does not take sufficient heed of this distinction, and so, because our thinking takes its rise from experience, philosophy ends up by declaring all our knowledge to be empirical”.
6. Among the several hints supporting this claim we find Frege saying in (1892, 66): “[...] we shall not follow the grammatical categories strictly, but rather group together what is logically of the same kind” and later on in the same article (1892,

70) he says: “This arises from an imperfection of language, from which even the symbolic language of mathematical analysis is not altogether free; even there combinations of symbols can occur that seem to stand for something but have (at least so far) no reference, e. g. divergent infinite series. This can be avoided, e. g., by means of the special stipulation that divergent infinite series shall stand for the number 0. A logically perfect language (*Begriffsschrift*) should satisfy the conditions, that every expression grammatically well constructed as a proper name out of signs already introduced shall in fact designate an object, and no new sign shall be introduced as a proper name without being secured a reference. [...] It is therefore by no means unimportant to eliminate the source of these mistakes, at least in science, once and for all”.

7. That the notion of *name* is theoretical or logical is clear from these passages:

“What is intended to be said by  $a=b$  seems to be that the signs or names ‘*a*’ and ‘*b*’ designate the same thing. (Frege, 1892, 56) and later on the same article (1892, 57) he says: “It is clear from the context that by ‘sign’ and ‘name’ I have here understood any designation representing a proper name, which thus has as its reference a definite object (this word taken in the widest range), but not a concept or a relation, which shall be discussed further in another article”.

That names must have a referent is a proviso only when we are interested in logical calculus: “A logical perfect language (*Begriffsschrift*) should satisfy these conditions, that every expression grammatically well-constructed as a proper name out of signs already introduced shall in fact designate an object, and that no new sign shall be introduced as a proper name without being secured a reference” (Frege, 1892, 70).

“We must here keep well apart two wholly different cases that are easily confused, because we speak of existence in both cases. In one case the question is whether a proper name designates, names, something; in other whether a concept takes objects under itself. If we use the words ‘there is a ---’ we have the latter case. Now a proper name that designates nothing has no logical justification, since in logic we are concerned with truth in the strictest sense of the word; it may on the other hand still be used in fiction and fable” (Frege, 1895, 104).

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