

Kepa Korta (*)

A simple theory of proper names¹

Resumen: *En este ensayo abordo la siguiente pregunta formulada por Glezakos (aludiendo a Kaplan): ¿Qué determina la forma de un enunciado de identidad que contiene un nombre? Argumento que los usos de los nombres están determinados por los específicos nombres proferidos y la presencia (o ausencia) de las intenciones cocorreferenciales del hablante. Esto explica por qué, las preferencias de la forma $a=a$ son no informativas o cognoscibles a priori, de modo mucho más general que las preferencias de la forma $a=b$. Mi enfoque tiene el beneficio adicional de proveer una explicación de los nombres vacíos.*

Palabras claves: *Nombre propio. Identidad. A priori. Cocorreferencia.*

Abstract: *In this essay, I address the following question posed by Glezakos (after Kaplan): What determines the form of a name-containing identity statement? I argue that uses of names are determined by the specific names uttered and the presence (or absence) of coco-referential intentions of the speaker. This explains why utterances of the form $a=a$ are uninformative or knowable a priori, more generally than utterances of the form $a=b$. My approach has the additional benefit of providing an account of empty names.*

Key words: *Proper name. Identity. A priori. Coco-reference.*

Most, if not all, of the philosophy of language in one hundred-plus years of analytic tradition has rested on a mistake. In his seminal

essay “Über Sinn und Bedeutung”, Frege made a great mistake trying to pose a puzzle about the substitution of co-referential singular terms that cannot be posed without using his own notion of *Sinn*. Without the notion of *Sinn*, there is no puzzle. So, non-Fregeans make a mistake in thinking there is one. With the notion of *Sinn*, the puzzle is solved by the very notion that creates it; so Fregeans should not be puzzled either. This is the striking claim that Stavroula Glezakos puts forwards in her short and forceful essay “Can Frege pose Frege’s puzzle?”.

In this essay, I address the following question posed by Glezakos (after Kaplan): What determines the form of a name-containing identity statement? Glezakos’s answer is this:

If an identity sentence’s form is specifiable without appeal to something like the theoretical notion of sense, then Frege will not be able to maintain that sentences of the form $a=a$ are, in general, uninformative or knowable to be true a priori (at least no more than sentences of the form $a=b$). If, instead, sameness or difference in *Sinne*, expressed by the names in the sentence, is what determines an identity sentence’s form, then the puzzle fails to hold as a general puzzle; it arises only if we assume a role for the very sort of theoretical entities that Frege presents it as leading us to (2009, 203).²

Her positive argument seems the following one: In natural language, sentences of the form $a=a$ are not analytic or knowable a priori. The same name can be used for more than one thing. And, even when this isn’t so, a fully competent speaker of the language might not know it. So Frege’s problem about $a=a$ being a priori and

$a=b$ not doesn't get started. In either case, to know the truth, we need to know the referents and that they are identical. So the two are on a par.

Using Glezakos's terms, I would cast my own reply as follows: the form of an identity statement is specifiable without appeal to anything like the theoretical notion of sense and without the specification of any referent and, therefore, natural language sentences of the form $a=a$ are, *in general*, uninformative or knowable to be true a priori (at least *more so* than true sentences of the form $a=b$). Using my own terms, I argue that uses of names are determined by the specific names uttered and the presence (or absence) of *coco*-referential intentions of the speaker. This explains why utterances of the form $a=a$ are uninformative or knowable a priori, more generally than utterances of the form $a=b$. My approach has the additional benefit of providing an account of empty names.

As I see it, my view contradicts Glezakos's argument because posing the problem in non-Fregean referentialist terms, there is still a distinction to be made between utterances of the form $a=a$ and $a=b$ with different epistemic status, in general. But, I'm not completely certain. Glezakos's main point is negative: the epistemic status of natural language sentences of the forms $a=a$ and $a=b$ do not differ simply in virtue of their grammatical form. I supplement her point (possibly in a manner she would find unacceptable) by saying more about what is involved in what we might call *the same use* of the same name. We often assume this in conversation, even when we don't know to whom the uses of the name refer, and even when they don't refer to anything. This assumption is behind the intuitive force of the problem as Frege states it, so we won't fully understand why the problem seemed compelling until we understand what is involved in it.

My discussion, like Glezakos's, concerns natural language, but, unlike Glezakos, I discuss utterances of sentences containing names, i. e. statements and not just sentences. Sentences (names) by themselves do not have contents (referents), utterances do. A single sentence (name) can be uttered to express different propositions (to refer to different

individuals) and the speaker's intentions are relevant to determine the proposition expressed (the individual referred to). Moreover a single utterance has different contents determined by the sentence uttered and, in our case, conventions governing the use of proper names, the speaker's intentions, and other "extra-linguistic" or "causal-historical" facts. These assumptions are not made in Glezakos's discussion, but are not rejected either. I think we get an improved account by making them explicit.³ The issue remains open in that respect. I proceed to briefly explain my own view, starting with what I take to be some non-disputable facts.

1. Some facts

I am pretty sure that the following utterances (produced right now by me) are all true:⁴

- (1) Kepa Korta is Kepa Korta.
- (2) Kepa Korta is not Kepa Korta.
- (3) Kepa Korta is a lawyer.
- (4) Kepa Korta is not a lawyer.

Furthermore, I claim that

- (1) is necessarily true and knowable a priori;
- (2) is necessarily true and knowable a posteriori;
- both (3) and (4) are contingent and true a posteriori.

If you don't agree, just consider the following facts. First, concerning (1),

- (a1) (1) is the utterance of a sentence in English in which 'Kepa Korta' is a proper name for a person and 'is' is the 3rd person singular form of the verb 'to be' in the present tense.
- (b1) The speaker intends the second use of the name 'Kepa Korta' in (1) to *coco*-refer with the first use of "Kepa Korta" in (1).
- (c1) The first use of 'Kepa Korta' in (1) refers, via a *coco*-referential network of its uses to a person: me.

Given (a1), (b1), and (c1), (1) expresses a (singular) proposition, with me and the relation of identity as its constituents, to the effect that I am identical with myself. Thus, (1) is not only true, but necessarily so, and knowable a priori.

Consider (2) and the relevant corresponding facts about it:

- (a2) (2) is the utterance of a sentence in English in which 'Kepa Korta' is a proper name for a person, 'is' is the 3rd person singular form of the verb 'to be' in the present tense, and 'not' is negation.
- (b2) The speaker intends the second use of the name 'Kepa Korta' in (2) not to coco-refer with the first use of 'Kepa Korta' in (2).
- (c2) The first use of 'Kepa Korta' in (1) refers, via a *coco*-referential network of its uses to a person: me. The second use of 'Kepa Korta' in (2) refers, via a *coco*-referential network of its uses to a person: my cousin.

Given (a2), (b2), and (c2), (2) expresses a (singular) proposition, with me, my cousin, the relation of identity, and negation as its constituents. Thus, (2) is not only true, but necessarily so. It is knowable only a posteriori, however. To explain why, I need to add some simple facts about the use of proper names in natural language: proper names can be (and most often are) *coco*-referentially used and proper names are "nambiguous" (with an 'n'). But before doing that, let me tell you the facts about (3) and (4):

- (a3) (3) is the utterance of a sentence in English in which 'Kepa Korta' is a proper name for a person, 'is' is the 3rd person singular form of the verb 'to be' in the present tense, and 'a lawyer' designates the property of being a lawyer.
- (b3) The speaker intends the use of the name 'Kepa Korta' to *coco*-refer with certain previous uses of the name 'Kepa Korta'.
- (c3) The use of 'Kepa Korta' refers via *coco*-referential network of its uses to a person: my cousin, and he is a lawyer.
- (a4) (4) is the utterance of a sentence in English in which 'Kepa Korta' is a proper name for a person, 'is' is the 3rd person

singular form of the verb 'to be' in the present tense, 'not' is negation and 'a lawyer' designates the property of being a lawyer.

- (b4) The speaker intends his use of the name 'Kepa Korta' to *coco*-refer with certain previous uses of the name 'Kepa Korta'.
- (c4) The use of 'Kepa Korta' refers via *coco*-referential network of its uses to a person: me, and I'm not a lawyer.

The term 'a priori' means knowable without further empirical investigation, given the grammatical facts about the sentence. In the case of utterances, I am taking the relevant notion of apriority to be *given the grammatical facts about the utterance and the reference-relevant intentions of the speaker*. Thus, I agree with Glezakos that my utterances are not a priori *simply* given their grammatical form, while maintaining that they are in an important sense a priori, a sense that explains the intuitive force of Frege's example.

Now, a brief account.

2. An account

It is pretty obvious that our use of proper names in natural language for persons, cities, countries and the like is typically a sort of vicarious reference. Sometimes, we "baptize" people, pets, places or what have you in their presence and with possibly much information about them. By doing that, we make possible for other people to use that very same name to refer to that very same individual, initiating a chain, or better, a network of uses (with several possible branches and sub-branches), which supports a convention that allow you to use that name to refer to that individual. Sometimes we are name-givers. But most of the time we are not. We just use names exploiting previously existing names and conventions supported by previously existing networks, and we open new branches in the network.

It is quite obvious too that names have a special kind of ambiguity that Perry (2012a) calls 'nambiguity' (with an 'n'). Many individuals

can share a name. I chose quite an exceptional case with only two living people called ‘Kepa Korta’,⁵ but if you take just ‘Kepa’ the number increases. There are hundreds of ‘Kepa’s, but a single name. You could individuate names via their bearers and claim that in (2) we do not have two occurrences of a single name, but two homophonic but different names, as Kaplan 1990 assumes. This is not only counterintuitive but also has unacceptable consequences from a theoretical point of view. To identify the names in (1) and (2) as the same or as different, identification of the referents would be required, and, as Glezakos points out, that would dissolve the whole issue: understanding the utterance would automatically involve determining it as true or false.

And, finally, it is also a well-known fact that in natural language there are empty names: names that designate nothing. As in Donnellan’s story about Jacob Horn, there is a name, there is a network of uses of that name, but back in the earliest part of the network there is a block, in this case a hoax. We have no named object (Donnellan 1974, Perry 2012b). Or, perhaps, the name is used in a novel as the name for a fictional character like “Dr Watson”. It might be unclear whether fictional names have referents or what kind of reference they have.

What is clear is that in the case of empty names, and fictional names on any reasonable account, there is a phenomenon of using them in the same way that does not require their having the same referent. This phenomenon is what Korta and Perry (2011, Ch. 7) call *coco-reference* (see also Perry 2012b).

Conditional co-referring or *coco-referring* happens when the speaker intends the utterance *u*’ of a singular term to refer to the same thing as an earlier utterance *u* of a singular term referred to, if there is anything it referred to (and to refer to nothing, if it referred to nothing).

Take an utterance of the following sentence:

(5) Sherlock played his violin.

In determining the proposition expressed by the speaker, and hence its truth or falsity, it is necessary to know whether the pronoun ‘his’ is *anaphorically* linked to its *antecedent*

‘Sherlock’ or it is free. Depending on your favorite grammatical theory, you can say that the sentential form is ambiguous between two different sentences like (5a) and (5b) or you can say that the sentence is underdetermined as to the presence of the link between ‘his’ and ‘Sherlock’.

- (5a) Sherlock_{*i*} played his_{*i*} violin.
- (5b) Sherlock_{*i*} played his_{*j*} violin.

One way or the other, the speaker’s intention is determinant. The fact that determines whether (5)’s form is (5a) or (5b) is the speaker’s intention. If the speaker intends her utterance of ‘his’ to refer to whomever her utterance of ‘Sherlock’ refers to, if it refers at all, then you have (5a). If not, you have (5b). (5a) is a case of *anaphoric coco-reference*.

In this sense, (1) is similar to (5). Fact (a1), the fact that it is an utterance of an identity sentence using the same name twice, leaves open whether its form is (1a) or, instead, (1b).

- (1a) Kepa Korta_{*i*} is Kepa Korta_{*i*}.
- (1b) Kepa Korta_{*i*} is Kepa Korta_{*j*}.

It is fact (b1) which settles the issue, a fact about my intentions as a speaker. I do intend my second use to *coco-refer* with my first use of ‘Kepa Korta’. And these are all the relevant facts to determine that my utterance (1) is true. All these facts concern linguistic knowledge, including facts about how proper names refer, if they refer, and how *coco-referring* works. This is, arguably, knowledge that any fully competent user of the language has. No extralinguistic knowledge about the referent (me? my cousin? nobody? a fictional character?) is needed to determine that (1a) is true. That’s why my utterance (1) is true a priori.

We don’t have to assume that there is a referent. Thus, if *coco-referential* intentions are present utterances of “Sherlock is Sherlock” and “Jacob Horn is Jacob Horn” are also true a priori.

As for (2), the utterance is equally ambiguous or underdetermined. Fact (b2) determines that its form is:

(2b) Kepa Korta_{*i*} is not Kepa Korta_{*j*}.

Since the first use does not coco-refer with the second, it is facts about their particular coco-referential networks, i. e. (c2), which determine its truth. These facts concern whether they share any coco-referential network, whether up in their network branches they have a referent or not, and, if they do, whether the referents happen to be one and the same. Information concerning me and my cousin that go beyond linguistic knowledge is needed. The two occurrences of the name refer, but they do not coco-refer, and they do not co-refer either. It is true a posteriori.

In translating natural language sentences into, say, the predicate calculus (or, better, free logic, to allow for individual constants with no referents), we need to take account of speaker intentions, to determine whether the same individual constant should be used to translate different occurrences of the same name. Thus, I contend that an utterance with the grammatical form $N=N$ is ambiguous in the sense that the logical form of such translation might be $a_i=a_i$ or $a_i=a_j$, where the subscripted expressions are individual constants. If the former, *same-name* coco-reference is present and the utterance is true a priori. If the latter, its truth or falsity is, in general, only knowable a posteriori.

Take Kripke's (1979) Paderewski example. In:

(6) Paderewski is Paderewski,

the first and crucial fact is about the speaker's intentions. In this case, I take it that the form of the statement is:

- (6a) Paderewski_i is Paderewski_j.

That is, the speaker does not intend the second use of 'Paderewski' to coco-refer with its first use. So the truth or falsity of the utterance requires information about the coco-referential network of the first use that takes its bearer to be a pianist and the coco-referential network of the second that takes him to be a statesman and that, eventually, converge, getting a referent that is one and the same. The two occurrences of the name refer, and they do co-refer, even if they don't coco-refer. Hence, (6), interpreted as (6a), is true, but a posteriori. Its truth requires facts

about coco-referential networks that converge on one and the same referent. Thus, I agree with Glezakos when she says that:

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, or that may learn only after empirical investigation that an identity sentence containing that single name twice is indeed true (204).

I would talk about utterances and not sentences. Otherwise, I agree, and I would add: If someone, hearing this utterance, thinks that the names do coco-refer, she is misunderstanding the utterance. On the other hand, if she understands that the two names do not coco-refer, the judgment about its truth involves empirical knowledge about coco-referential networks and their referents.⁶

Glezakos adds:

Given such denials, we must conclude that sentences of the form $a=a$ are not always knowable a priori (204, fn. 9).

I agree again. They are knowable a priori only when the names are coco-referential. And when the form of the utterance is $a=b$, i. e. when two different names are involved, things are different. There can be cases of coco-reference, that is, cases in which a use of a proper name is intended to refer to whatever another use of another proper name refers to, if anything.⁷ Perhaps the clearest cases are when some one is re-baptized or gets a new name. Taking again a familiar example, my cousin and I were named after my father, his godfather, 'Pedro Corta', and that was also our official name (his family name coming from his father, of course).⁸ At some point after Franco's death, Basque names and Basque orthography were legalized, and I changed my name in the official registry. We can imagine the registrar claiming:

(7) Pedro Corta is Kepa Korta.

Or, for a more radical (and less familiar) case, take the first time that the relevant person said:

(8) Classius Clay is Muhammad Ali.

Those two utterances can be taken as cases of (convergent) coco-reference that were knowable a priori, very much like Kripke's (1980, 54) "Stick S is one meter long".

In general, however, utterances of identity sentences containing two different names involve different (parts of) networks that may or may not refer to one and the same thing, and whose truth is empirically determined, via their respective coco-referential networks.

3. Conclusion

Glezakos claims:

In a framework in which *Sinne* are not invoked as name-individuators, it seems that identification of the referent will be necessary for identification of the name; and thus, all true identity sentences will be on an epistemic par (206).

My framework does not invoke *Sinne* as name-individuators. Yet no identification of the referent is needed for identification of the name. In (1), identifying me or my cousin as the referent is not required. It is one and the same name, used in the same way, as part of the same network. You just have to identify it as a name and determine the presence or absence of same-name coco-referential intentions. This is necessary to understand the utterance.

From the point of view of the speaker that's easy. She knows about her coco-referential intentions. From the hearer's point of view, it requires recognition of the speaker's intentions, just as in any other utterance. As Fine puts it:

Suppose you say 'Cicero is an orator' and later say 'Cicero was honest', intending to make the very same use of the name 'Cicero.' Then anyone who raises the question of whether the reference was the same would thereby betray his lack of understanding of what you meant (2007, 40).⁹

So, identification of the referent is not needed, just understanding the utterance correctly, i. e. determining the presence of coco-reference or not. No identification of any network is needed, just that one and the same network is involved. And this information is available once one identifies the sentence uttered and the coco-referential intention. If the utterance has the form $a_i = a_i$, no more information is needed to determine that it is true. When both occurrences of the name are in the same sentence by the same speaker, the default assumption is that the same network is being exploited. It is this assumption that accounts for the intuitive force of Frege's problem.

Notes

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2. All references to Glezakos are to her 2009 paper under discussion.
3. For the sake of brevity, however, I avoid detailing the various kinds of contents of the utterance or a proper account of networks, notions and files. See Donnellan (1974), Korta and Perry (2011) and Perry (2012a), (2012b) for the account of networks I favor. See Perry (1980), (2012a) and Recanati (2012), for an account of notions and files.
4. I apologize for using my own name in the examples, but that was the simplest way of stating "non-disputable" facts about a particular name —I always get confused with 'Hesperus' and 'Phosphorus' or 'Everest' and 'Gaurisanker'.
5. As far as I and google can tell.
6. This is probably behind Frege's remark about "different languages" in the Lauben case (Glezakos, 206). In translating the sentences to logical notation, Herbert Garner and Leo Peter would use different individual constants, hence different languages.
7. Korta and Perry (2011, 78) call these cases cases of "convergent coco-reference".

8. As far as I know, nothing bad happened to my father, my cousin or me for sharing the initials PC with an illegal political party at the time.
9. See also Perry (1980), (2012a), (2012b), and Recanati (2012). What we call ‘coco-reference’ seems close to what now is often called ‘*de iure* co-reference’.

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