

What's in a name?

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It's an age-old question in the philosophy of language: are proper names rigid designators or covert definite descriptions? I propose that the answer is "yes (a bit of both)". The informative contexts are not the usual ones involving naming and referring, but rather those requiring more complex linguistic interactions: ellipsis, intonation, discourse-mediated quantification and anaphora, and expressive content. Particularly revealing are circumstances in which the descriptive aspect of a name allows it to pick out different individuals even within overlapping worlds and times. Building on results found deep inside the footnotes of Bargunedytts (1991/1997/2001/2003, ch. 47), I argue that the data support a view on which proper names have complex inner structure.

Reference

Bargunedytts, Chris. 1991/1997/2001/2003. His brother is so damn tall?! A study of possessive expressive comparative declaratives. PhD thesis, UC Santa Cruz.