

Defending predicativism: Lessons from *Barbie*

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Much contemporary work on the semantics of proper names falls into one of two camps. The first, known as referentialism, considers names to be rigid individual-denoting expressions (Mill 1843, Marcus 1961, Kripke 1972). The second, known as predicativism, considers names to be property-denoting expressions that come to refer to individuals through a grammatical process (Sloat 1969, Burge 1973, Bach 1981, Geurts 1997). In this paper, I provide novel evidence for *the*-predicativism, or the proposal that bare names are introduced by a phonologically null definite article (Elbourne 2005; Matushansky 2006, 2008; Izumi 2012; Fara 2015). According to *the*-predicativism, the sentence in (1a) has the logical form in (1b).

- (1) a. Barbie and Ken had a dance-off. b. [~~the~~ Barbie and ~~the~~ Ken had a dance-off]

The notion that bare names are covert definite descriptions has generated intense debate in the literature, much of which is resolved by the unique state of affairs in the 2023 film *Barbie*.

In Barbie Land, one of the major settings in the film, most residents are named “Barbie” or “Ken”. Although descriptive material is sometimes added to these names to disambiguate one Barbie or Ken from another, as in *President Barbie* and *Beach Ken*, the residents do not use this material when addressing one another. In terms of physical appearance, there is no trait that is common to all Barbies or Kens beyond a generic notion of femaleness or maleness, respectively. As such, these names cannot be argued to express “content” in a way that other names do not.

If it is part of the common ground that dance-offs regularly happen between Barbies and Kens, the name *Barbie* can take narrow as well as wide scope with respect to the generalized quantifier *every dance-off* (\forall), the modal *may* (\diamond), and the propositional attitude verb *believe* (V). That is, *Barbie* in (2–4a) behaves like the definite description *the female contestant* in (2–4b) in that both can be satisfied by the same individual or different individuals depending on the reading.

- (2) a. In every dance-off, Barbie won. $b > \forall$ or $\forall > b$
b. In every dance-off, the female contestant won. $i > \forall$ or $\forall > i$
- (3) a. In the next dance-off, Barbie may win. $b > \diamond$ or $\diamond > b$
b. In the next dance-off, the female contestant may win. $i > \diamond$ or $\diamond > i$
- (4) a. I believe that Barbie will win the next dance-off. $b > V$ or $V > b$
b. I believe that the female contestant will win the next dance-off. $i > V$ or $V > i$

The fact that bare names exhibit the same semantic behaviour as definite descriptions undermines referentialism, which incorrectly predicts that bare names should only ever be able to take wide scope.

Another environment that has been argued to differentiate names from nouns is *one*-anaphora (King 2006, Hawthorne & Manley 2012, Gray 2018). Assuming the same common ground as before, where dance-offs are understood to take place between Barbies and Kens, *Ken* in (5a) fares as well as *the male contestant* in (5b) in licensing anaphoric *one*.

- (5) a. When Ken_i did not show up for the dance-off, a different one_i took his place.
b. When the male contestant_i did not show up for the dance-off, a different one_i took his place.

These types of examples further challenge the referentialist view that bare names are rigid designators.

To account for the absence of the definite article with names, I follow Matushansky (2006) in attributing this phenomenon to fusion of D and *n* with a [NAME] feature, as shown in (6).

- (6) [DP D \emptyset [_{NP} *n*_[NAME] *Barbie*]] \rightarrow [DP D+*n*_[NAME] *Barbie*]

In languages like Greek that require the use of the definite article with names, fusion does not take place, and in languages like Mandarin that lack articles, name NPs are covertly type-shifted by the iota operator. Finally, in languages that optionally use the definite article with names, fusion can be overridden for pragmatic effects like familiarity or disdain, justifying the violation of economy.

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