The efficacy of names

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Abstract

The semantic and pragmatic architecture of names is examined in the light of ideas from the likes of Mill, Frege, Kripke, Kaplan, Recanati, cross-cultural naming practices, and the functions of alternative names (nicknames, pseudonyms, slurs, and identity labels). The distinction between proper and common names is reevaluated with emphasis on the way context and encyclopedic knowledge shape meaning of both common and proper names. Using the lexicographic model posited in Allan 2024a; 2026, both common and proper names are shown to have semantic content and each makes recourse to encyclopedic data. Names (both common and proper) prove to be efficacious because their chosen form is normally motivated by features of identity, ideology, and/or sociocultural history, albeit subject to phonological, graphological, semantic, and sociocultural constraints.

Keywords: connotation, encyclopedic knowledge, indexicality, metaphor, motivation, naming practices, semantic content

1. Being efficacious

A name is efficacious if it functions to effectively and appropriately identify the denotation, i.e. the name's potential reference.[1] This is sometimes achieved through mimicry, though very few names are directly representational. Mimicry, however, is not limited to sound symbolism, because transferred names and semantic extensions are also a type of cognitive (as well as formal) mimicry. Names are efficacious if they serve to identify recognizable properties of the denotation such as the gender of a person, or a place or topographical feature. A name is also efficacious if it serves the illocutionary intention to glorify or denigrate the denotation and/or alternatively elevate or self-debase the name-user.

Allegedly, names are arbitrary (Saussure 1931: 100f; Whitney 1875: 19): if you invent a widget, adopt a new pet, give birth to a baby you can (supposedly) use any phonic cum graphic form as its name. In fact, whenever it can be determined, a name is always motivated. However, there are constraints on its form: a name in language *l* must (a) conform with the

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[1] Its reference is what a speaker/writer/signer uses the name to identify when uttering the name (Allan 2018). The denotation is what Kaplan 1989 calls 'character' and reference is Kaplan's 'content'.

phonology of *l* and (b) not violate the laws and social conventions of the community of *l*-speakers, though sometimes there is deliberate violation of societal norms – always motivated. Judgments about the appropriateness of a name are judgments of semantic and pragmatic acceptability arising from the connotations of the name. The connotations arise from encyclopedic knowledge about its denotation and/or reference which encompass personal and societal experiences, beliefs, and prejudices about the contexts in which the name is typically used (Allan 2007).

That names are efficacious is compatible with, and perhaps explains, the ubiquity of metaphor in language (Lakoff and Johnson 1980; Gibbs and Steen 1999; Kövecses 2005; Kövecses and Benczes 2010). Metaphor is where one conceptual domain is named after an established familiar domain: e.g. LANGUAGE IS A CONDUIT (*I'm not getting through to you; I don't know where he's coming from when he says that; I'm not across his meaning*); LIFE IS A JOURNEY (*she's going places; she's where she wants to be in life; she's lost her way; she's at a crossroads*). Newly encountered entities are named after familiar ones: place names get transferred from the homeland to a new colony (*London* UK to *London* CA, *London* OH, *New London* CT, NH); flora and fauna that look similar to what is already known get dubbed with the familiar name from back home (the Australian *magpie* (*Gymnorhina tibicen*), is a black and white bird from the family Artamidae similar in appearance to the black and white European *magpie* (*Pica pica*) from the family Corvidae); inventions get named after something similar that already exists. For example, brassieres were invented in the nineteenth century; to function effectively, its intrinsic the bra cup was necessarily a hollow hemispheroid like the drinking vessel we call a *cup* (see (17)). The name *cup* was motivated by its function as container and cover in a certain configuration. Witness the similarly motivated metaphorical extensions for the bra cup in other languages: Dutch *kopje* [beha] (diminutive of *kop*) "cup", Italian *coppa* [del reggiseno, cf. *coppa di gelato*] "bowl/cup/tub", similarly Turkish *kup* [bedeni], Spanish *copa* "drinking vessel/glass", Polish [rozmiar] *miseczk* is a diminutive of *miska* "bowl", Turkish *kap* [sütyen] "container", German *Körbchen* (diminutive of *Korb*), Czech *košíček* (diminutive of *koš*), and Hungarian *kosár* all otherwise mean "basket". French *bonnet* [de soutien-gorge] "cap". All these metaphors are motivated by the configuration, function, and even location of the concept represented in English by [bra] *cup*. Additional extensions of the common name *cup* include the cup-shaped structure of hardened bracts at the base of an acorn and certain sporting events in which the winner is presented with a cup-like trophy (the *Melbourne Cup* is an annual horse-race; in

2023 the 'cup' was an 8-carat solid gold trophy weighing 1.69kg). All are efficacious names derived from semantic extensions.

Arguing for the efficacy of names is not to adopt the view of Plato's Cratylus in the eponymous dialogue of c. 385 BCE (Plato 1997). *Cratylus* compares the merits of naturalism (*phusis*) versus conventionalism (*nomos* or *sunthēkē*) in naming.[2] Plato's mouthpiece Socrates, who does most of the talking, first argues for the naturalist hypothesis against the conventionalist Hermogenes (*Cratylus* 385-427). For instance, dismissing sound symbolism which is language specific and conventional, not natural (Hinton, Nichols and Ohala 1994). Onomatopoeic words supposedly mimic natural sounds, but differ from language to language always subject to the phonological conventions of the language in which they occur: compare English *cock-a-doodle-doo*, French *cocorico*, German *kikeriki*, Japanese *kokekokko*; and English *clang* with Tzeltal *ċan*, English *chip* with Tzeltal *ċehp, screech* with *kiċ*. Languages have phonesthetic networks which also differ from language to language: e.g. the English words *flail, flame, flap, flare, flash, flay, flee, flick, fling, flit, flood, flop, flounce, flourish, flush, fly* share the common consonantal onset 'fl–' and all suggest sudden or violent movement; *bash, clash, crash, dash, flash, gash, lash, mash, slash, smash, thrash* have the common rhyme '–ash' and all involve violent impact: but neither *fl–* nor *–ash* are systematic morphemes of English (Allan 2001: 132-140). In the second part of *Cratylus* (428-440), Socrates refutes naturalism: the forms of words do not capture the essence of their denotation such that meaning is interpreted directly from form. As Plato wrote in *Letter VII*:

> There is nothing to stop things which are at present called *round* being called *straight,* and vice versa; and their stability would be in no way impaired if everyone made this transposition. (343b)

So, the argument for the efficacy of names does not adopt the naturalist hypothesis.

The vast majority of names discussed in this essay are nominals. However, the other open-class categories – verbs, adjectives, adverbs – also name their content, though only a couple of verbs are considered here and research needs to be extended. Furthermore, although

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[2] Plato's purpose was to question whether it is valid to study the natural world through discussion of the language denoting things in the world. Were the naturalist hypothesis correct, then a name would reveal the essence of its denotatum, so that the study of language would be as valid in the quest for knowledge about the natural world as a study of the world itself; on the other hand, if the conventionalist hypothesis is correct, then talking about the world cannot replace studying it directly through the physical sciences. Hence the Royal Society motto *Nullius in verba*.

cultures beyond the Anglosphere are mentioned from time to time, they are not examined in any detail. On the slim evidence available there is a universal propensity for names to be efficacious, but in this essay the evidence is largely restricted to English. §2 compares the properties of proper and common names. §3 examines the various motivations for particular names. §4 investigates the functions of alternative names. §5 evaluates the checklist account of proper names favored by Frege and Russell with the direct reference account favored by Mill and Kripke and in the light of both hypotheses presents a lexicographic comparison of the proper name *Aristotle* and the common name *cup* which identifies the relevance of each philosophical account and demonstrates the many properties share by common and proper names. §6 offers some additional evidence for the similarity between proper and common names. §7 summarizes the essay.

2. Proper names vs common names

There is a traditional distinction between 'proper names' – which identify a unique individual (such as *Aristotle*) – from 'common names' (such as *gold, cup, democracy*) which identify a natural kind or a non-natural class of entities (cf. Kripke 1972). Nevertheless, we shall see that proper and common names share many properties (Allan 2024b).

Often, proper names refer to a 'particular', a real, mythical, or fictional individual: *Homer, Hitler, Elizabeth Taylor, Alfred the Great, the Virgin Mary, God, Santa Claus, Hercule Poirot*; pet animals such as *Lassie, Toto, Gromit, Trigger, Black Beauty, Phar Lap*; places and topological features, *Brooklyn, the Bronx, Mexico City, the City of London, Ayers Rock, I-40, the Pacific Ocean, the Eiffel Tower*. Proper names for constellations, mountain ranges, businesses, institutions, radio stations, pop groups, orchestras, acting companies, and the like refer to collections whose members share some common property: *the Milky Way, the Himalayas, the Bodleian, Pink Floyd, the Grateful Dead, the Hopi, the Mafia, Zabar's, Factory-2-U, Oxford University Press* [the publishers]*, General Motors*. Others name events like wars and epidemics, *World War II, COVID-19*; artefacts such as *the Mayflower, the OED, WordPerfect, Tampax, Picasso's 'Les Demoiselles d'Avignon'*; newly discovered and cultivated biological phenomena; computer files, books, newspapers, films, TV shows, along with manufactured products of all kinds.

John Locke 1700 III.iii.2 pointed out that it would be 'beyond the power of human capacity' (not efficacious) to expect everything to be given a proper name. Peter Strawson 1974: 36 recognized circumstances where there is a need for a name that consistently identifies a 'particular' and Robin Jeshion 2009: 374 develops this into a

Significance Guides Naming Principle: An agent can name an individual only if she accords intrinsic or relational significance to that individual.

She further refines this to accord with the fact that proper names are not constrained to individuals but to singular concepts (e.g. *the Himalayas* constitutes a singular concept):

In recognizing that a speaker has used a proper name 'N', a hearer knows that 'N' is a referring expression (that 'N' has a bearer). So, because being a referring expression (having a bearer) is psychologically associated with singular thinking about those bearers, the hearer forms a singular thought about the name's bearer. (Jeshion 2009: 399)

This identifies the efficacious condition for assigning a proper name.

The Ford Motor Company is a proper name, but *a Ford* (car) is not. An initial capital letter is no guarantee. There are names 'like *Chevrolet* that are usually capitalized, some like *Roman* that are often capitalized, some like *devil* that are occasionally capitalized, and some like *first base* that are rarely capitalized' (Algeo 1973: 17). One difference between proper and common names is demonstrated in the comparison of non-indexicals in (1)–(3) with indexicals (Pelczar and Rainsbury 1998; Recanati 1993; 2013) in (4)–(6).

(1)   There are three Fords in my yard.
(2)   In my yard there are three cars of the same kind/make: they are Fords.
(3)   In my garage there are three cars with the same name: Ford.

(1) means the same as (2), which explicitly classifies the reference. The most probable interpretation of (3) is also (2). People sometimes attribute a pet-name to their car and (3) could, in such a circumstance, mean that each car was attributed the same indexical *Ford*, in which case it is feasible that one car could be a BMW, another a Hyundai, and a third a Toyota – all non-indexicals.[3] Note that in this unlikely and confusing circumstance, (3) has a different meaning from (2) and (1) would be comparable with (4) as well as (6).

Indexical proper names don't work the same way:

(4)   There are three Sarahs in my class.
(5)   *In my class there are three girls of the same kind/make: they are Sarahs.
(6)   In my class there are three girls with the same name: Sarah.

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3   Norma Tanega (1939-2019) named her cat (non-indexical) 'Dog' (indexical). The flouting of linguistic efficacy was to protest that her New York City apartment building sanctioned cats but not dogs. Her 'Walkin' my cat named Dog' (https://youtu.be/06djV1MTHjg) contains the logically provocative line 'Dog is a good old cat'. (Can you walk a cat like you'd walk a dog?)

(4) means the same as (6) but not the would-be classificatory (5). In (2), there is a class of objects with certain common characteristics that identify them as Fords (*all Fords are Fords*), and a subset of these characteristics is not shared with other car marques. Although most probably all Sarahs are female, most females are not Sarahs. There is no defining characteristic of all things called *Sarah* that will systematically distinguish them from all things called *Mary* except that they bear a different name. The form of the proper name marks the difference. It follows that something can unproblematically bear both names without being a hybrid; furthermore, *Mary Sarah* is a name distinct from *Sarah Mary*. Proper names are often shared by different name-bearers, so there must be a stock of proper names located in the lexicon, along with common names. A lexicon is a bin for storing the meanings of those language expressions whose meaning is not determinable from the meanings, if any, of its constituents.

Another difference between proper and common names is that the former have a simpler semantic content. John Stuart Mill (1806-1873) thought that proper names have 'strictly speaking, no signification' i.e. no semantic content (Mill 1843: I.2.5). As proven from (7)–(12), that cannot be correct: the statements in (7)–(8) are anomalous whereas those in (9)–(12) are not.

(7)   *John washed herself.
(8)   *Mary washed himself.
(9)   John washed himself.
(10) Mary washed herself.
(11) Robin washed himself.
(12) Robin washed herself.

The gender of the pronoun is normally determined by attributes of the referent. The anomaly of (7) and (8) derives directly from semantic incompatibility of the proper name and its clause-mate reflexive pronoun, and indirectly from the fact that whereas the typical denotatum of *John* is male and the name is therefore of masculine gender, *Mary* typically denotes a female and is feminine. *Robin* is androgenous – it may standardly denote either a male or a female – and so is semantically compatible with a pronoun of either gender. There are quite general gender constraints on names. (13) is anomalous; and whereas (14) normally means Mary has given birth, (15) means that John's female partner has given birth because a male cannot.

(13) *Richard is lactating.

(14)   Mary's just had a baby.

(15)   John's just had a baby.

The most significant semantic characteristic of a personal proper name is that it identifies the gender of the name-bearer (Searle 1958). As noted in respect of (11) and (12), it is not true for every name – witness English *Billie, Dana,* /frɑnsis/ (but *Frances*F vs *Francis*M), /dʒou/ (but *Jo*F vs *Joe*M), *Kim, Pat, Sam*; nevertheless, gender differentiation of personal proper names is a characteristic found in every human society (Alford 1988: 66-68). It is the reason for transgender folk to change their forename to mark a change in gender: e.g. Catherine Elizabeth McGregor was born Malcolm Gerard McGregor on 24 May 1956; she transitioned in 2012.[4] Today it is why people assign themselves a pronoun along with their name, e.g. Samantha's *Sam [she/her]* vs Samuel's *Sam [he/him]*. Pronoun assignment was move inspired by people from the LGBTQIA+[5] community who do not wish to identify with the binary contrast F vs M and who therefore adopt a variety of pronouns from regular English *they/them* to more than a dozen other pairs – see https://www.lgbtqnation.com/2022/08/incomplete-list-gender-pronouns. So, personal proper names typically do have semantic value, contra Mill and his followers.

If given names like *Elizabeth* are included in the lexicon, what about family names like *Jones, Smith, Taylor*? Native speakers of English readily recognize some names as (originally[6]) Cornish (*Treloar*), Georgian (*Shevardnadze*), German (*Klein*), Greek (*Papadopoulos*), Irish (*Murphy*), Italian (*Pavarotti*), Jewish (*Zimmermann*), Polish (*Piekarski*), Russian (*Kuznetsov*), Scottish (*McDonald*), or Welsh (*Jones*). Immigrants to the Anglosphere who wish to assimilate, sometimes Anglicize their names: e.g. *Klein* becomes *Clyne*, *Piekarski* becomes *Parkes*. It is likely that *Chomsky* is an Anglicized form of Polish /ˈxomski/ from the town of Chomsk (or Хомск, now in Belarus). When *Adam Kowalski* and his wife *Anna Kowalska* emigrate from Poland to an Anglophone country, she adopts the

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[4]   Https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Cate_McGregor. Chastity Sun Bono, born female (1969), transitioned to male Chaz Salvatore Bono in 2009, https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Chaz_Bono.

[5]   Lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, queer, intersex, asexual, and other sexual orientations and gender identities.

[6]   Although the family-name offers a clue to the bearer's ancestry, it gives no guarantee of it being a contemporary fact. This reflects a general truth about proper names which distinguishes them from common names. One sense of the common name *cat* necessarily names something animal, but the proper name *Martha* only most probably names a female.

masculine form of the family name to become *Anna Kowalski* because in the Anglosphere family names are not morphologically changed for the gender of the referent. Hungarian-born *Ürge László* became *Les Murray*, swapping the name sequence from the Hungarian norm family-name before given-name to given-name before family-name sequence normal in English; similarly Chinese actor 张嘉倪 *(Zhāng Jiāní)* is known in English as *Jenny Zhang*. All such name changes are obviously motivated by the intention to achieve greater efficacy in using the name.

3. Motivations for names

> The mines had fanciful names: Balaclava, Himalaya, Stirling, Beehive, Rupee, Tara, Manchester, Eureka, Dora, Robin Hood, Britannia, Bobby Burns, Florida, Bonnie Dundee, Parnell. Any geomancer would see the pattern there: how foreign stragglers planted their weak hopes in the gesture of a name, how in the land of schist rubble and saltbush, searing and inhospitable, they recited something cherished – a hero, or a lover, or a place half-recollected from a greener world. (Jones 2025: 144)

Names are motivated by ideals and ideologies such that the name will reflect claimed or desired character and conduct. Thus, newborns are named after auspicious events, revered forebears, or celebrated idols. Some Romans named children in sequence of birth *Primus, Secundus, Tertius*, etc. Some Akan people (Ghana, Ivory Coast, Togo) are named for the day of their birth; e.g. *Akua* (female, Wednesday), *Kofi* (male, Friday; Kofi Annan, 7th UN Secretary-General, was born Friday 8 April 1938). Among Native Americans from the great plains, names often changed over time; for instance, an old Cheyenne man is reported as saying,

> When I was small I was called 'Little Bird.' When I first went to war and returned to camp, the name of 'Long Horn' was given me by an old man of the camp. Then the traders gave me the name of Tall-White-Man, and now, since I have become old, they (the Indians) call me Black Pipe. This name was given me from a pipe I used to carry when I went to war. (Clark 1885: 266)

The same is reported of the Pawnee:

> After performing any special exploit, a man had a right to change his name, if he preferred. Names were sometimes thus changed several times during life. The first such occasion was a great event with a brave. The new name might be chosen as commemorative of the exploit performed, but not necessarily. For instance, a chief succeeded in stealing a number of hordes. As it happened several of the horses were spotted, accordingly he took the name Spotted Horse. Sometimes the name was derived from an individual characteristic, as Black Warrior, Angry

Chief, etc. But quite usually the new name was selected from mere caprice or with an idea of its special personal fitness, as Shooting-Fire, Gray Eagle, Chief-of-Men, etc. When the name was finally decided upon, in order to have it, as it were, officially sanctioned, a crier was hired, by the bestowal of a horse or other adequate compensation, to proclaim throughout the band that the person in question (giving his old name) should henceforth be known as (giving the new name). (Clark 1885: 267-268)

The celebrated Oglala Sioux warrior known as Crazy Horse (Tȟašúŋke Witkó "his horse is crazy") (c. 1840-1877) was first known as Čháŋ Óhaŋ ("Among the Trees"); in his late teens he became Waglúla ("Worm"); about ten years later he is said to have had a vision of his horse's shadow dancing while it stood still beneath him, which led to his final name of Tȟašúŋke Witkó.[7] Whatever the truth may be in particular instances, all such names are manifestly motivated.

So too with names based on ideological sources: for example, Hebrew אברם *Avram*, a name from the Torah, Aramaic/Hebrew מַתַּי *Mattai* (*Matthew*) from the Bible, Arabic مُحَمَّد *Mohammed* from the Qurʾān. Renamings sometimes have similar motivation: the African American revolutionary Malcolm Little (1925-1965) joined the Nation of Islam, adopting the name Malcolm X to symbolize his unknown African ancestral surname while discarding 'the white slavemaster name of Little'. As a Black Muslim minister, in 1964 he completed the Hajj to Mecca and thereafter wished to be known as el-Hajj Malik el-Shabazz (The Pilgrim Malcolm the Patriarch). Following in his footsteps, boxer Cassius Marcellus Clay Jr (1942-2016), after joining the Nation of Islam, also in 1964 denounced his birth name as a slave name and formally changed his name to Muhammad Ali.

More frivolously, the pronunciation of stage name Charli XCX (Charlotte Emma Aitchison) is /ˈʧɑ·li ˈʔɛkssi·ˈɛks/, the last three syllables reportedly bearing the meaning "kiss C[harli] kiss". Elon Musk's children with Grimes (Claire Elise Boucher) are named X Æ A-Xii /ˈɛksæʃ ˈeɪ ˈtwɛlv/ (male born 2020, nickname X /ɛks/), Exa Dark Sideræl /saɪdi·ri·l/ (female, born 2021, nickname Y /waɪ/), and Techno Mechanicus (male, born 2022, nickname [Greek] T /tau/). The motivation for the name *X Æ A-Xii* according to Grimes (@Grimezsz, X 6 May 2020) is:

•X, the unknown variable ⚔
•Æ, my elven spelling of Ai (love &/or Artificial intelligence)
•A-12 = precursor to SR-17 (our favorite aircraft). No weapons, no defenses, just speed. Great in battle, but non-violent ♡

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[7]   Another influence might be that his father's name was also Tȟašúŋke Witkó.

The numeral '12' was changed to *Xii* to comply with the law.[8] As for the Grimes-Musk daughter:

> "Her full name," she [Grimes] writes, "is Exa Dark Sideræl Musk."
> Exa is a reference to the supercomputing term exaFLOPS (the ability to perform 1 quintillion floating-point operations per second). Dark, meanwhile, is "the unknown. People fear it but truly it's the absence of photons. Dark matter is the beautiful mystery of our universe." She texts me a voice memo with the pronunciation of Sideræl – "sigh-deer-ee-el" – which she calls "a more elven" spelling of *sidereal* "the true time of the universe, star time, deep space time, not our relative earth time." It's also a nod to her favorite *Lord of the Rings* character, the powerful Galadriel, who "chooses to abdicate the ring." ('"Infamy Is Kind Of Fun": Grimes on Music, Mars, and Her Secret New Baby With Elon Musk' *Vanity Fair* March 10, 2022)

The Grimes-Musk son Techno Mechanicus' name is said to be inspired by the game Warhammer 40,000 and its Mechanicus faction that controls technology and serves as the primary source of scientific and engineering expertise. The number τ is a mathematical constant 2π (the ratio of a circle's circumference to its radius) approximately equal to 6.28 – and Elon Musk's birthday is June 28 (6/28).

Clearly, all motivated.

There are reports of seventeenth century Puritan names like If-Christ-Had-Not-Died-For-You-You-Had-Been-Damned, Fly-Fornication, Through-Much-Tribulation-We-Enter-The-Kingdom-Of-Heaven (nickname, Tribby)[9]. Family names like *Baker, Cook, Smith, Tailor* have transparent motivation as trade descriptions. The descriptive properties of the family names of Simon Sitbithecunte (1167), John Fillecunt (1246), and Bele Wydecunthe (1328) (McDonald 1988) I leave to the reader's imagination, bearing in mind that the 'cunt(h)(e)' may refer to a water conduit.

Toponyms have similar motivations to personal names. Colonizers impose familiar names: five states in the USA have cities named *London,* there are in the USA also 23 towns or cities

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[8]   This is reminiscent of a report in *Time* magazine that Michael Herbert Dengler sought to change his name to 1069, which was denied in North Dakota but he was allowed to use the spelling *One Zero Six Nine* by Hennepin County Court, MN. According *Time*: 'One means, "I am part of the whole of life, which is one." Fair enough. But the others are more esoteric. Nine, for example, "stands for relationship to essence in the difference in the meaning when actualizing the spatially everpresent nature of life."' ('Americana: 1069, Esq.', *Time* December 12, 1977). Once again, the name change was explicitly motivated (albeit baffling).

[9]   Https://themyskira.tumblr.com/post/27965982570/awesome-puritan-names.

named *Paris*; Australia has a *Paris*, too. About 200 Australian place names are adopted from Britain (https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/List_of_locations_in_Australia_with_an_English_name). If indigenous names are adopted by colonizers they are recast phonologically into the colonizer's language, e.g. Tohono O'odham *Cuk Ṣon* /ʧʊk ṣɔ·n/ is rendered *Tucson* /ˈtusɔn/; Kikuyu *Kirinyaga* is rendered *Mount Kenya*. The same goes for all borrowed names: Greek Ἀθῆναι (*Athēnai*) is rendered *Athens* (maintaining the plural suffix), Ἀριστοτέλης is *Aristotle*; Georgian შევარდნაძე is *Shevardnadze*; Farsi شاه مات (*shāh māt*) becomes *checkmate*; French *m'aidez* becomes *mayday*. Another example of folk etymology is the French borrowing *chaise longue* /ʃɛ·z lõᵍ/, anglicized (!) to *chaise lounge* /ʃeɪs laʊnʤ/.

The twenty-first century has seen some place names revert to modified versions of indigenous names. Some Australian examples: *Ayers Rock* was renamed *Uluru* (from the Yankunytjatjara place name for the area), *Fraser Island* has been renamed *K'gari* (from Butchulla /gari/ "paradise"), *Mount Wellington* is *Kunanyi* (from revived Palawa Kani "mountain"). Once again, all motivated renamings.

Common names are also motivated. Some motivations are obscure, for example, *window* was originally *wind-door* – an opening in the wall to allow fresh air (wind) into the house as in Figure 1: glazing was a later and more expensive option. The motivation for *automobile* is self-evident; *car* "wheeled vehicle" predates it by several centuries and was efficacious for transfer to the horseless-carriage. I have already mentioned in §1 extensions of the name *cup* to sport trophies, garments, and various eukaryotes like the acorn-cup.

Figure 1. Windows as wind-doors

Names for verbs are also motivated: one sense of the verb *cup* is that "actor X cups undergoer Y such that X forms Y into a cup-shape (hemispheroidal-shape) for some purpose" (for instance, cupping hands to scoop up water to drink); another sense is that "actor X applies a cup or cups to Y's skin as therapy (in order to create suction pulling the skin into the cup to increase blood flow)".

Brand names are motivated. The story goes that, in 1888, George Eastman inspired by the sound of the camera's shutter invented the name *Kodak* as a trademark for the camera he had invented because it was short, 'strong and incisive', easily pronounceable, and memorable because unusual. The motivations for the model names of cars (see Allan 2024b; Lehrer 1992) connote power and/or importance, luxury, flight, speed, force, machismo, or travel. The names *Firebird, Thunderbird, Falcon, Hawk*, and *Skylark* have been used; but the names of nondescript unexciting birds such as sparrow, crow, pigeon, chicken, goose, turkey are not efficacious.

4. Alternative names

My name is Alexandria. Some of you may know me as AOC. (Alexandria Ocasio-Cortez 'Fighting Oligarchy' rally, Nampa, ID, April 14, 2025)[10]

There are alternative names among some common names and also among some proper names. Typically, the choice of the particular alternate depends on its connotations which are pragmatic effects that arise from encyclopaedic knowledge about the name and also from personal and community experiences, beliefs, and prejudices about the contexts in which it is typically used (Allan 2007). Consequently, connotation constrains notions of appropriateness and is motivated by user attention to precision, social convention, or stylistic effect of a particular alternate on the occasion of use. For instance, a *car* is also an *automobile* (more often in the USA than elsewhere); *gold* may be more formally labeled *Au* or *Element 79*; the *vulva* is (among many other possibilities) also formally *pudendum muliebre*, erroneously *vagina*, or – if slang is contextually acceptable – *vjj* or *pussy*, and more dysphemistically *snatch* or *cunt*. In Australia, abbreviations such as *arvo* instead of *afternoon*, *bottlo* in place of *bottle-shop*, *Chrissie* instead of *Christmas*, *pressie* in place of *present*, *smoko* in place of *tea-break* are all markers of informality, common in colloquial speech and also news reports. In all dialects of English, nicknames such as *Alex, Sandy, or Sasha* for *Alexandria*, *Bill* for *William*, *Charlie* or *Chuck* for *Charles*, *Kate* for *Katherine/Kathryn*, *Mike* in place of

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[10] Alexandria Ocasio-Cortez is US congressional representative for New York's 14th district. Her school nickname was *Sandy*. Today her friends call her *Alex*: 'AOC really emerged after I won my primary [2018]. And I think there were a lot of pundits on television that were like stumbling because my name is Alexandria Ocasio-Cortez [i.e. Hispanic]. And it was -- the news story after I won my primary was so sudden. And there were all these folks on TV that I think were kind of struggling to say my name, that it actually started coming from TV.' (AOC, Feb 4, 2022 https://finance.yahoo.com/video/alexandria-ocasio-cortez-became-known-110000886.html)

Michael, *Ted* in place of *Edward* are markers of informality. There are similar practices in most languages (see Wierzbicka 1992 on the different conditions for using alternative Russian personal names such as *Katerina, Katen'ka, Katjuša, Kat'ka, Katjuxa, Katja, Katënok,* and *Katënyš*). Circumstances determine which of the alternative names is efficacious.

Stage names, pen names, noms-de-guerre, gamertags, usernames, handles, and codenames exist for use in specific contexts. Authors adopt pseudonyms and performers stage names to enhance their chance for success. The Brontë sisters, *Charlotte, Emily*, and *Anne*, initially published under the pseudonyms *Currer, Ellis*, and *Acton Bell*, preserving their initials while concealing their gender because they believed female authors might face prejudice. *Norma Jeane Mortenson* disliked her birth name and changed it in her late teens to *Jean Norman* and at the age of 20 to *Marilyn Monroe* (the rest is history). *Robert Zimmerman* performs and publishes using the name *Bob Dylan* motivated perhaps to avoid potential prejudice and, being something of a poet, invoking the spirit of Dylan Thomas. These alternative names are all efficacious.

There is a superstition that speaking the name *Macbeth* inside a theatre, other than as called for in the script while rehearsing or performing, will cause disaster; consequently, it is known as *the Scottish play* (being set in Scotland), or more obscurely as *the Bard's play* where, of course *the Bard* is a standard alternative name for *William Shakespeare*. Which brings to mind another kind of alternative name, *the Prince of Denmark* to refer to *Hamlet*. This is comparable to using *the Pope* to refer to whoever holds that office in the relevant context: the current Pope was born *Robert Francis Prevost* and became *Pope Leo XIV* in 2025.

Terms of address like *Your Highness*, *Mr President, Minister, Coach, the Occupant, Ma'am, Father, Son, Darling, My dear girl* are also alternative names[11], with appropriate adaptation they can also be used as third person descriptives. Some are androgynous, others gender specific. They all identify the title to an office or role, in most cases temporary but permanent in the case of kin terms. As terms of address, all are contextually relative to the addressor; as third person descriptives the office or role named is contextually relative to some person or persons to whom the title is applicable. These are the properties that render them efficacious as names.

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[11]   Pelczar and Rainsbury 1998: 298 call these (or some of them) 'quasi-names', but there is no reason to do so here.

Similar to such titles are terms like *Bitch, Cunt,* and *Nigger*. These are typically dysphemistic offensive insults, but in other contexts can be used in the spirit of camaraderie[12] (Allan 2015; 2016; 2020; Allan 2024b; Jeshion 2020; Wald 2019). Their relevance as names depends on one or the other of these functions. All are androgynous and the first two can also be used of inanimate objects.[13] Being typically dysphemistic, these three are frequently euphemized to *b-word*, *c-word* and *n-word* respectively. As insults they characterize the referent with a slur or derogation; inverted in banter or the spirit of camaraderie, they mark empathy. The dysphemistic character of such terms arises from their connotations.[14] Consequently, connotation constrains notions of appropriateness that serve to govern choices among orthophemistic, dysphemistic, or euphemistic expression. Whether used as insults or as banter, these names are efficacious in the preferred function.

Another side to the efficacy coin is the avoidance of names, as in the taboos on naming prey by hunters (Frazer 1911: 417), avoiding names for disease (Allan and Burridge 2006: 204ff), on naming a dead person and, in some communities, even avoiding names for common objects that sound similar to the name of a dead person (Allan and Burridge 1991: 35), and like practices – all of which are motivated by considerations of the efficacy of the name or, rather, the use of the name.

Also functioning as alternative names are pronouns (actually pro-NPs), including demonstratives and deictic locatives, and pro-verbs (actually pro-VPs) – albeit constrained by syntax to limited contexts within the world spoken of in discourse. Evidence for the former is enshrined in oaths like ***I, Horatio Nelson,*** *do solemnly and sincerely affirm and declare that **I** will …* and condemnations like ***You, Henry Smith,*** *are a drunk!*, clarifications like *he broke **it, the Ming vase***. In English only the third person singular pronouns are gender marked; all other pronouns are not. All (English) pronouns are context bound under syntactic constraints; their only descriptive properties are person, number, and for the third person singular, gender.[15] Demonstratives and locative deictics that occur with a pointing finger or the

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[12] In which case *nigger* this euphemism is often spelled *nigga*, though there is no corresponding change in pronunciation.

[13] *Nigger* was once used as a descriptive in naming products, but no longer.

[14] Recall that to identify the connotations of a term includes recognizing the community attitude towards it.

[15] Pronouns in languages that use classifiers, can identify additional properties, see Aikhenvald 2000; Allan 1977; inter alios.

equivalent exemplify indexicals, e.g. ***That*** [Kaplan's 'Dthat'] *needs throwing way!* and *Put it over **there*** ['Dthere'] *right **now*** ['Dnow'] (Kaplan 1989). Pro-verbs utilize auxiliaries and are also syntactically constrained to narrow discourse contexts of the world spoken of. For example, *Sally needed to finish the dress before seven and she **did*** [finish the dress before seven]; *Max is happy with the outcome and **so is** Sally* [happy with the outcome]. Pronouns and pro-verbs are not interesting in this discussion of the efficacy of names.

5. Neither Frege nor Kripke got the whole story

Frege mistook encyclopedic facts about one referent of the proper name *Aristotle* to be the sense of the name ('Sinn' in Frege 1892: 27). A similar checklist account of proper names, based on encyclopedic information, is found in Russell 1905; Searle 1958; Strawson 1959. Following Mill 1843 and a tradition that extends back to Dionysos of Thrace c.100 BCE, Kripke 1972 favored what has become known as the direct reference hypothesis: a proper name uniquely identifies a particular referent in every possible world, which – in Kripke's terms – renders the proper name a 'rigid designator': Aristotle might not have been the teacher of Alexander the Great, but he would still have been Aristotle; he might not have written 'On Interpretation' (Aristotle 1984: 25-38), but he would still have been Aristotle. Plainly we are referring to just the most celebrated bearer of the name *Aristotle* (Ἀριστοτέλης Σταγειρίτης, 384-322 BCE); there are others such as Ἀριστοτέλης ὁ Μυτιληναῖος (philosopher, 2nd century CE), Ἀριστοτέλης ὁ Ἄργος (politician, 3rd century CE), Αριστοτέλης Βαλαωρίτης (Greek poet, 1824-1879), Aristotle Onassis (shipping magnate, 1906-1975), Aristóteles Picho (Peruvian actor, 1957-2013), Aristotle Pollisco (Filipino rapper Gloc-9, b. 1977). Proper names translate and transliterate: when anglicized, all these people share the name *Aristotle* – which, like a common noun, needs to be listed in the lexicon along with other listemes.[16]

The sense of a listeme λ normally corresponds to a description of the concepts (Allan 2024a; 2026) that comprise the salient properties of the typical denotation of λ. i.e. what λ is normally used to refer to in some possible world, *w*, real or imagined (see (16), (17)). World *w* provides context (C1 in Allan 2018) for the encyclopedic information about the typical denotation. Its reference is what the speaker/writer/signer is using the listeme to talk about – be it intensional, extensional, or non-existent. Information about denotata (potential referents)

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[16]   A lexicon (sc. mental lexicon) is a bin for storing the meanings of so-called 'listemes' (Di Sciullo and Williams 1987), namely, those language expressions whose meaning is not properly determinable from the meanings, if any, of their constituents.

is stored in their encyclopedia entries. The lexicon entry for a listeme is a networked triple consisting of a formal representation, tagged $_{f000}$, linked to a morphosyntactic category[17] which is also linked with the semantic component of the triple, the latter tagged $_{s000}$: e.g. $_{f001}N_{s001}$ (where N=noun). In the model, (16), $_{se000}$ is a link from the semantic component to the encyclopedic component of the entry. The subscripts ($_{f000}$, $_{s000}$, $_{se000}$) are identity tags that model neurons in the wetware.[18] The commands in the decision procedure are constructs that model synapses in the wetware[19]: & ("conjunction"), &OR ("inclusive disjunction"), XOR ("exclusive disjunction"), IF ("on condition that"), ELSE ("if not"), ELIF ("else if"), GOTO, OUTPUT, TENABLE ("given the context, this sense is/seems to be applicable to the denotatum" so, OUPUT the data), NEXT ITEM ("move on")[20].

(16)　**Aristotle** /ˈærɪstɒtl/$_{f500}$ & $_{f500}N_{s600}$ & $_{s600}$"bearer of the name $_{f500}$*Aristotle*, normally male", potential referents "ancient polymath" [context 1]: IF TENABLE, GOTO $_{se501}$ ELIF "ancient politician" [context 2]: IF TENABLE, GOTO $_{se502}$ ELIF "twentieth century business magnate" [context 3] $_{se503}$ ELSE OUTPUT 'Referent Unknown' & GOTO NEXT ITEM

　　$_{se501}$Aristotle b. 384 BCE Stagira – d. 322 BCE, Chalcis (χαλκός). Ancient Greek polymath who discoursed on the natural and physical sciences, economics and politics, logic and philosophy, poetics and rhetoric. IF TENABLE, OUTPUT & GOTO NEXT ITEM[21]

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[17]　I use this phrase to allow that a lexicon might include information on each morpheme of say *anti-dis-establish-ment-arian-ism* and/or on the meaning relations among, for example, *abduce, abduct, adduce, conduce, conduct, deduce, deduct, educe, induce, induct, introduce, produce, reduce, seduce, traduce* – and their derived nominals.

[18]　Neurons are fundamental units of the brain and nervous system; they are cells responsible for receiving sensory input from the external world and for sending commands out. Wetware is the human brain.

[19]　Synapses: each neuron has a few to hundreds of thousands of synaptic connections with other neurons.

[20]　This means either interpret the next item in the text or, if necessary, seek further information about a feasible referent for this listeme from a search engine.

[21]　The encyclopedic data presented in (16) for potential name-bearers is just a thumbnail sketch. Just how much information should be included in a model is currently unknown. As seen in (17), one can be more confident with respect to common nouns. Also missing from the encyclopedia

$_{se502}$Aristotle of Argos, third century BCE: prominent political figure, associate of military commander Aratus of Sicyon (271-213 BCE); noted for opposing Spartan king Cleomenes III in 224 BCE. IF TENABLE, OUTPUT & GOTO NEXT ITEM

$_{se503}$Aristotle Socrates Onassis b. Smyrna (İzmir) 1906, d. Paris 1975: Greek business magnate. Owned huge shipping fleet and was one of the world's richest men. Celebrated for marrying in 1968 Jacqueline Kennedy, née Bouvier (1929-1994), widow of John Fitzgerald Kennedy (1917-1963), 35th president of the United States. IF TENABLE, OUTPUT & GOTO NEXT ITEM

The denotation (character) of *Aristotle* is "bearer of the name *Aristotle*, normally male", the context in which the name occurs is in limited to a choice of three potential referents ($_{se501-503}$), in a fuller account there would be more. If one of these is selected as the satisfactory OUTPUT, the referent of this instance of Aristotle has been identified. Toponyms like *London* has the semantics "toponym, city bearing the name *London*" linked to encyclopedia entries for each referent for *London* in various parts of the world. *Mount Wellington* has the semantics "toponym, mountain, bearing the name *Mount Wellington*" for which there are at least two encyclopedia entries. Even unique proper names like *Pink Floyd* have some semantic content: "legal entity bearing the name *Pink Floyd*" linked to encyclopedic information about the band.

A comparison with a partial entry for a common name, demonstrates that there is much similarity with the entry for a proper name. Compare (16) with (17), a partial entry for the noun *cup* adapted from Allan 2026.

(17) $_{f100}$**cup** /kʌp/ & $_{f100}$N$_{s201-202}$ & $_{s201}$ "drinking vessel" [context 1]: IF TENABLE, GOTO $_{se201a}$ XOR $_{se201b}$ XOR … ELIF $_{s203}$ "garment" [context 2]: IF TENABLE, GOTO $_{se202}$ … ELSE OUTPUT 'Inappropriate Listeme' & GOTO NEXT ITEM

$_{se201a}$ "$_{f100}$*cup* is a flat-bottomed hollow oblate hemispheroidal drinking vessel, an impermeable physical artefact (entity) with a vertical handle and a container with a Allan 2026capacity of about 250ml, it is a typical Western style cup for containing drinks such as tea or coffee, that is typically accompanied by a matching saucer", e.g. *a cup of tea, tea cup* [context 1a]: IF TENABLE, OUTPUT & GOTO NEXT ITEM ELSE GOTO $_{se201b}$

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entries in (16) and (17) is multiple cross-referencing to places, people, concepts like 'polymath', etc.

se201b "f100*cup* is a flat-bottomed hollow oblate hemispheroidal drinking vessel, an impermeable physical artefact with a vertical handle and a container with a capacity of about 125ml, it is a typical Western espresso style coffee cup (demitasse) that is often accompanied by a matching saucer", e.g. *4pcs Ceramic Small Coffee Cup* [context 1b]: IF TENABLE, OUTPUT & GOTO NEXT ITEM ELSE GOTO se201c

se202 "f100 *cup* is a hollow hemispheroidal physical artefact of textile fabric that is one of a pair which constitute the principal parts of a brassiere, each cup being shaped to contain and support one of a woman's breasts"[22], e.g. *cup sizes get larger as the letters go up in the alphabet*: IF TENABLE, OUTPUT & GOTO NEXT ITEM ELSE GOTO

The denotation (character) of *cup* comprises several senses distinguishable as applicable in different contexts, in (17) limited to just three (s201-203) and each context may be further specified into several subsenses identifiable from the encyclopedia, e.g. the several kinds of drinking vessel labelled *cup* (cf. se201a, se201b; for further elaboration see Allan 2024a; 2026; *Oxford English Dictionary* 2025). Again, the selection of one OUTPUT from the encyclopedia identifies the appropriate referent (content) of this particular instance of the common noun *cup*.

The principal difference between proper and common nouns is that the encyclopedic data for the personal proper noun identifies an individual history of a referent. All the examples in (16) happen to be real historical figures, but the names of fictional or mythical characters like Sherlock Holmes, Santa Claus, or God – and, of course, all other kinds of proper names are all sourced in encyclopedia entries.

A proper name can change during a lifetime or it can apply to the same entity from birth, throughout life's changes, and after death. As we have seen, an individual may also have more than one proper name at a time. The membership of a pop group, orchestra, or sports team may change from time to time without affecting the name of the ensemble. Cities grow or they fall into ruin, all the while retaining their proper name: e.g. *Byzantion* ⇒ *Kōnstantinoupolis* ⇒ *Kostantiniyye* ⇒ *İstanbul*; *St Petersburg* (Санкт-Петербург) ⇒ *Petrograd* (Петроград) ⇒ *Leningrad* (Ленинград) and then, once again, *St Petersburg*.[23] This kind of chronological mutation in the characteristics of the denotatum is equally

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[22]   Like other items of clothing, the configuration of the bra is determined by the configuration of the human body, consequently bra cups are paired, typically connected by a band below that circles the chest.

[23]   ⇒ can be glossed "became".

applicable to common names: the characteristics of a window, a house, tableware, clothing, democracy, justice, and much else has changed over time and place though the listeme denoting such things remains more or less unaltered. There is renaming in the various branches of biology when research leads to life-forms being relocated in new tribes, or families, or superfamilies, and so forth; or else a new variety or subspecies is recognized. For example:

> *Stribolanthes* species (syn. *Goldfussia*) … *Tibouchina* species (formerly *Lasiandra*). (Moore 1980: 220, 221)

> **Australian chats** Family Epthianuridae [The molecular biology work of Sibley & Ahlquist indicates the chats *are* true honeyeaters and they include them in the prior Family Meliphagidae. We separate them in this classification for the present.] (Simpson and Day 2003: 347 [sic])

The encyclopedia entry for *Lasiandra* will cross-reference *Tibouchina* and *Epthianuridae* will cross-reference *Meliphagidae*.

So, the persistence of proper names is open to the same vagaries over time as it is for common names. The French term for *Aristotle* is *Aristote*, for *London* it is *Londres*, for *cup* it is *tasse*, for *chair* it is *chaise.* The Greek for each these is, respectively, *Ἀριστοτέλης, Λονδίνο, κύλιξ,* and *καρέκλα*. Because the proper names have very restricted semantic content (character, denotation) and, to some extent, mimic the form in the source language, they are more similar across languages than either form or the more complex semantic content of common nouns. However, differences do occur: for instance, the proper name *Ann(e)* in English is normally restricted to females[24], but in Dutch and French it is androgynous. Different conditions render names efficacious in different circumstances.

6. Some additional evidence for the similarity between proper and common names

Proper names occasionally give rise to common names. For instance, the verb *lynch* "a mob hangs someone without trial or legal authority" most likely comes from Charles Lynch (1736-1796), a Virginian, who in 1780 persuaded the Continental Congress of the North American Colonies to pass 'Lynch's Law' to forgive extrajudicial imprisonment of prisoners of war. The verb *bowdlerize* "to expurgate from works of art material deemed unsuitable for

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[24]   Exceptions were Lord Anne Hamilton (1709-1748), named after his godmother, Queen Anne, who was also sponsor at the baptism of the male Anne Poulett (1711-1785).

minors" comes from Thomas Bowdler (1754-1825) who did just that to the works of Shakespeare and Gibbon. The brand name *Hoover* extended to denote vacuum cleaners and vacuum cleaning in UK and Ireland throughout most of the twentieth century. In the USA the brand name *Kleenex* extended to denote facial tissues in general, and its sister product *Kotex*, was frequently extended to denote sanitary pads. Such extensions to proper names are motivated by their perceived efficacy in the extended uses.

Encyclopedic data is called upon in comparisons like (18)–(20) (adapted from Allan 2024b).

(18)   Caspar Cazzo is no Pavarotti!

(19)   Nellie Norman is another Janis Joplin!

(20)   Harry's boss is a bloody little Hitler!

(18) implies that Caspar is not a great singer. We infer this because the salient characteristic of Luciano Pavarotti (1935-2007) was that he was a great singer. (19) implies that Nellie is an accomplished (and probably white) blues singer and/or perhaps that she has severe problems with her self-image as did Janis Joplin (1943-1970). (20) is abusive because Adolf Hitler (1889-1945) is in many circles disparaged as a tyrannical dictator.[25] Such extensions are efficacious for communicating what the speaker or writer has in mind to convey.

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[25]   This assessment of Hitler does not allow for a neo-Nazi assessment of Hitler, which would be far more positive – which prompts the question: Should a model encyclopedia entry reflect all points of view? Significantly, different individuals make different interpretations of the so-called facts (see Allan 2022; 2024b). Moreover, the prejudices of language users are equally relevant to a proper account of language understanding. Should the model of the lexicon and encyclopedia be all-encompassing presenting every possible point of view exhaustively on all branches of knowledge, or should they be modular, like a collection of human minds? Different interest groups embody different kinds of knowledge and vocabulary: a physician's lexicon is full of medical jargon and a medic's encyclopedia contains therapeutic knowledge unknown to the average patient; a zoologist knows more about creatures than most lay people and has the lexicon to talk about that knowledge. There are two reasons for favoring multiple lexicons (jargon dictionaries) and specialist encyclopedias: first it would putatively model individual human capacities; second, it would divide data and processing into manageable chunks. They would, of course, need to be interconnectable.

7. Summing up

What makes names efficacious is that they are not arbitrary but motivated by ideological and sociocultural considerations of functional effectiveness. Names are efficacious if they serve to identify recognizable properties of the denotation such as a place, topographical feature, or the gender of a person. Names are symbolic, very few are directly representational of the denotation. There is very little mimicry by sound symbolism, but we saw many examples of cognitive mimicry via transferred names and semantic extensions both metaphorical and literal. Nevertheless, the form of a name is linguistically constrained by the phonology and graphology normal to the name-giver's context. There may also be legal taboos on perceived blasphemy, obscenity, the prohibition of numbers in personal names. Both common and proper names carry semantic content, but typically proper names have much simpler semantic content than most common names. Both draw on encyclopedic data. It was demonstrated that both common and proper names are motivated by dubbing the new with a familiar name based on some perceived similarity between their respective denotata.

Common names like *cup* and *dog* denote classes of entities, or kinds such as *gold* and *democracy*. These have traditionally been regarded as listemes. For them the semantic content is more complex than for proper names but potential referents are also distinguished via encyclopedic data denoted by the listeme. Proper names are also listed in the lexicon, because many proper names are shared by different referents identified from encyclopedic entries – which is what renders them indexical. Because gender identity is important to the referent's self-image and social standing, it is significant in renamings. Personal proper names like *Aristotle* or *Elizabeth* have simple semantics such as "bearer of the personal name *Aristotle*, normally male" linked to encyclopedia entries that identify different potential referents. A toponym like *London* has the semantics "toponym, city bearing the name *London*" linked to encyclopedia entries that identify different potential referents. Even unique proper names like *Pink Floyd* have some semantic content: "legal entity bearing the name *Pink Floyd*" linked to encyclopedic information about the band.

Sociocultural constraints affect the use of nicknames, kin terms, address forms, etc. Even the use of slurs and tabooed names is subject to consideration of their efficacy to respect social norms or violate them for perlocutionary effect. Taboos that lead to the avoidance of names are also motivated by concern for efficacy.

Although a Saussurean (Saussure 1931) emphasis on the character of language as an arbitrary system of symbols has long been questioned there has been little to no focus,

hitherto, on the efficacy of names. The lacuna is now rectified. Nevertheless, because the vast majority of names discussed in this essay have been nominals there is a need to consider the efficacy of names in other open-class categories: verbs, adjectives, and adverbs. Further research is also needed to confirm the efficacy of names in languages other than English.

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