The Pragmatics of Empty Names

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Abstract: Fred Adams and collaborators advocate a view on which empty-name sentences semantically encode incomplete propositions, but can be used to conversationally implicate descriptive propositions. This account has come under criticism recently from Marga Reimer and Anthony Everett. Reimer correctly observes that their account does not pass a natural test for conversational implicatures, namely, that an explanation of our intuitions in terms of implicature should be such that we upon hearing it recognize it to be roughly correct. Everett argues that the implicature view provides an explanation of only some of our intuitions, and is in fact incompatible with others, especially those concerning the modal profile of sentences containing empty names. I offer a pragmatist treatment of empty names based upon the recognition that the Gricean distinction between what is said and what is implicated is not exhaustive, and argue that such a solution avoids both Everett's and Reimer's criticisms.

Fred Adams et ses collaborateurs mettent de l'avant la théorie selon laquelle les phrases comportant des noms propres vides codent sémantiquement les propositions incomplètes mais peuvent être utilisées pour impliquer des propositions descriptives dans le contexte d'une conversation. Marga Reimer et Anthony Everett ont récemment critiqué cette théorie. Reimer note judicieusement que leur théorie ne parvient pas à réussir un test naturel pour les implications conversationnelles, à savoir qu'une explication de nos intuitions concernant l'implication doit être telle que lorsque nous l'entendons elle nous apparaît comme étant correcte dans ses grandes lignes. Everett soutient que la théorie de l'implication ne parvient à expliquer qu'un certain nombre de nos intuitions et est en fait incompatible avec d'autres, notamment celles qui concernent la dimension modale des phrases contenant des noms propres vides. Je met ici de l'avant un traitement pragmatiste des noms propres vides en me basant sur l'idée selon laquelle la distinction Gricéenne entre ce qui est dit et ce qui est impliqué n'est pas exhaustive, et je soutiens que cette solution évite les critiques d'Everett et de Reimer.

1. Empty Names

The problem empty names pose for direct referentialists is straightforward. If reference exhausts the semantic content of names, then names without reference have no semantic content. However, sentences involving empty names seem to have various properties which are naturally taken to require the names to have semantic content—properties like being meaningful, being about certain things, and being truth-evaluable. For example, all

of the sentences displayed below seem to be meaningful. Furthermore, (1) (2) and (3) are intuitively all about the same thing, and about a different thing than (4), (5), or (6). Finally, while intuitions about (1), (2), and (5) vary, (3) and (4) seem to be false and (6) true.

       (1) Vulcan is a planet.
       (2) Vulcan explained the perturbations in Mercury's orbit.
       (3) Vulcan is a comet.
       (4) Mr. Knightley had three heads.
       (5) Mr. Knightley wore a hat on the day Emma was born.
       (6) Emma was a bad matchmaker.

As Marga Reimer has pointed out (2001), a solution to the problem of empty names must answer two questions. First, what is the semantic content of empty names and of sentences containing empty names? Call this the problem of semantic content (PSC).[1] Second, where do the intuitions of meaningfulness, aboutness, and truth-evaluability come from? Call this the intuition problem (IP).[2] Some answers to the problem of semantic content ipso facto solve the intuition problem. For example, someone who maintains that empty names are in fact disguised descriptions will have a built in response to the IP—sentences involving empty names appear to be meaningful, about things, and truth-evaluable because they are in fact meaningful, truth-evaluable, and about things.[3] However the treatment given by Fred Adams and his collaborators, Laura Dietrich, Gary Fuller, and Robert Stecker does not have this feature.

2. Incomplete Propositions

The notion of an incomplete proposition is a relatively natural extension of the Millian approach to subject-predicate sentences containing names.[4] Consider sentence (7):

       (7) Vulcan is a planet.

According to Millianism, Vulcan has no semantic value to contribute to the content of the sentence. Thus, when we represent the semantic content of (7), the position where the semantic value of 'Vulcan' should go will be left empty, as in (8).

       (8) ⟨ ( ), being-a-planet⟩

The round brackets here are only a device to make clear that the syntax sets up a spot for a semantic value which is not provided—they are not an element of the proposition. Propositions which are missing an element in this way are incomplete. This provides for the general answer to the PSC given by Adams, Dietrich, Fuller, and Stecker (hereafter ADFS). The semantic content of a sentence containing an empty name is an incomplete proposition (Adams et al 1992, Adams et al 1997, Adams and Stecker 1994, Adams and Dietrich 2004).

ADFS are joined by Reimer in countenancing incomplete propositions as the semantic contents of sentences containing empty names. David Braun also advocates an incomplete proposition view, though does disagree somewhat about what names count as empty names—fictional names in his view at least sometimes refer to fictional characters (Braun, 2005).[5] What attracts all of them to the incomplete proposition view is its consistency with Millianism—indeed as Reimer points out, the doctrine of the incomplete proposition might well be described as an application of Millianism.[6] If the semantic content of a proper name is nothing other than its bearer, and a particular proper name has no bearer, then that name has no semantic content to contribute to sentences in which it occurs.

Defenders of the incomplete proposition answer to the PSC do disagree about one issue—the question of whether incomplete propositions are truth evaluable. Essentially the options are two-fold. On one account, favoured by Reimer and Adams et al, incomplete propositions are not truth evaluable, since there is nothing to which the predicate can be accurately or inaccurately applied. On the other account, favoured by Braun (1993)[7] atomic incomplete propositions are all false, in accordance with the following principle:

> If P is a proposition having a single subject position and a one-place property position, then P is true iff the subject position is filled by one, and only one, object and it exemplifies the property filling the property position. If P is not true, then it is false (Braun 1993, p. 463).

This difference obviously impacts on the approach taken by these authors to the intuition problem, as part of the IP is the intuition that empty-name sentences have truth-conditions.[8] Braun, unlike Reimer and ADFS, can accommodate this intuition directly. This is a negligible advantage for two reasons however. First of all, Braun's account makes all atomic empty-name sentences false. Our intuition of truth evaluability however, is not just the intuition that empty-name sentences have truth-values, but also the intuition that some empty-name sentences are in fact true, including some atomic empty-name sentences. Secondly, the intuition problem is by no means restricted to the problem of accounting for the intuition of truth evaluability.

3. The Implicature Solution

ADFS have a straightforward answer to the intuition problem. All these intuitions are, they say, a result of a perfectly general phenomenon—the failure of speakers to distinguish between what is said and what is merely conveyed. On this view, when we utter an empty-name sentence, we conversationally implicate complete propositions. The various intuitions involved in the IP are intuitions about the propositions we implicate, not the incomplete proposition expressed by our utterance. However, because we don't clearly distinguish between what is said and what is implicated, we confuse these implications with the content of the actual utterance.

According to ADFS the conversational implicatures in question are not unique to empty-name sentences. Whether a name is empty or not, we mentally associate various descriptions with it. In the case of 'Vulcan', we might associate the descriptions 'the planet between Mercury and the sun', or 'the planet Leverrier hypothesized'. In the case of 'Paul Martin', we might associate the descriptions 'the 21st Prime-Minister of Canada', or 'the Member of Parliament for LaSalle-Émard in Montreal, Quebec', or for some very few of us, 'the guy who lives next door'. Adams et al call the descriptions we associate with a given name the lore associated with the name—others have called it the dossier, file, or profile. Because of the close connection between a name and the lore we associate with the name, Adams et al suggest that the lore helps to generate pragmatic implicatures from utterances using the name. For example, consider sentences (9) and (2).

> (9) Paul Martin was a philosophy major.
> (2) Vulcan explained the perturbations in Mercury's orbit.

Because of the connection between the name 'Vulcan' and the descriptions associated with it, an utterance of (9) might well implicate that the planet Leverrier hypothesized explained the perturbations in Mercury's orbit. Similarly, an utterance of (2) might implicate that the 21st Prime-Minister of Canada was a philosophy major. In both cases, say ADFS, we are prone to confuse the implicatures with what is said by the utterance. In the case of empty names, since the implicatures are meaningful, have truth-conditions, and are in a ordinary sense about something, we are prone to think that what is said is also meaningful, has truth conditions, and is about something.

4. Reimer's Objection

Reimer objects to Adams et al's account on the grounds that it cannot withstand informed reflection. She writes:

> [E]ven after we are appraised of the distinction between what is said and what is communicated, we still want to say that, in sincerely uttering sentences containing empty names, we say and do not just communicate, propositions that are truth-evaluable. … What makes some pragmatic explanations of what appear to be semantic facts appealing, is that, once we hear them, we are inclined to say: 'Oh yes, now I see that I was confusing what was said with what was communicated' (Reimer 2001, p. 502).

In essence her complaint is this: the plausibility of Gricean accounts of implicature is in part that when the distinctions and analyses are explained to us, we almost all immediately recognize them as basically accurate. However, we do not have this reaction to a implicature based account of our intuitions regarding empty-name sentences. I will return to the issues raised by her criticism shortly, but before doing so we should look at Reimer's own solution, which is simply this—as speakers of the language we assume that reference to non-existents is possible.

Ask a non-philosopher what they are referring to in uttering the sentences 'Santa is jolly' and 'Santa doesn't exist', suggests Reimer, the response will be: Why Santa Claus of course! What, did you think I was talking about, the Easter bunny? This is an unreflective assumption—it is an empirical fact that speakers of the language do assume that there are things that don't exist and do assume that they can refer to them. We assert such things like: "There is a mythical figure named 'Santa Claus'—but he doesn't exist, the whole thing is just a myth," and in doing so take ourselves to be speaking literally and truthfully

But, one might respond, philosophers, who know better (or should!), have the very same intuitions. Nevertheless, when we participate in ordinary everyday conversation, Reimer claims, we have an unreflective moment in which we do assume that we can refer to non-existents. In addition, the linguistic data suggest that when we use the word 'existence' we do not take it to apply to all things. Of course Reimer acknowledges that the idea that there are things that don't exist is likely completely incoherent—but her claim is that this is language, not reality, that we are talking about. It is a feature of our linguistic practices that we assume reference to non-existents is possible.

In my view the main problem with Reimer's account is that it doesn't seem to actually explain the intuitions in question. Is Reimer's view that the intuitions forming the intuition problem are just symptoms of this linguistically induced delusion? If that is so, then one wonders why we have this delusion. Indeed, it seems to me that Reimer's observation—that our linguistic behaviour shows us to assume that reference to non-existents is possible—is just a restatement of the original set of problems. If our intuitions are best explained as based on an acceptance (however fleeting) of reference to non-existents, there are two options: either accept that reference to non-existents is possible, and give an answer to the problem of semantic content that includes that, or reject reference to non-existents in one's answer to the PSC, and give an answer to the intuition problem that explains why we have the unreflective intuition that reference to non-existents is possible.

5. Everett's Modal Profile Problem

Anthony Everett has argued against pragmatic treatments like that of Adams et all on the grounds that they cannot account for the modal profile of sentences containing empty names. Everett asks us to consider the modal profile following sentence (2003, p. 16):

> (10) Santa is identical with John Perry.

This sentence is necessarily false, Everett tells us, but it seems there are possible circumstances in which John Perry is a plump jolly man who delivers presents at Christmas. On Adam's et al's view an utterance of (10) can pragmatically convey the possibly true proposition that the plump jolly man who delivers presents at Christmas is identical with John Perry, and we confuse that pragmatically conveyed proposition with the expressed one. But asks Everett, if that is the case, why aren't we similarly confused when asked about the modal profile of (10)? Why don't we have the intuition that (10) is possibly true?[9]

As Everett points out (2003, p. 17), considerations of modal profile raise two problems for Adams et al's pragmatic account. First, we are in need of an account of our intuitions about the modal profile of (10), and none seems forthcoming—on Adams et al's account (10) expresses an incomplete proposition and thus lacks truth-value in every world. It is perhaps necessarily without value, but not necessarily false. Nor can they explain these intuitions using their pragmatic approach, for the reasons laid out above. Secondly, if our intuitions about modal profile are not to be explained in terms of confusion between semantic and pragmatic properties, why should our intuitions about truth-value, aboutness, etc. be explained that way? Indeed, if we do not conflate semantically and pragmatically provided information when assessing modal profile, what reason is there to think we conflate it when assessing truth-value?[10]

6. Pragmatics and What is Said

Some commonplaces. Sentence-types have linguistic meanings in virtue of their structure and the meanings of their parts. Sentence-tokens have linguistic meanings in virtue of being tokens of a sentence-type with that linguistic meaning. Speakers who utter declarative sentence-tokens may thus assert things, and what they assert is partly determined by the linguistic meaning of what they utter, along with the context in which they make the utterance and their intentions in making it. Furthermore, as Grice taught us, speakers may implicate (conversationally and otherwise) various things with their utterances. Finally, it is traditionally maintained that linguistic meaning of a sentence token together with context determines something variously called semantic content, the proposition expressed, or what is said.

ADFS attempt to explain our intuitions about empty-name sentences in terms of what speakers implicate in uttering them. Reimer rejects this approach on the grounds that when the origins of implicatures are explained to us, we recognize our intuitions as being about what we implicate and not about what we say. Essentially she appeals to what Francois Recanati has called the availability hypothesis (1993, pp. 246-248). Roughly, the hypothesis may be characterized as follows:

> Speakers have conscious access to both what is said and what is implicated, and are able to distinguish between the two.

However, Recanati's notion of what is said is not the traditional notion, but a much more expansive one that includes a substantive amount of content provided by pragmatic mechanisms not dissimilar to those involved in generation conversational implicatures. While Recanati does not use these terms, his view seems to be that what is said by a sentence in a context is closely associated with what illocutionary act the speaker performs by uttering that sentence in that context (for a declarative sentence, what the speaker asserts). Recanati is not alone in thinking that pragmatically provided content contributes to what is said in this broader sense. Kent Bach (1994, 2001a, 2001b), Robyn Carston (1998, 2004) and Charles Travis (1985, 1996),[11] despite many areas of

contention between them, all share the view that not all pragmatically provided content is mere conversational implicature. I'll call this general view pragmatism.[12]

It is certainly beyond the scope of this paper to mount a full defense of pragmatism. However, a rehearsal of the examples and arguments that motivate the various versions of the view is in order. Let us begin with the existence of syntactically complete sentences with semantic content insufficient to provide a truth evaluable proposition. In these cases, pragmatically provided information is needed in order to complete the proposition. Bach (1994) asks us to consider the following examples:

> (11) Steel isn't strong enough.
> (12) Willie almost robbed a bank.

Both of these sentences are on Bach's view semantically incomplete, because we need to add extra information in order to reach a complete and determinate proposition. In the case of (11) we need to know what steel isn't strong enough for. In the case of (12) the options are more diverse: did Willie attempt to rob a bank and fail, or think about robbing a bank and settle on a corner store instead, or barely refrain from robbing a bank, or any one of a considerable other number of possibilities?[13] In both cases however, the semantically provided content requires supplementation before truth value can be assessed.

Cases of semantic incompleteness provide a relatively neutral motivation for the view that pragmatic contributions may sometimes be required to get us from the semantic content of a sentence to what is said in the broad sense. However pragmatic contribution to truth conditions is not limited to completion. There are many sentences that although semantically complete, have semantic content seemingly incompatible with our intuitions regarding their truth conditions. For example consider a utterance of (13).

> (13) Jack and Jill are married.

In many contexts it is natural to interpret an utterer of this sentence as asserting that Jack and Jill are married to each other. However, if it is part of the background information that Jack and Jill are brother and sister, one is more likely to interpret the utterer as asserting that Jack and Jill are married to other people. Of course, further information could be added to this second context to return us to the original interpretation. Regardless, the semantic content of (13) is neutral between these interpretations, but our intuitions vis-a-vis truth conditions are that a given utterance of (13) may be true just in case Jack and Jill are married to each other. That is, it seems that what is said in the broad sense by (13) may sometimes include what is made explicit in (13a), and sometimes what is made explicit in (13b):

> (13a) Jack and Jill are married to each other.
> (13b) Jack and Jill are married to other people.[14]

The gap between the semantic content of an utterance of (13) and the intuitive truth conditions of such an utterance is on the pragmatist view filled by pragmatic considerations of a broadly Gricean type. Similar considerations apply to utterances of sentences like the following:

(14) Jane took out her key and opened the door. [with the key] (Carston 2002)
(15) I've been playing hockey. [Backyard rink or official NHL rules?][15]
(16) The oven is hot. [enough to cook pizza] (Travis 1996)
(17) You aren't going to die. [from that cut] (Bach 1994)
(18) I haven't had breakfast. [today] (Bach 1994)
(19) I haven't had sushi. [ever]
(20) I haven't had desert. [with this meal]

The process here is one of expansion rather than completion. The speaker intends the hearer to expand upon the semantic content of the sentence uttered to reach what is said in the broad sense.[16]

Neither expansion nor completion results in mere conversational implicature. Conversational implicatures are generally communicated in addition to what is said in either sense, and in conversational implicature the speaker may well still assert the straightforward semantic content of the utterance. When I write that Fred is punctual, I may given the setting implicate that he is not a good philosopher, but I also assert that he is punctual. However, in both expansion and completion one does not assert the initial semantic content. The result of expansion or completion is asserted instead. To use Reimer's language, the results of expansion or completion are something we say and not just communicate, though the say here must be understood in the broad sense. An explanation of our intuitions in terms of these kinds of pragmatically provided content does not require any confusion between what is merely communicated and what is asserted on the part of the speaker or hearer. When I utter "I haven't had breakfast" in a standard context, I genuinely assert that I haven't had breakfast today, and I don't assert that I haven't had breakfast ever.[17]

There is considerable dispute among pragmatists on two issues—the possibility of being fully explicit, and the appropriateness of retaining the traditional notion of what is said as a factor in the process of communication. Neither of these issues bears substantively on the discussion that follows, and I will simply ignore them. Despite these disputes pragmatists agree that there is pragmatically provided content that is not mere implicature, and that our intuitions concerning truth conditions are often intuitions that take this pragmatically provided content into account.

7. A Pragmatist Treatment of Empty-Name Sentences

The right response to Reimer's criticism of Adams et al is to abandon the view that what is communicated by empty-name sentences is conversationally implicated, while maintaining that the information in question is pragmatically provided and part of what is said. There is clearly something intuitively correct about Adams et al's claim that we

associate descriptive content with names as part of the lore of a name, and that when we hear utterances involving names we often enrich the information semantically encoded with information drawn from the lore. It also seems true that our ordinary utterance reporting practices allow a fair degree of substitution of these descriptions for the names they are associated with. Consider the following series of partial conversations:

> A. Bill to Sara: Mary is leaving for England tomorrow.
> B. Sara to Fred: Bill said his sister is leaving for England tomorrow.

Given Mary is Bill's sister, B is a perfectly acceptable case of indirect quotation. Of course, that doesn't require that the semantic content of 'Mary' is the same as that of 'Bill's sister', or that the semantic content of the sentence 'Mary is leaving for England tomorrow' is the same as the semantic content of the sentence 'My sister is leaving for England tomorrow,' or that what is asserted by Bill is the same as what would have been asserted by Bill had he uttered the second sentence. Most importantly, it is compatible with the view that names behave exactly as the Millian says they do on a semantic level. Similarly when the names are empty.[18]

In short the view I am advocating is that with any use of a name, empty or not, the lore of the name serves to contribute considerable extra content that can form part of what is said in a broad sense, and that while speakers may in general be able to distinguish conversational implicatures from what is said in the broad sense, and thereby recognize a Gricean explanation when one is given, that does not translate into a reason to expect speakers to immediately recognize as correct the distinction between the semantic content of a sentence and what is said in a broad sense. The notion of implicating something rather than saying it—of reading between the lines—is an ordinary notion explained. The distinction between semantic content and what is said in the broad sense is a technical one, and we should no more expect competent speakers to recognize it as correct upon hearing it than we should expect competent pool players to recognize theoretical physics as correct upon hearing about it.[19]

How does this view solve the intuition problem? Consider again sentence (2):

> (2) Vulcan explained the perturbations in Mercury's orbit.

Let us stipulate, in order to keep the example simple, that the lore associated with the name 'Vulcan' by the speakers and audience we are considering is completely captured by the description 'the planet Leverrier hypothesized'. In this case, (2a) captures what is said in the broad sense by an utterance of (2).

> (2a) The planet Leverrier hypothesized explained the perturbations in Mercury's orbit.

Now, there is no question that (2a) is meaningful, that it is in the ordinary sense about something, or that it has a truth-value. This is plausibly the primary thing asserted by the utterer of (2). Thus it would be natural for us to treat an utterance of (2) as meaningful,

about something, and having a truth-value. One attractive feature of this explanation is that it can accommodate all the varieties of the intuition problem, including the problematic case of negative existentials: since it is true that the planet Leverrier hypothesized does not exist, it is natural for us to treat an utterance of the sentence 'Vulcan doesn't exist' as true.

One should keep in mind that the inclusion of lore derived information in what is said is not a special feature of empty names and empty-name sentences. If the speaker and audience all know that Mary is Bill's sister (i.e., have that among their lore for the name Mary), then an utterance of (21) may well communicate the claim made in (21a):

> (21) Mary is leaving for England tomorrow.
> (21a) Bill's sister is leaving for England tomorrow.

Again, (21a) is plausibly in this situation one of the things asserted by the speaker, possibly even the primary thing, and this fact explains why we might accept the use of (21a) in reports of an utterance of (21). The difference between empty names and non-empty names is that the incompleteness of empty-name sentences means that the semantic content is not itself truth-evaluable.

Our intuitions that sentences like (2) are meaningful, truth-evaluable, etc. stem from the fact that someone uttering of them will normally assert something meaningful, truth-evaluable, etc. In general, we take sentences to be meaningful when they are normally used to assert something meaningful, and similarly for the other intuitions. Empty-name sentences are not particularly special in this respect. Consider again Bach's (11):

> (11) Steel isn't strong enough.

Our intuitions about (11) are that it is meaningful and truth-evaluable. But without knowing what steel is claimed to be not strong enough for, we cannot actually evaluate it, nor is it meaningful in the sense at issue. A correct account of the semantics of (11) is not sufficient to account for its meaningfulness. Similarly, a correct account of the semantics of (17) is not sufficient to account for our intuition that it is sometimes asserted truthfully to a mortal audience.

> (17) You aren't going to die.

Our intuitions about empty-name sentences are also not adequately accounted for by a Millian semantics of proper names, but Millians can avail themselves of exactly the same pragmatist resources as we do to explain our intuitions with respect to (11) or (17). Reimer is correct that these intuitions do not concern mere implicatures, but implicatures are not the only kind of pragmatically provided content.

Can this view also handle the modal profile problem raised by Everett? First of all, we need to try and recast Everett's objection in terms that make sense under the view we are considering. Everett notes that the following sentence is necessarily false:

(22) Santa is identical to John Perry.

However, according to the pragmatist view of the sentence, what is asserted by an utterance of (22) will be descriptive in nature, perhaps along the lines of (23).

(23) The jolly fellow who delivers presents at Christmas is John Perry.

This however does not seem to be necessarily false.

Our first question then is this: when we claim a sentence is necessarily false (or make any other claim about its modal profile), are we saying something about the semantic content of the sentence, or something about what is said (in the broad sense) by the sentence, or are we saying something about the linguistic meaning of the sentence? To answer this question, let us turn to an example not involving empty names. Consider the modal profile of the following sentence.

(24) Elaine is identical to Susan.

Possibly true or not? Given no further information, the answer seems to be yes. However, if I tell you that 'Elaine' and 'Susan' do not refer to the same entity, that is enough to produce the intuition that (24) is necessarily false. Notice of course that I have not told you whether both names refer, or who they refer to. Do these intuitions concern the linguistic meaning of (24), or something else? Intuitively it seems that any competent speaker of English has a grasp on the linguistic meaning of (24) without having any additional information about 'Elaine' and 'Susan'. There is no lore involved. The information that the names do not co-refer thus seems to take us beyond linguistic meaning, in that it tells us something about the semantic content of the utterance— namely that the same entity does not appear twice over in the proposition expressed. On the other hand, the information that the names do not co-refer does not enable you to identify the singular proposition that is the semantic content of an utterance of (24), since, for example, you do not yet know whether the proposition is complete or incomplete— one or perhaps both names could still turn out to be empty.[20] Asking people to consider whether a sentence is possibly true is a way of getting them to focus on linguistic meaning or perhaps on what kinds of semantic content the sentence could have, but in any case, to abstract from the actual semantic content and from what is said in the broad sense. It seems then that modal profile intuitions do not concern the same level of linguistic analysis as straightforward intuitions regarding truth.[21]

We are now in a position to answer the first of Everett's two challenges to a pragmatist view: why are our intuitions about the truth, aboutness, etc. of empty-name sentences sensitive to pragmatically provided aspects of what is said in the broad sense while our intuitions about modal profile are not? The answer is that in general, our intuitions about modal profile are sensitive only to features of linguistic meaning and (to some extent) semantic content. empty-name sentences are no exception. Indeed, it might be seen as part and parcel of the pragmatist view that some of our intuitions are sensitive to

semantic content and/or linguistic meaning and some are sensitive to pragmatically provided content, and that one must be careful in determining which intuition is which. For example, consider again the following three sentences:

> (13) Jack and Jill are married.
> (13a) Jack and Jill are married to each other.
> (13b) Jack and Jill are married to other people.

Asked about (13) in isolation, speakers are likely to identify it as having the same truth conditions as (13a). Asked about (13b) however they will not identify it as contradictory, and when asked about (13) and (13a) together they will identify them as saying something different. These intuitions cannot be reconciled if all treated as intuitions about just one object.

What about Everett's second challenge based on modal intuitions: that of explaining why we have the intuitions we have about the modal profile of sentences like (10)? I suspect these intuitions are a product of the linguistic features of names in general, independent of whether the actual names in question refer or not. That is, our judgment about the modal features of (22) follows straightforwardly from the fact that 'Santa' and 'John Perry' do not co-refer, just like in the case of (24), and the emptiness of 'Santa' is simply not considered. To put it a different way, it is not part of the linguistic meaning of 'Santa' that it does not refer, but it is part of the linguistic meaning of any two names that if they do not co-refer then identity statements concerning them cannot be true. In asking questions about modal profile we isolate certain features of the utterance, and thus get different intuitions, in much the same way that asking about (13) and (13a) together will elicit different responses than asking about (13) in isolation.

This phenomena also sheds some light on the other objections raised by Everett in his paper. All his objections have as their central theme the observation that we are sometimes able to seperate out the descriptive content associated with a name from its semantic content, and Everett makes use of Kripke style arguments to demonstrate this. One feature of these of all these arguments is that they involve constructing situations which call our attention to the difference between pragmatically and semantically provided aspects of what is said in the broad sense. However, the fact that we have the intuition that there is a sense in which (13) and (13b) say something different does not do away with our intuition that a standard utterance of (13) says that Jack and Jill are married to each other. The best explanation of the existence of both sorts of intuitions is the distinction between the two senses of what is said. Similarly, my utterance of "Clinton was unfaithful" may well be correctly reported by "She said the previous president was unfaithful", even though an appropriate example would elicit the intuition that 'Clinton' and 'the previous president' are not semantically equivalent. Both these intuitions must be accommodated. In the case of empty names, distinguishing semantically between 'Santa' and 'the jolly fat man who delivers presents on Christmas' is compatible with explaining our intuitions about the truth of empty-name sentences containing the name in terms of sentences containing the description. This point is the

essence of Adams and Dietrich's own response to Everett (2004), though they frame it in terms of the distinction between what is said and conversational implicature.

For the Millian an account of empty proper names that treats them as semantically on a par with non-empty names is highly desirable. Any account on which empty names are singled out as being descriptive, even though we can easily be mistaken about whether a name refers or not, will appear ad hoc. Furthermore, the intuitions which motivate Millianism apply to names from fiction and false theories just as they do to non-empty names. The advantage of a pragmatic approach is that it can accommodate both the intuition empty-name sentences can be meaningful, about something, and truth-evaluable, and the intuitions that support Millianism in the first place. There are problems with a pragmatic approach which rests on conversational implicature: luckily this is not the only option.

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[1] Reimer (2001) and Braun (1993) call this the problem of the proposition expressed. I wish to avoid this name since on the view I advocate the semantic content of a sentence is not necessarily identical with the proposition expressed by an utterance of that sentence.

[2] Here I follow Reimer (2001).

[3] A sentence can be about something in the intuitive sense that I am concerned with here without being directly referential, or even denoting anything. For example, the sentences 'The present King of France is bald' and 'The present King of the United States of America is bald' are intuitively about different things, even though neither description denotes anything. This can be nicely explained by the fact that one description could denote without the other denoting, and vice versa. It is not clear to me that Reimer shares this view of aboutness, since on one occasion she identifies the intuition that a sentence is about something with the intuition that the sentence expresses a singular proposition (2001, 503). However this comment is compatible with there being other ways in which the intuition can be explained.

[4] Reimer (2001) calls them gappy propositions. Braun (1993) calls them unfilled propositions, while Salmon (1998) calls them structurally challenged. Kent Bach (1994, 2002) calls them propositional radicals.

[5] Nathan Salmon (1998) also endorses incomplete propositions where names are genuinely empty, but thinks that almost all of the names we normally call empty actually have semantic values. According to Salmon genuine empty names are rare entities. In contrast Braun thinks that fictional and mythical names are genuinely empty on a fair number of occasions. This is in contrast to his 1993 view, on which fictional names were not Millian names at all.

[6] While the incomplete proposition account is naturally described as an application of Millianism, some arguments for Millianism seem to mitigate against it. For example, empty-name sentences themselves seem to have modal profiles in accord with the modal argument against descriptivism. However if empty-name sentences do not express complete propositions it is unclear how they can have modal profiles at all. If the modal argument is counted among the arguments for Millianism, which seems unquestionable, then the arguments for Millianism do not unequivocally support the incomplete proposition view. The modal profile problem is discussed further below.

[7] In his 2005 paper Braun suggests that the question of whether atomic incomplete propositions are false or not is not completely settled, but still defends it as at least as plausible as its competitor.

[8] Salmon (1998) endorses both options, arguing that there are two versions of the true/false distinction. The version endorsed by Braun corresponds to what Salmon calls the exclusion theory, and the version endorsed by Reimer and ADFS correspond to what he calls the choice theory.

[9] This example depends upon an acceptance of the necessity of identity, but the point does not. More complicated examples can be constructed that raise the same basic problem even if the necessity of identity is rejected. For example, it seems that 'Santa delivers presents' has a different modal profile from 'The person who delivers presents at Christmas delivers presents'. See Everett 2003 for discussion.

[10] Everett offers other objections against a pragmatic account, which have as a central theme the application of standard objections to descriptive theories of proper names to the pragmatic-descriptive treatment of empty names. Adams and Dietrich respond to these objections in "What's in a (n empty) name? (2004). Their responses to the other objections seem to me to be on point. However, while my response to the modal-profile objection certainly bears some resemblance to theirs, my commitment to the view that what is said includes some pragmatically provided content means that I need to address this issue independently, since Adams and Dietrich's own response as formulated depends upon the fact that the pragmatically provided content is mere conversational implicature.

[11] Another somewhat recent advocate of a pragmatic treatment of assertion is Scott Soames (2005).

[12] Pragmatism so described is to be distinguished from the more radical view that Anne Bezuidenhout calls contextualism (2002). Contextualists make the further claim that pragmatic considerations contribute to the truth conditions of what is said (taken broadly) essentially—i.e. that the background assumptions involved can never be made completely explicit. For contextualist the best we can do is to be more explicit. The views defended in this paper are compatible with contextualism, but do not require it.

[13] Some more examples of sentences in need of completion according to Bach:

      a.That lamp is cheap. [relative to other lamps]
      b.Gentlemen prefer blondes. [to brunettes]
      c.Mutual knowledge is relevant. [to communication]
      d.Strom is too old. [to be a good senator]

[14]   It might be objected that (13b) would often implicate that Jack and Jill are having an affair—the claim is not that an utterance of (13) ever has a total communicative content identical to an utterance of (13a) or (13b).

[15]   Notice that the example assumes that the ambiguity between field, street, and ice hockey has already been settled in favour of ice hockey, but this still leaves open the question of what counts as 'playing hockey' for the purpose of evaluating the truth of the utterance. Bezuidenhout 2002 discusses a similar example extensively.

[16]   Bach 1994 contains numerous examples of completion and expansion. See also Recanati 1989, 2001, Carston 2004, and the afore mentioned Bezuidenhout 2002.

[17]   See Bach 1994, Carston 2004, and Recanati 1989, 2001 for further discussion.

[18]   This exchange may bring to mind Cappelen and Lepore's arguments against the view that semantic theory is beholden to statements of indirect speech, i.e., against the principle: an adequate semantic theory should assign p as the semantic content of a sentence S iff in uttering S a speaker says that p. Pragmatist views in general (and mine in particular) also reject this principle. Instead they endorse roughly the view that an adequate combination of semantic theory and pragmatic theory should assign p to S iff in uttering S a speaker says that p. Like Cappelen and Lepore, I think that indirect quotation allows us to go quite a long way from the strict semantic content. Where most pragmatist views and Cappelen and Lepore part company is on the issue of truth conditions. Cappelen and Lepore think that semantics alone determines truth conditions. See Cappelen and Lepore 1997, 2005a and 2005b.

[19]   Recanati maintains that completion and expansion occur at a sub-personal level, and are thus unavailable to introspection. If this is the case then the analogy to the pool player is particularly good, in that it seems probable that various sub-personal processes contribute to the pool player's success. However I think it is possible to endorse the view that we cannot easily recognize the difference between semantic and pragmatic contributions to what is said in the broad sense without committing to the sub-personal view. For example Bach suggests that our difficulty in recognizing the difference is due to the fact that many sentences are typically used non-literally (2002), and the contexts in which they are used literally are remote. In contrast in cases of conversational implicature contexts where the implicature is absent are easier to access. If this is the case then the analogy is not as apt. Bach suggests we compare the situation to that of watching a film. The experience of watching a film may be best explained by reference to cuts and camera angles but this does not entail that the viewer will recognize an explanation of their experience in these terms as true. See Recanati (1989) and Bach (1994) for further discussion.

[20]   Whether both names could be empty depends of course on whether my claim that the names do not refer to the same thing is taken to be true when both names do not refer at all. My intuition is that it is true in such a case, but nothing of substance depends on this. It is enough that you cannot rule out the possibility that the proposition in question is incomplete due to one name failing to refer.

[21]   As mentioned in note 10, this analysis of the situation bears some resemblance to Adams and Dietrich's own response to the modal profile objection (2004). However Adams and Dietrich are committed to the view that a sentence like 'Santa = Perry' is necessarily neither true nor false, since on their view the sentence has no truth value in its own right, since it expresses no proposition. On my view utterances of this sentence do indeed have truth values, though what proposition is expressed will vary with context, but its modal profile is a matter of its linguistic meaning.