

# Dubbings-in-trouble\*

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## Abstract

Pelczar and Rainsbury advance a theory of proper names which purports, inter alia, to implement Kripke's causal theory of name reference in order to explain reference change. The key tool for accomplishing this is the notion of a dubbing-in-force. In this paper I aim to show that this special appeal to dubbings does not sustain any real advance over Kripke's account at least with respect to the problem of inadvertent referential shift. I argue that this theory has not offered any theory of reference transmission, which I take as a precondition for explaining the problem of reference change, and that the notion of a dubbing-in-force is unnecessary for name reference.

## Keywords

Semantics, reference, proper names, indexicals, dubbings.

## 1. Introduction

This paper addresses Pelczar's and Rainsbury's indexical theory of proper names.<sup>1</sup> Because, as we'll see shortly, the central tenet of the theory is the notion of a *dubbing-in-force*, I shall call it the 'D(ubbing)-theory' hereafter. In brief outline, the D-theory argues for a semantic assimilation of names to indexical expressions like 'I', 'she' and 'this'.<sup>2</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> Pelczar and Rainsbury 1998 ('P&R' for short) and Pelczar 2000; 2001.

<sup>2</sup> Along with this, the D-theory advocates an *ontological* assimilation. Specifically, it supports the Indexical view on name-individuation according to which names are individuated by their type or form. As such, it opposes the Homonymy view which considers names as lexically ambiguous words like 'bank', individuating them by form-and-bearer. Proponents of the Indexical view are Cohen 1980, Loar 1976, and Recanati 1993. The Homonymy view has been held by Evans 1982,

Much like indexicals, proper names are ascribed a single meaning captured by a semantic rule or *character* which explains how their literal contents or referents can vary across different contexts of their use.<sup>3</sup> This is done by introducing into the context of the utterance of the name the notion of a dubbing-in-force. By means of this notion, the D-theory also purports: first, to augment Kripke's causal picture of reference determination so as to accommodate the problem of reference change; second, to account for Kripke's 'Paderewski' puzzle; finally, to explain propositional attitude ascription puzzles containing co-referential names such as 'Hesperus' and 'Phosphorus'.<sup>4</sup>

In this paper I will attempt to cast doubt on the D-theory by arguing against the key tool at its disposal, namely the notion of a dubbing-in-force. I will first lay out the D-theory in more detail (section 2). Then (section 3) I will argue that the notion of a dubbing in force: (a) involves a problematic circularity; (b) fails to account for the problem of multiple bearers. Moreover, (section 4) I will try to show that this notion (c) does not make the D-theory better than Kripke's picture in cases which do not involve reference shift; (d) appears to be unnecessary for name reference. Next, I will argue that this notion (e) is no helpful to explain reference *transmission*. As I understand it, a theory of reference transmission is one which specifies conditions for the referent of the token of 'N' which S produced in a context c to be the same as the one referred to by the name token which another speaker, S\*, produced—whom S witnessed producing this token (and from whom perhaps S acquired 'N' for the first time). On the plausible assumption that an account of reference transmission is a precondition for a theory

Almog 1984, Devitt (1982: 136), Kripke (1980, Preface: 7-9), Kaplan (1989: 574-5; 1990: 110-1). For an alternative approach see Bach (1970; 1987: 34-5, 135-138). For a criticism of the Indexical view, as held by Recanati 1993, oriented to a version of the Homonymy approach, see Galanakis (2004: ch. 5).

<sup>3</sup> Like Pelczar and Rainsbury, I too assume Kaplan's 1977; 1989 semantics for pure indexicals and demonstratives. See also Perry 1997a; 1997b; 2001.

<sup>4</sup> Due to space limitations, in this paper I will tackle only the first of these applications of the D-theory concerning name reference determination and referential change. Nevertheless, I think that the present criticism of this theory has also a bearing on the other strands of it, and hence on its success as a whole. However, I will not argue for this here.

of reference change, the D-theory does not seem to have solved the problem of reference shift either (section 5).<sup>5</sup>

## 2. The D-Theory

The D-theory argues that proper names are on a par with indexicals such as 'I'. An indexical like 'I' has two sorts of meaning: *character* and *content*. The character is represented by a function from contexts to contents, where the content is the referent of a token of 'I' in *c*. The context *c* is represented by a quadruple  $\langle w, s, p, t \rangle$  such that the agent *s* is located at *p* at the time *t* of the utterance of the indexical token of 'I' in the world *w*. **(I)** states the designation condition specifying the linguistic meaning of 'I'.

- (I)** For every context *c*, an 'I' token (in utterance *u*) designates *x* iff: *x* is the agent (speaker/writer) of *u* in *c*.

Pelczar and Rainsbury argue that proper names function semantically like indexicals by adding to the context *c* a new (fifth) parameter, captured by the notion of a *dubbing-in-force*. As they say, 'a *dubbing* is a speech-act whereby a name acquires a referent, and a *dubbing* is in *force* in a given context if in that context the item that was dubbed in that *dubbing* bears the name it received in that *dubbing*' (P&R: 294). In line with P&R (1998: 297) and Pelczar (2001: 141) we could say that, on the D-theory, proper names are governed by the following semantic rule **(N)**.

- (N)** For every proper name 'N' and for every context *c*, the token of 'N' produced in *c* refers to *x* iff *x* is the object dubbed 'N' in the *dubbing-in-force* governing the name 'N' whose token is produced in *c*.

Given the existence of names with multiple bearers, there might be more than one *dubbing* in force in a single context of a name use. Whenever this happens, for reference to succeed, one of the compet-

<sup>5</sup> For a detailed examination of the importance which the problems of *multiple bearers*, *reference borrowing*, and *inadvertent reference shift* have in a theory of proper name reference, and for extensive criticism of existing causal theories, Kripke's one included, see Galanakis 2004.

ing dubbings must be the most prominent. According to Pelczar (2001:138–139), the selection of the most prominent dubbing in force is carried out by means of pragmatic considerations, roughly in terms of Gricean conversational maxims.

The notion of a dubbing-in-force is meant to enhance Kripke's picture of reference determination in order to handle the phenomenon of reference shift. In Kripke's picture 1971; 1980, a name token of the type 'N', uttered by S in c, refers to the object which, by being dubbed 'N', initiated a causal chain of reference transmission events; in each link in this chain, the person who used 'N' (e.g. S) intended to refer to the same object as the person from whom she acquired 'N'. According to the D-theory, however, dubbings play a more 'active' role than merely starting chains of reference transmissions; they are brought, so to speak, into the context of the use of the name. In order to explain changes in name reference, over and above the Kripkean causal-intentional link, we should evaluate the prominence that a dubbing in force has in the context in question; the aim is to choose the most prominent one. A dubbing concerning an object o can be in force but have low prominence in a context. Another dubbing concerning a distinct object o\* can be highly prominent in this context, and thus be the most prominent dubbing in question. On the D-theory, this is how a name can shift its reference from o to o\*. I will come back to this line of explanation of reference change in section 5.

In sum, the notion of a dubbing-in-force is the central tenet of the D-theory. Firstly, it enables Pelczar and Rainsbury to explain how proper names could be semantically much like indexicals. Moreover, it allows them to build on Kripke's picture of reference fixing in an attempt to account for reference shift. In what follows, I will try to show that this attempt to account for reference (shift) fails.

### 3. Troubling dubbings-in-force: circularity and multiple bearers

In this (and the next) section I aim to explain why the D-theory's contextual appeal to dubbings is not helpful.

The notion of a dubbing-in-force is stated more clearly as follows:

- (Df)** A dubbing of something x with a name v is in force in a context c if, and only if, fixing the events leading up to c, it would be pos-

sible for there to be an utterance in *c* satisfying the following two conditions: (i) the utterance does not itself involve, include, or constitute a dubbing of something with the name *v*; (ii) in the utterance, the name *v* refers to *x*. (Pelczar 2000: 134)

I will first argue that, thus defined, the notion of dubbing-in-force involves a problematic circularity. Then, I will argue that the D-theory has not solved the problem of multiple bearers.

Suppose that Alf knows many things about the famous physicist Albert Einstein. Imagine Alf saying in a conversation, 'Einstein discovered the General Theory of Relativity'. As it seems, Alf's token of 'Einstein' refers to Albert Einstein. Let us see how exactly the D-theory could explain how this is so. For this to happen, it must be the case that the 'Einstein'-dubbing of the famous physicist is in force in the context of the conversation and is also the most prominent one. How, then, are we supposed to decide if the 'Einstein' dubbing is in force in that context? According to (Df), we first look whether Alf's use of 'Einstein' involves, includes, or constitutes a dubbing of something with 'Einstein'. Unfortunately, the D-theory does not say anything informative about how dubbings are constituted and individuated.<sup>6</sup> As applied to our example, the D-theory remains silent about the conditions under which Alf's use of 'Einstein' would count as constituting a new dubbing of something with this name. Nonetheless, for the sake of the discussion, let us assume that Alf's use of 'Einstein' does not involve or constitute any new 'Einstein' dubbing. As we will see, the D-theory faces a more important difficulty.

Since as we have supposed clause (i) of (Df) is satisfied, we should next look at clause (ii). What we get is this: to argue that Alf's 'Einstein' tokens refer to Albert Einstein we must argue that in Alf's utterance containing 'Einstein', the name 'Einstein' refers to Albert Einstein. However, this can hardly be progress. If the phrase 'in the utterance, the name *v* refers to *x*' of (Df)-clause (ii) means that in order to find what Alf's 'Einstein' token refers to we must find what

<sup>6</sup> Moreover, Pelczar and Rainsbury write that a 'dubbing is a speech-act whereby a name acquires a referent' (P&R 1998: 294). Still, this is far from being an explanation of what is going on in such dubbings or how in particular the reference is fixed. For instance, the D-theory has not addressed the so-called *qua-problem* concerning reference fixing in a dubbing situation. For this problem see, for example, Devitt 1981 and Devitt and Sterelny 1987.

the token of the name ‘Einstein’ contained in his utterances refers to, the account of the D-theory for reference determination seems hopelessly circular. If, on the other hand, this phrase means that we must find out what the *name type* ‘Einstein’, a token of which appears in Alf’s utterance, refers to then once again we are left in the dark as to what Alf refers to with ‘Einstein’. For there are many person called ‘Einstein’. In short, the D-theory does not take care of the problem of *multiple bearers*.

It is worth noticing that the above criticism holds also for the most prominent ‘Einstein’ dubbing in the context of Alf’s use of the name. That is, we could suppose that the ‘Einstein’ dubbing of Albert Einstein is the most prominent such dubbing; once again, making use of this most prominent dubbing we either get a circular account or we do not know what to say about what Alf’s token of ‘Einstein’ refers to. This is because the difficulty for the D-theory is not, at least at this point of the discussion, the distinction between dubbings-in force and the most prominent out of them. Rather, the difficulty concerns the central working notion of the D-theory itself, namely the notion of a dubbing in force—irrespective of whether the dubbing we appeal to is a ‘simple’ dubbing in force or the most prominent one.

More generally, if we apply the **(Df)** to the reference-determining semantic rule **(‘N’)**, we get the following rule **(Ref)**.

- (‘N’)** For every proper name ‘N’ and for every context *c*, the token of ‘N’ produced in *c* refers to *x* iff *x* is the object dubbed ‘N’ in the dubbing-in-force governing the name ‘N’ whose token is produced in *c*.
- (Ref)** For every proper name ‘N’ and for every context *c*, the token of ‘N’ produced in *c* refers to *x* iff, provided that the utterance containing ‘N’ does not itself involve, include, or constitute a dubbing of something with the name ‘N’, *x* is the object dubbed ‘N’ in the dubbing governing the name ‘N’ in *c* and in the utterance containing ‘N’ the name ‘N’ refers to *x*.

Let us consider all the uses of ‘N’ that do not involve any dubbing on the part of its users. Arguably, the vast majority of name tokens conform to this. With respect to each of these ‘N’-tokens, and in line with the unpacked rule **(Ref)**, to find what an ‘N’ token refers to in a context *c*, we must find what either (a) in the utterance containing ‘N’, the name token ‘N’ refers to or (b) the name type ‘N’ (a token of which is the one produced in *c*) refers to. However, in option (a) the

D-theory seems to offer a circular account of how proper names get their references. And in option (b), the D-theory, which is meant to individuate names by their types or form alone, has not explained the problem of multiple bearers. Given that this problem is part and parcel of the problem of proper name reference determination, it is unlikely that the D-theory has explained how names refer to what they do.

#### 4. Prominent dubbings, prominent troubles

In this section, I will question further the notion of a (prominent) dubbing in force along with the D-theory's method of its selection. I will do so by means of a head-on comparison between the D-theory and Kripke's picture. After that, I will argue for the view that the notion of a (prominent) dubbing in force appears to be redundant for name reference.

Suppose that A and B (experts in Roman literature) discuss some widely unknown Roman writers. At some point A says, 'Aristotle used to write only early in the morning'. Let us assume that the only person who A and B know as 'Aristotle' is the unknown Roman poet Aristotle. Moreover, suppose that Ben is totally ignorant about the Roman Aristotle; in contrast, he knows many things both about Aristotle the philosopher and about Onassis. Further, suppose that Ben did not hear in A's utterance the name 'Aristotle'. Mistakenly thinking that A, B discuss famous Greek writers, Ben joined the conversation by saying 'Aristotle was a great man'.

Let see what Kripke's theory could predict about what Ben's token of 'Aristotle' refers to. According to this theory, as the example is set up, Ben has been plugged into two distinct 'Aristotle' causal chains of communication: one 'Aristotle' chain leading back to the philosopher and one causal chain of uses of 'Aristotle' starting off from Onassis. Nevertheless, in the context of Ben's use of 'Aristotle' in our example, Ben intends to use 'Aristotle' to refer to the same ancient *philosopher* (not to a shipping magnate) as the one referred to by the person (say, Mr W) from whom Ben acquired the name 'Aristotle' for a philosopher in the past. Assume also that the chains of uses of 'Aristotle' to which Mr W's uses of this name belong started from Aristotle the philosopher. As such, Kripke's theory would quite straightforwardly predict that Ben's token of 'Aristotle' refers unambiguously to Aristotle the philosopher.

Let us now see what the D-theory could say about this example. To recall, on the D-theory, in order to find out what Ben's token of 'Aristotle' refers to, we must first find the 'Aristotle' dubbings that are in force in the context of his utterance and consequently single out the most prominent among them.

- (Df)** A dubbing of something *x* with a name *v* is in force in a context *c* if, and only if, fixing the events leading up to *c*, it would be possible for there to be an utterance in *c* satisfying the following two conditions: (i) the utterance does not itself involve, include, or constitute a dubbing of something with the name *v*; (ii) in the utterance, the name *v* refers to *x*.

In line with (Df), the events that led up to Ben's use of 'Aristotle' are those past events involving his acquisition of the name 'Aristotle' for the philosopher and Onassis and the current event concerning the conversation about Roman writers. From this point on, nevertheless, it is not easy to see how, following (Df), we can single out the 'Aristotle' dubbings that are in force in the context at issue.<sup>7</sup>

The only relevant interpretation of (Df) which I can think of is the following. To decide if a certain 'N' dubbing is in force in a given context, we look for the names that the speaker has acquired in the past for what persons, things, etc. If, in the context in question, the speaker (irrespective of whether it actually does so) *would* use 'N' to refer to a certain individual *o*, then the 'N' dubbing for *o* is an 'N' dubbing in force in that context. In accordance with this interpretation, we could now say, on behalf of the D-theory, which are the 'Aristotle' dubbings in force. Since, as I have described the example, Ben did not hear A's use of 'Aristotle' he did not get the name for the unknown Roman poet called 'Aristotle'. Given that Ben has the name 'Aristotle' in his vocabulary for the philosopher and Onassis, the dubbings in force in question are the 'Aristotle' dubbing regarding the philosopher and that about Onassis.<sup>8</sup> The next thing to ask is which of them is most prominent.

<sup>7</sup> In this respect, it is worth noting that although, on the D-theory, 'the key notion connected with the indexicality of names is that of a dubbing in force' (Pelczar 2001:138), Pelczar and Rainsbury did 'not attempt to provide a systematic way to decide which dubbings are in force in a given context' (P&R 1998: 295).

<sup>8</sup> I am not sure whether Pelczar would side with this interpretation. As he writes,

As the D-theory states, the inquiry about the most prominent ‘Aristotle’ dubbing is constrained or guided by pragmatic principles along the lines of Gricean conversational maxims such as the maxim of Relation ‘be relevant’ (Grice 1991: 308). Still, the conversation between A and B is about widely unknown Roman writers. As such, it seems that the ‘Aristotle’ dubbing that is most relevant to the discussion between A and B is the one about the unknown Roman poet. This dubbing, however, is not a dubbing in force in the context of Ben’s use of ‘Aristotle’.<sup>9</sup> On the other hand, it is unclear how, by appealing to Gricean conversation principles, we would single out one of the ‘Aristotle’ dubbings in question (one concerning the philosopher, the other about Onassis) which are in force in the context of Ben’s utterance as the most prominent. As we have assumed, Ben’s interlocutors, A and B, have not had acquired the name ‘Aristotle’ for anyone else but the Roman writer, at least prior to their witnessing Ben’s use of it.

the causal-intentional route by which [a speaker acquired a name] constitutes *at most* one of the elements that may give force to one of the relevant dubbings. Other factors (such as conversational norms of relevance and truth-telling) can also [...] have a bearing on which of the relevant dubbings is in force. (Pelczar 2001: 139)

Given this, however, it seems problematic that Pelczar uses the same pragmatic mechanism for the selection of dubbings in force as that which he uses for singling out the most prominent out of them. It seems to me that what Pelczar says in the above quote is in tension with his demarcation of dubbings in force by (Df). In addition, following what he says, it is far from evident which ‘Aristotle’ dubbings are in force in our case. See also footnote 9.

<sup>9</sup> If Pelczar insisted that the ‘Aristotle’ dubbing concerning the Roman poet is in force, then it seems that (by utilizing the same pragmatic means he would use for its selection as one which is in force in line with the quote in footnote 8) he would be a small step from assigning to it prominence over any other relevant ‘Aristotle’ dubbing in force. But then, the D-theory would have to say that the occurrence of ‘Aristotle’ in Ben’s utterance refers to the Roman poet. This seems counter-intuitive, since Ben has never perceived any use of ‘Aristotle’ in which this name refers to this Roman. As we have supposed, Ben does not have the name ‘Aristotle’ for this Roman in his idiolect. Given that he is unaware of the fact that A discussed with B Aristotle the Roman writer, Ben cannot even have any deferential intention to refer with ‘Aristotle’ to what A refers with this name. After all, it would not harm the spirit of the example to add that, for some reason, Ben came to believe that neither A nor B know the philosopher Aristotle and that he joins their discussion aiming at informing them about this philosopher.

As far as I can see, the only possible way to single out the ‘Aristotle’ dubbing e.g. for the philosopher as the most prominent one is to argue as follows. We must include in the class of Ben’s conversational participants the participants in the community-wide ‘Aristotle’ practice of using ‘Aristotle’ to talk about the ancient philosopher. On this line of thought, the most prominent ‘Aristotle’ dubbing that we are after is the dubbing from which the most prominent ‘Aristotle’ community-wide practice originated.<sup>10</sup> And arguably, (perhaps by appealing also to Ben’s referential intentions) this practice is the ‘Aristotle’ practice of using ‘Aristotle’ to talk about the famous philosopher.

Nevertheless, this could bring about another obstacle to the D-theory. According to this suggestion, the process of the contextual selection of the most prominent ‘Aristotle’ dubbing comes down to the contextual selection of the most prominent ‘Aristotle’ practice. But then, it is questionable why we need to invoke dubbings-in-force at all in order to determine reference. Suppose that in Ben-like cases the determination of the reference of the produced ‘N’ token is carried out in terms of the most prominent ‘N’-practice. If so, then it seems that all we need is, guided by pragmatic, high prominence-based considerations of reasonable assignment, to *assign* the object the most prominent ‘N’ practice is about as the reference of the ‘N’ token in question.<sup>11</sup> In short, we could drop talk of dubbings in force and say instead that Ben’s token of ‘Aristotle’ refers to Aristotle the ancient philosopher in the context at issue iff it is *most reasonable* in that context to assign that philosopher as the reference of the produced name token. In such a case, however, the central explanatory tool of the D-theory, namely the notion of a dubbing-in-force, does not seem to have any role to play for reference fixing.

To summarize the discussion thus far. The central notion of the D-theory, the notion of a dubbing in force has been found to be problematic in many ways. Firstly, the explanation of reference determination via this notion (specifically via (Df)) appears to be circular. One way to avoid this is to interpret the name ‘N’ mentioned in (Df) as referring to

<sup>10</sup> To the best of my knowledge, the first who used the notion of a proper name using practice in an account of name reference is Evans 1982.

<sup>11</sup> A consequence of this would be that names turn out to be like variables and not indexicals. However, I will not argue against this aspect of the D-theory here. For a development of this idea of referential assignment which is in line with an anti-indexical, or homonymy view on name individuation see Fiengo and May 1998.

name types. But then, since the D-theory individuates name by their types or forms alone, and given that typically many persons are called by a given name type, the D-theory has not accounted for the problem of multiple bearers. Moreover, as the ‘Aristotle’ example indicates, the D-theory is unclear both about how to select the ‘Aristotle’ dubbings which are in force in the context of Ben’s utterance and about how to determine which of them is the most prominent. As such, the notion of a (prominent) dubbing in force is of no real help in accounting for what Ben’s token of ‘Aristotle’ refers to.<sup>12</sup> I suggested a way out of this, in terms of the most prominent ‘Aristotle’ practice or the most reasonable referential assignment. However, this has the cost of leaving no role for dubbings-in-force to play in reference determination; the D-theory’s *special use* of dubbings seems to be more or less redundant for name reference.

It seems strange that the D-theory, which means to enhance Kripke’s theory, has difficulties in handling a case like the ‘Aristotle’ example that do not involve a reference change, while Kripke’s picture can easily answer it. Still, the D-theory is best meant to improve upon Kripke’s picture in successfully handling reference shift. It is thus vital to examine how the D-theory fares in this respect.

<sup>12</sup> In fairness to Pelczar, he would see the discerned difficulties in singling out the most prominent dubbing in force in a certain context as being highly analogous to those associated with messiness which he discusses in relation to indexicals and demonstratives in Pelczar 2001. As such, it is not unlikely that Pelczar would count these difficulties as a further motivation for the assimilation of names to indexical expressions. Nevertheless, I do not think that this line lends much support to Pelczar’s view. For reasons of space, I cannot take up this issue here. However, two brief comments are necessary. First, the present criticism of the D-theory purports to indicate that the notion of a dubbing-in-force is unhelpful in name reference *in particular*. And, although it is most likely that a theory of name reference fixing has a bearing on the indexical-homonymy controversy, it seems independent from the ‘contextual messiness’ feature of this controversy in the following sense. Namely, names could turn out to behave like indexicals and yet there would be a theory of how their reference is determined which is compatible with this but also does explain the selection of the prominent candidate referent, and thus it handles the messiness in question. Second, as indicated in the text, the obstacles relevant to the selection of the prominent dubbing could relatively easily support a homonymy oriented treatment of names.

## 5. Dubbings and reference change

In this section, I will take up a major application of the D-theory, namely the explanation of reference shift in terms of dubbings in force. As we will see, it is unlikely that the D-theory's basic explanatory vehicle does any real work in this respect either.

Consider the 'Madagascar' real-life example of reference shift, due to Evans 1973. In hearing the name 'Madagascar' during one of his explorations, Marco Polo mistakenly thought that it was the name of a certain island southeast of the African coast. In fact, the persons from whom Polo learnt the name were using 'Madagascar' to refer to a specific part of the African mainland. When he returned to Venice, Polo taught the name to his contemporaries as the name of the island mentioned above and soon or later, the name spread to Europe. Nowadays, we use 'Madagascar' to refer to the island in question, not to the region of the African mainland. That is, the name 'Madagascar' has undergone a referential change from the portion of the African mainland in question to the island Madagascar. The problem is to explain how this happened. The explanation that the D-theory offers is the following.

As Pelczar says,

[t]he notion of a dubbing in force provides a way of augmenting Kripke's causal theory of names so as to accommodate [the 'Madagascar' case...] the causal-intentional route by which [a contemporary speaker acquired the name 'Madagascar'] constitutes at most one of the elements that may give force to one of the relevant dubbings (i.e. of the mainland versus the island by 'Madagascar'). Other factors (such as conversational norms of relevance and truth telling) can also and in this case do have a bearing on which of the relevant dubbings is in force in a given utterance of 'Madagascar' by our hypothetical contemporary speaker. (Pelczar 2001: 138–139)

Or, as Pelczar and Rainsbury write, the solution to the 'Madagascar' case of reference change is

straightforward [...] the dubbing of the eastern portion of Africa with 'Madagascar' went out of force, and the currently reigning dubbing of the fourth largest terrestrial island with 'Madagascar' came into force [...] what dubbing is in force with regard to 'Madagascar' varies linearly over time [...] the contextual feature to which 'Madagascar' is sensi-

tive—viz. dubbing(s) in force with respect to ‘Madagascar’—is at present synchronically invariable. There was a time, however, when it did enjoy some measure of synchronic variability; viz., when ‘Madagascar’ was being used by some speakers to refer to the eastern portion of Africa, and by other speakers to refer to the world’s fourth largest island. (P&R 1998: 295-296)

As I will argue, however, this explanation does not satisfactorily address the problem of reference change. My criticism will centre on the ‘Madagascar’ dubbing of the island that, as the D-theory claims, gradually outweighed the ‘Madagascar’ dubbing of the part of the African mainland at issue. Along with it, I will try to show that, appearances notwithstanding, it is unlikely that the D-theory is better off than Kripke’s picture with respect to the problem of reference shift. I will end up the section by an overarching diagnosis of what went wrong in the D-theory’s attempt to explain this problem.

Pelczar (2001: 139) insists that ‘we needn’t posit any explicit act by which (or identify a precise moment at which) the dubbing of the island acquired force in lieu of that of the mainland territory’. Nonetheless, the D-theory says that in the initial phase of the transmission of ‘Madagascar’ in Europe, some speakers used it to refer to part of the African mainland whilst other speakers were using it to refer to the island Madagascar. Presumably, this is what we get if we apply the mechanism concerning the most prominent dubbing in force. What follows is an example designed to show that this view could be defeated with relative ease.

Suppose that Marco Polo, after hearing the name ‘Madagascar’ from the natives, and erroneously thinking that it is the name of the island we nowadays call ‘Madagascar’, went to the island to explore it. Suppose that on his way to the island, for some reason, Polo forgot that he got the name from the African natives. Suppose that Polo mistakenly thought that he learnt the name ‘Madagascar’ for the island in question from an old book written by an earlier explorer. He also forgot all the information he initially acquired from these natives concerning the portion of the African territory that they called ‘Madagascar’. Instead, Polo came to associate with ‘Madagascar’ a great deal of information only about the island. Finally, imagine that Polo and his fellows in the trip used ‘Madagascar’ *for the first time* only after the exploration of the island, on their way back to Venice. In particular, suppose that in a discussion about the island, Polo said

'Madagascar is the greatest island I have ever visited'. It seems safe to say that in this and in subsequent uses of 'Madagascar' by Polo and his fellows, 'Madagascar' refers to the island and that a reference shift happened. However, in this context, the discussion is solely about the island that Polo and his fellows in the trip visited. Given this, the D-theory seems to be forced to say that the 'Madagascar' dubbing of the African mainland is not in force. To argue that Polo's 'Madagascar' tokens refer to the island, the D-theory must first argue that in the context of Polo's first use of the name there is a 'Madagascar' dubbing of the island which is in force. This bears on the D-theory's attempt to account for reference shift in two ways.

Firstly, regardless of how the D-theory will attempt to explain how this 'Madagascar' dubbing in force occurred, it would be the only 'Madagascar' dubbing which is in force in the context in question, and so the most prominent one. As such, it is not quite right to say that in the initial phase of the use of 'Madagascar' some European speakers referred with it to the island while others to a certain part of the African mainland. Instead, it seems that Polo and his fellows (and all those Europeans who learnt the name from Polo) referred with 'Madagascar' only to the island. As such, a reference shift happened from the initial phase of use of 'Madagascar' by Polo and his followers in the trip. In contrast to what the D-theory says, the shift in the reference of 'Madagascar' is not, and need not be gradual. Pelczar and Rainsbury could reply that this is as it should be. They could say that in this version of the 'Madagascar' example, the D-theory could predict that there is a single 'Madagascar' dubbing concerning the island, due to Polo. However, this does not seem to save the day. This is why.

Secondly, and more importantly, imagine that we press the supporter of the D-theory to explain how exactly the dubbing of the island with 'Madagascar' took place. As it seems, the only features she could avail herself of are facts about Polo (i.e. that he forgot how he got the name), his causal contact with the island, the information which he gathered from this contact and which he associates with 'Madagascar' as well as his conversational-communicative goal to talk about that island with his companion (which is accomplished). If this is so, however, then it appears that these features are all we need to account for name reference shift. Let us explore further this suggestion.

The proponent of the D-theory would say that the important feature in question is the actual *use* of a name in communication. She

could claim that it is the use of ‘Madagascar’ by Polo and his fellows, and subsequently by other Europeans, which established ‘Madagascar’ as the name of the big island off the eastern African coast. At the same time, these name uses opened up the gap with the uses of ‘Madagascar’ by the African natives. The notion of a (prominent) dubbing in force in the context of a name’s use intends to capture the communicative uses of it to which the occurring use conforms or is part of. And it is these uses that bring about the conferral of a name on an object, especially in cases in which, like the ‘Madagascar’ example, there is not any explicit dubbing.

However, recall what Kripke writes in response to the ‘Madagascar’ case:

[T]oday the usage of the name as the name of the island has become so widespread that it surely overrides any historical connection with the native name...the phenomenon is perhaps roughly explicable in terms of the predominantly social character of the use of proper names...we use names to communicate with other speakers in a common language. This character dictates ordinarily that a speaker intend to use a name the same way as it is transmitted to him; but in the ‘Madagascar’ case this social character dictates that the present intention to refer to the island overrides the distant link to native usage. (Kripke 1972: 768-769)

Given this, we could well wonder how exactly, if at all, the D-theory has any edge over Kripke’s causal theory in regard to explaining shifts in name reference. Rather, it looks as though we did not come up with any real progress over the problem of reference change.<sup>13</sup>

The same outcome could be arrived at from a slightly different angle. The D-theory says that the shift in the reference of ‘Madagascar’ happened (gradually) *because* the dubbing of the African mainland with ‘Madagascar’ was losing force and the dubbing of the island with this name was gaining force over time. Eventually the latter dubbing was

<sup>13</sup> This comparison is meant to apply to the problem of reference change *in particular*, which I take to be an important ingredient in a theory of name reference determination. In other words, I do not mean to imply that the outcome in the text holds even when we consider the D-theory and Kripke’s picture as a whole. For instance, as opposed to Kripke’s theory, the D-theory does offer an account of propositional attitude ascription puzzles. Still, it seems to me that this leaves open the question of whether Kripke’s picture could not be amended so as to handle such puzzles at least as well as the D-theory.

the only dubbing in force, and as such the most prominent dubbing governing uses of ‘Madagascar’ by contemporary speakers. However, the order of explanation could be reversed. In particular, one could say that the raising in prominence of the ‘Madagascar’ dubbing of the island is because a shift in the reference of the name from the African mainland to this island happened. Put differently, we could say that because people started talking about the island in question with ‘Madagascar’ that the dubbing of that island became more forceful, relevant, or prominent with respect to their ‘Madagascar’ utterances. If this is so, however, we can hardly have an explanation of the problem of reference change. In contrast, it looks as though the D-theory puts the cart before the horse.

At this point, I want to discern what in my opinion went wrong with the way in which the D-theory tries to handle the problem of reference shift. To start, nowhere are we told how exactly Polo and/or those who learnt the name ‘Madagascar’ from him ‘broke’ the chain of uses of ‘Madagascar’ by the African natives (which terminates in the Africa mainland). Furthermore, the D-theory does not tell us how ‘Madagascar’, in its European uses, came to refer to the island. The D-theory says that *nowadays* ‘Madagascar’ refers to the island because *nowadays* the dubbing of the island with ‘Madagascar’ is the only dubbing in force in the contexts of its uses or the most prominent such dubbing. However, this does not in effect explain how the Africa natives’ chain of transmission of the reference of ‘Madagascar’ broke in the first place. And this is the real question. But to answer it, we need a theory of reference transmission. If we had a theory of reference transmission which does explain this, *then*, if we wish so, we could say that nowadays the dubbing of the island with ‘Madagascar’ is *of course* the most prominent ‘Madagascar’ dubbing. But this is a *post facto* move, one that comes after the explanation of the broken referential chain and the establishment of the new European chain of uses of ‘Madagascar’.

More generally, it seems that the problem of reference shift is a special case of the problem of reference transmission. This is because a theory of reference passing from one speaker S to another S\* is one which offers conditions to explain how and why the name ‘N’ which S uses on a given occasion has the same reference o\* as it has on the use

of it by her informant S\*. And the failure of these conditions to obtain could also explain how it would be possible for 'N' to acquire a new referent *o* on the use of it by S, initiating a new chain of uses of 'N' in which 'N' refers to *o*. This is, it seems to me, the right way to account for reference shift. That is, one has to offer a theory of reference transmission. As Pelczar (2001: 137–138) claims, the problem with Kripke's picture of chains of reference transmissions with respect to the 'Madagascar' example is that this picture does not suffice to explain how 'Madagascar' acquired the island as its new referent. Instead, it seems that this theory would allow that, on contemporary uses of it, 'Madagascar' could refer to the southeast part of the African territory in question. It is this picture of reference passing which the D-theory intends to improve upon. However, the D-theory not only does not offer an improved theory of reference transmission; it does not offer any such theory at all. In particular, the central tool of the D-theory, namely the notion of a dubbing-in-force, is of no help in successfully handling the problem of reference transmission. It seems to be no accident that we have found that the same holds in relation to the problem of multiple bearers.

## 6. Conclusion

The D-theory attempts to account for name reference, most noticeably the problem of reference shift, by means of its key working notion, that of a dubbing in force. However, the 'Einstein' example indicates that the D-theory's answer to name reference in terms of dubbings in force, even prominent ones, faces the following problems. Firstly, the D-theory appears to be offering a circular account of how names refer. Also, it falls short of successfully explaining a central problem in the issue of name reference, that of multiple bearers. In addition, the notion of a prominent dubbing in force seems to create difficulties in accounting for the 'Aristotle' example which does not involve any reference change. By contrast, Kripke's picture could easily handle this case. Finally, the notion of a prominent dubbing in force does not suffice to explain the 'Madagascar' example. The diagnosis for this was because this notion is of no help in cashing out the problem of how reference is transmitted from

speaker to speaker. Moreover, this central notion is not well enough explained. We could explain it in terms of the social, communicative uses of ‘Madagascar’ or the most prominent ‘Madagascar’ or ‘Aristotle’ practice, as the case might be. But then it looks as though the notion of a prominent dubbing in force is *unnecessary* for name reference; all we need is to appeal to communicative name uses.

I conclude that the notion of a (prominent) dubbing in force in its specific, contextual use by the D-theory, does not account for name reference—specifically for reference transmission and reference shift. The D-theory thus does not succeed in these respects. In contrast to what the D-theory claims, it does not seem that this theory is so much an improvement over Kripke’s causal picture of reference. A theory of name reference is still wanting.

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