Non-literal uses of proper names in XYZ constructions

A relevance theory perspective

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The paper focuses on non-literal uses of proper names in XYZ constructions, such as the use of the personal name Donald Trump in Boris Johnson is the Donald Trump of UK politics or '5G' is the Donald Trump of telecom, and argues that such uses can be best accounted for by relevance theory. While in their primary use, proper names uniquely denote specific individuals and have no meaning on their own, in their secondary uses, they act as common nouns, capable of conveying non-literal meanings. In relevance theory, such non-literal uses can be explained in terms of lexical modulation or ad hoc concept formation. The analysis of selected examples shows that while some of the XYZ constructions can be seen as metaphors, others are better described as category extensions, and it substantiates the relevance-theoretic claim that there is no clear cut-off point between the two varieties of loose use.

Keywords: ad hoc concept, category extension, lexical pragmatics, metaphor, proper name, relevance theory, XYZ construction

1. Introduction

Proper names as terms used to uniquely identify specific individuals have long attracted the interest of linguists and philosophers seeking answers to the questions concerning their meaning and reference. Much less attention has been given to so-called secondary uses of proper names as illustrated by He is no Shakespeare used to comment on the writer's lack of genius.

The paper focuses on non-literal uses of proper names in XYZ constructions, which can be illustrated by the use of the personal name Donald Trump in Boris Johnson is the Donald Trump of UK politics. XYZ constructions are understood as structures with free slots to be filled with lexical content, and typically analysed within cognitive linguistics as cases of blending or as metaphors. These analyses do not explain in a comprehensive way how the meaning of proper names contributes to the interpretation of non-literal uses of proper names in such constructions, how such interpretations vary with respect

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to non-literalness and creativity. A new analysis is offered within relevance theory with a view to suggesting satisfactory solutions to these problems. Examples of non-literal uses of proper names in the XYZ construction are based on the pragmatic process of lexical modulation or ad hoc concept formation. More specifically, they are regarded as broadened ad hoc concepts, with varied degrees of creativity, depending on whether essential (category extension) or peripheral (metaphor) properties associated with the name bearer are projected onto the ad hoc concept. XYZ constructions are analysed as 'pragmatic routines', which explains why such novel and often creative uses should not be difficult to process. Above all, the analysis of such examples supports the relevance-theoretic hypothesis that there is a continuum between category extensions and metaphors within a larger continuum of loose uses.

2. Some Issues Concerning Proper Names

Formal aspects of proper names

Proper names are terms conventionally used to identify specific individuals (or collections of entities, e.g. the Hebrides), typically people (e.g. William Shakespeare), and places (e.g. London), but also objects (e.g. Nautilius, the famous submarine named by Jules Verne), animals (e.g. Bucephalus, the horse of Alexander the Great), institutions (e.g. the Knesset), historical events (e.g. the Plague), and public holidays (e.g. Passover), etc. (Payne and Huddleston 2002, 515–516). Huddleston (1988, 96) defines a prototypical proper name as "the institutionalised name of some specific person, place, organisation, etc. – institutionalised by some formal act of naming and/or registration." Of various categories of proper names, the most common are personal names (see also Hanks 2006; Lehrer 2006).

Since a proper name is used to refer to a specific entity (or a collection of entities) conventionally associated with that name, it is generally assumed that "a proper name is inherently definite" (Payne and Huddleston 2002, 517), which makes proper names in English incompatible with both indefinite and definite determiners. The former are excluded because of the clash between the inherent definiteness of proper names and indefiniteness marked by the presence of such determiners, while the inclusion of the latter in proper names will result in redundant marking of definiteness. With respect to definiteness marking, Payne and Huddleston (2002) distinguish between strong proper names such as William Shakespeare, in which there is no (extra) definiteness marker, and weak proper names like the Thames, which require the definite article.

The semantics of proper names in relevance theory

The semantics of proper names is a much contested subject in linguistics and philosophy, and there seem to be two basic positions about the meaning of proper names: either it is limited to direct reference or it comes from a

description of some kind. The first position can be traced back to John Stuart Mill (1974) (for discussion, see e.g. Bunnin and Yu 2004; Lycan 2019; Schwartz 2014; Reimer 2006); this group also comprises Kripke's (1980) causal theory of reference (with variations of the theory proposed by Hilary Putnam, Keith Donnelan, and David Kaplan). The second position, according to which the meaning of a proper name is the descriptive (conceptual) content with which the name is associated, goes back to Frege (1892/1980) and is also connected with Russell (1905, 1918) and Searle (1958) (for discussion, see e.g. Audi 2015; Lycan 2019; Taschek 2010).

Interestingly, to account for the semantics of proper names, it is not necessary to adopt either of these positions. In relevance theory, it is generally assumed that meanings of proper names (and of most words2 in general) come from associated mental concepts, and it is the design of these concepts that holds the answer to the question what kind of meaning proper names (and other words) have.

Lexical concepts (i.e. concepts encoded by words) are regarded as distinct mental structures with a relatively high degree of stability. Such a concept consists of an address in memory which provides access to different kinds of mentally represented information filed at that particular conceptual address via three types of entries: logical, encyclopaedic and lexical (Sperber and Wilson 1986/1995, 86). Only the logical entry for a concept makes any contribution to the content of an assumption which contains that concept, while its encyclopaedic entry, at least partly, determines the context in which that assumption is processed (Sperber and Wilson 1986/1995, 89). The logical entry for a concept provides access to computational information, understood as a set of deductive rules operating on assumptions in which that concept appears. The encyclopaedic entry gives access to representational information about the extension and/or denotation of the concept; it includes expert information, folk knowledge, cultural beliefs, and personal opinions and experiences, which may be stored in the form of propositional representations, assumption schemas, prototypes, scenarios or scripts and mental images (Carston 2002, 321; Sperber and Wilson 1986/1995, 88). The lexical entry contains representations with linguistic forms. It includes information about the phonetic structure and grammatical properties of a word used for encoding the associated concept (Sperber and Wilson 1986/1995, 90).

Different types of words can be associated with different types of concepts, or as observed by Sperber and Wilson (1986/1995, 90), "different words may have meanings of different formats". Hence, Sperber and Wilson suggest that, unlike common nouns, proper names are associated with concepts which provide access only to lexical and encyclopaedic information; there is no logical information. This naturally follows from their assumption that the extent to which concepts are logically specified may vary: some logical entries may

amount to a full definition of a concept, some may "provide some logical specification of the concept without fully defining it" (Sperber and Wilson 1986/1995, 92), and some may be empty. Because of such a design of concepts, the relevance-theoretic framework is well-suited to accommodate varied approaches to lexical semantics. For example, to subscribe to the causal theory of meaning, according to which both proper names and natural kind terms are treated alike, it would be enough for relevance theorists to postulate that all these terms are associated with concepts with empty logical entries and appropriately modified encyclopaedic entries.

More recent relevance-theoretic work shows that it is also possible to reconcile the referentialist view and the descriptivist position by restating meaning in terms of mental representations and arguing that the meaning of proper names may vary depending on the nature of each name and its use in context. This is what Powell (2010, 76) does, offering what he calls "a mixed referential-descriptive account". Admitting that proper names most frequently contribute just their referents to truth conditions, Powell also allows for descriptive content to enter the propositional content in some contexts. According to him, proper names serve the purpose of communicating individual concepts, which he views as subjective cognitive entities or "dossiers containing information all of which is taken by the holder of the concept to be satisfied by the same individual" (Powell 2010, 14). To understand a proper name used by the speaker, it is necessary for the hearer to "entertain some individual concept" (Powell 2010, 55, original italics) which has the same denotation as the speaker's concept and which is associated with the name used. On his view, the meaning of a proper name is not only its referent; its meaning is also determined by the internal dimension of the individual concept. Importantly, there are no constraints on how similar the internal dimensions of the speaker's and the hearer's concepts must be, so the speaker and the hearer may associate different descriptions with the proper name's referent. Thus, Powell's relevance-theoretic approach does not postulate any uniform meaning for proper names, arguing instead that individual concepts expressed by them may be used to refer directly or through some descriptive content according to the speaker's intention.

Secondary uses of proper names

Even though, undoubtedly, the primary function of proper names is to identify a certain individual in a unique unambiguous way, it is also possible to use a proper name to show that an entity is not a sole bearer of that name or to make a comment on an entity which is not really a bearer of that proper name. While, in their primary use, proper names in English are assumed to be inherently singular and definite, which typically precludes the presence of determiners; in their secondary use, the loss of the inherent definiteness motivates the selection of determiners or pluralization. In their insightful discussion of the grammar of English proper names and proper nouns, Payne

and Huddleston (2002, 520–522) suggest several secondary uses of proper names, the most important of which are illustrated in the examples below:

(1) a. I've never met [an Ophelia] before.

b. We need [another Einstein].

c. She's [no Florence Nightingale].

d. [The young Isaac Newton] showed no signs of genius.

e. Let's listen to [some Beethoven] tonight.

Example (1a) illustrates how proper names can be used to denote a set of bearers of the proper name. Since there may be a number of people called Ophelia, the name Ophelia denotes the set of people having this name. The sentence will thus be interpreted as meaning that the speaker has never before met a person with the name Ophelia.

Examples (1b) and (1c) show how proper names can be used to denote a set of entities that have relevant properties of the name bearer. In particular, another Einstein is understood as 'another person with such-and-such properties commonly associated with Alfred Einstein', while the expression no Florence Nightingale suggests that the person thus described does not have the properties that would qualify her as a member of the set of people having the properties associated with Florence Nightingale (i.e. compassion, diligence, commitment to patient care, etc.). Example (1d) illustrates the use of proper names to denote a set of manifestations of the name bearer. Guided by the presence of the adjective young, the addressee will restrict the reference of the proper name to one of the manifestations of Isaac Newton, namely, that of Isaac Newton as a young person, and not, say, that of Isaac Newton as a recognised scientist. Finally, Example (1e) is an illustration of how proper names are used to denote a set of products created by the name bearer. The expression some Beethoven is shorthand for 'some music by Beethoven'.

The above examples of secondary uses of proper names do not fall into one category. In the remainder of the paper, I focus only on cases where proper names are used to denote a set of entities having properties associated with the name bearer, as illustrated in Examples (1b) and (1c) above, elsewhere referred to as 'resemblance examples' (see e.g. Fara 2015; Jeshion 2015a, 2015b, 2015c), and I treat them as non-literal uses of proper names. In the literature, these uses have come to be known as 'non-referential' (e.g. Bach 2002; Powell 2010), 'deviant' (e.g. Geurtz 1997; Pang 2010) or 'appellative' (e.g. Van Langendonck 2007). It is also possible to describe them as non-literal (e.g. Burge 1973; Fara 2015;

Jeshion 2015a, 2015b) or metaphorical (e.g. Boër 1975).

I have decided to use the term "non-literal" even though it may be rejected by those for whom proper names do not have any sense and as such cannot be used "literally" or "non-literally". But if we admit, after Powell (2010), that

proper names may have some descriptive meaning, it is possible to use them literally or not. Furthermore, the terms "literal" and "non-literal" have been used in the debate about proper names between referentialists and predicativists (cf. Fara 2015 vs. Jeshion 2015a, 2015b). But most importantly, the terms are useful to distinguish between two kinds of "secondary" uses. Literal uses of proper names may be illustrated with so called 'family examples' such as He is a Romanov, meaning that he is a member of the Romanov family (to which Example [1a] could be added). On the other hand, non-literal uses of proper names include so-called 'resemblance examples' such as George Wallace is a Napoleon (Burge 1973, 429), where George Wallace is not among those whose name is Napoleon, but rather that his behaviour resembles that of Napoleon Bonaparte in a particular contextually salient way (see also Boër 1975). Interestingly, the literal and non-literal uses may be combined with a punning effect, as shown by the following example from Zabeeh (1968, 64): "Here is another Hitler", "But there cannot be another Hitler".

In the literature, non-literal uses of proper names are often described in terms of conversion, one of the word-formation processes by which lexical items change grammatical category without any formal modification (e.g. Allerton 1987; Anderson 2007). Accordingly, proper names are converted into common nouns (or noun phrases).

While discussing examples of appellativizations of proper names, Van Langendonck (2007) sees metaphor and metonymy as basic processes underlying the change of proper names into common nouns. Based on his explanation, in examples involving non-literal uses of proper names, the appellativization is possible because a metaphor is involved:

it is used to compare other persons to Einstein (Example [1b]) and to Florence Nightingale (Example [1c]). Hence, the meanings of another Einstein and no Florence Nightingale could be paraphrased as 'a person comparable to Einstein' and 'a person sharing no common properties with Florence Nightingale', respectively.

Matushansky (2008) sees uses of proper names such as those in Examples (1b) and (1c) as cases of coercion, where the proper name Einstein or Florence Nightingale acquires the meaning of 'an individual having the typical properties associated with the unique individual that is called Einstein or Florence Nightingale'.

The above analyses invariably focus on finding a mechanism transforming proper names into common nouns, be it ellipsis, conversion, coercion, metaphor, metonymy, without attempting to offer sufficient explanation. In particular, the process of conversion could be used to generate the sense of plurality (with a proper name referring to more than one name bearer) but can hardly be invoked to account for meanings derived from characteristics of original referents of proper names. On the other hand, the

analyses in terms of metaphor, metonymy or simile are based on comparisons without specifying the criteria used to evaluate resemblance. It will be shown in the remainder of the paper that relevance theory may provide a comprehensive description and explanation of such uses.

3. Non-Literal Uses Of Proper Names In Relevance Theory

Lexical modulation

In relevance theory non-literal uses of proper names, just as non-literal uses of any other words, are treated as loose uses of language which result from pragmatic processes of lexical modulation or lexical adjustment. There is no presumption of literalness, so practically every linguistically encoded word meaning is fine-tuned in the process of lexical modulation, with the help of available contextual information (Carston 2002, Chapter 5; Sperber and Wilson 2008; Wilson and Carston 2007). As a result of this pragmatic process, the adjusted meaning contributed by a particular word to the utterance meaning will differ from the stable lexically encoded meaning of that word (Allott 2010, 109). Lexical modulation is also known as ad hoc concept formation since, in relevance theory, (in most cases) word meanings come from the associated concepts, and pragmatically modulated meanings require the construction of unlexicalised ad hoc concepts. These occasion-specific concepts are constructed in the process of utterance interpretation in response to expectations of relevance and are derived from the interaction of information stored in the logical and encyclopaedic entries for lexicalised concepts with the context (both linguistic and extralinguistic) and the principles of relevance (Carston 1997, 2002). Wilson and Carston (2019, 36) add that "[such] concepts are capable of capturing fine-grained differences in perception, action or emotion in a way that encoded word meanings cannot".

As mentioned above, a given lexicalised concept activated by the use of the encoding word may serve as the input for the construction of a non-lexicalised concept. When an ad hoc concept is constructed via the process of narrowing, it picks out only "a subset of the items that fall under the encoded concept," which means that the encoding word is used "with a more restricted denotation" (Wilson and Carston 2007, 232). For example, in (2a) below, the verb drink is used to communicate 'drink alcohol', which is more specific (narrower) than the verb's encoded meaning 'to take in and swallow a liquid through the mouth'. If an ad hoc concept is yielded on the basis of broadening, it involves the extension of the set of items that fall under the encoded concept. Hence, the word is used "with a consequent expansion of the linguistically-specified denotation" (Wilson and Carston 2007, 234; see also Wałaszewska 2015), as illustrated by (2b), where the verb will be interpreted as communicating a less specific (looser) meaning than the encoded one,

something along the lines of ‘take in a liquid’, without the specification of how it is done.

(2) a. Some women drink to cope with work pressures.

b. This plant drinks a lot of water.

Unlike narrowing, broadening involves the suspension of literalness since in the construction of an ad hoc concept some of the logical information associated with the lexically-encoded concept may be dropped and the resulting ad hoc concept may traverse the boundaries of the lexicalised concept. Such non-literal uses are not treated as a deviation from the norm since, as mentioned above, there is no presumption of literalness.

In relevance theory, approximation, hyperbole, and metaphor are not assumed to be natural kinds; on the contrary, they involve the same interpretive mechanisms, and as such may be hypothesised to form a continuum, with no easily identifiable cut-off points between them (Sperber and Wilson 2008; Wilson 2014; Wilson and Carston 2007; Wilson and Sperber 2012). This hypothesis is deeply rooted in the long defended relevance-theoretic view that “there is a continuum between literal, loose, and metaphorical uses rather than a set of clearly definable theoretical categories which play distinct roles in communication and comprehension” (Wilson 2017, 94). Approximation, hyperbole, and metaphor “merely occupy different points on a continuum of degrees of broadening” (Carston 2012, 479), and differ only with respect to the amount of looseness involved. The amount of broadening of the linguistically encoded concept is slight, almost imperceptible in the case of approximation, more substantial in the case of hyperbole, and metaphor is based on a greater departure from the lexicalised meaning than hyperbole.

Let us illustrate these three cases of broadening with the following example:

(3) Peter is blind.

In interpreting (3), when uttered in different contexts, it is possible to use the lexically encoded concept BLIND (‘lacking the sense of sight’) to construct different context-sensitive ad hoc concepts such as BLIND*, BLIND**, BLIND***. On the assumption that Peter is so visually impaired that he can see only blurred shapes and colours, BLIND* will be interpreted as an approximation, and its denotation will include both people who are totally blind and people who are nearly blind. If Peter’s eyesight is poorer than expected by the speaker (e.g. he can’t see well from a distance), BLIND** will be interpreted as a hyperbole, and its denotation will be broader than that of BLIND*: it will include people who are both totally and nearly blind as well as people who may be simply near-sighted. Undoubtedly, BLIND** is more radically broadened than BLIND*. Finally, if Peter does not realize that Mary loves him, BLIND*** will be interpreted as a metaphor, with its denotation even more radically broadened to include people who are unable to perceive

something, be it by means of the eyes or by means of the mind. Importantly, in the metaphorical use, the information about visual perception associated with the concept BLIND is not accessed. To sum up, all of the ad hoc concepts in relevance theory, category extension is defined by Sperber and Wilson (2008, 91) as involving the application of "a word with a relatively precise sense to a range of items that clearly fall outside its linguistically specified denotation". As observed by Wilson and Carston (2007, 236), not only common nouns but also personal names lend themselves to being used as category extensions, as can be seen in their examples below:

(4) a. Ironing is the new yoga.

b. I don't believe it – they've appointed another Chomsky.

According to Wilson and Carston (2007, 236), in (4a), yoga may be understood as conveying an ad hoc concept YOGA* "representing the category of fashionable pastimes for relieving stress", while the ad hoc concept CHOMSKY* communicated by the use of the proper name in (4b) stands for "a broader category of forceful exponents of a particular approach to linguistics".

It is suggested in relevance theory that category extension and metaphor form a continuum of cases between less radical and more radical broadenings. In the earlier approach (e.g. Wilson 2003), metaphor was even described as a more radical variety of category extension. The problem with an accurate description of the relationship between category extension and metaphor is not associated with the lack of distinguishing criteria, but primarily with the fact that the two varieties of loose use may imperceptibly merge into each other, and the distinction between them is blurred. In theory, the difference between category extension and metaphor can be teased out by analysing what properties of the encoded concept are projected onto a broader category: in the case of category extension, it is "defining, or at least characteristic, properties of the encoded concept", while, in the case of metaphor, it is "relatively peripheral or, at least, contingent properties of the encoded concept" (Sperber and Wilson 2008, 94). Additionally, unlike category extensions, metaphors may involve both broadening and narrowing, but such a combination is by no means their defining feature (Sperber and Wilson 2008, 95).

As I have argued elsewhere (Wałaszewska 2020), category extension may easily combine with other varieties of loose use such as approximation and hyperbole, which shows that the relevance-theoretic continuum of loose uses may have a complex, non-linear, multi-dimensional structure. For example, in (5):

(5) I swam a marathon.

the ad hoc concept MARATHON* represents a broader category of racing over a distance of 26.2 miles in a variety of ways such as running or swimming. One of the characteristic properties of the lexically encoded concept MARATHON, namely running, is not projected onto the broader category. It is

still associated with the ad hoc concept, but as one of a number of properties specifying possible ways of moving over a distance, which makes the ad hoc concept include in its denotation both running and swimming. On the other hand, the properties of physical distance and activity of racing, which seem to be defining, or at least characteristic, properties of MARATHON are projected onto the broader category. What is more, this case of category extension, in an appropriate context, could be interpreted as involving approximation (the speaker raced over a slightly shorter swimming distance than 26.2 miles) or hyperbole. To arrive at a hyperbolic interpretation, it is possible to imagine a newbie swimmer marvelling at their achievement of covering just a few miles in a competition.

On the face of it, the process of ad hoc concept formation may seem problematic in the case of proper names. The most widely accepted view is that proper names only identify the individuals they name and as such have no meaning on their own: this raises doubts as to the applicability of processes of lexical modulation in such cases. In other words, the question is whether the use of a proper name can trigger ad hoc concept formation.

As discussed earlier, in their non-referential uses, proper names in English are accompanied by determiners (or pluralised), which indicates that a given proper name is treated as a common noun (noun phrase). Since common nouns are associated with concepts which have three kinds of entries, it seems plausible to claim that, in the case of such occasion specific noun phrases, some items of encyclopaedic information associated with the referent of the proper name used non-referentially are treated as logical information. Such a move seems motivated since Sperber and Wilson (1986/1995, 89) do not exclude the possibility that the same item of information is stored as encyclopaedic or logical information, or in both forms simultaneously.

Let us analyse the following examples to see how ad hoc concepts can be formed in the case of non-literal uses of proper names:

(6) a. Putin is the new Hitler. (Wałaszewska 2015, 119)

b. Putin is a Hitler.

In the case of proper names, "a relatively precise sense" can be understood as characteristic properties typically stored in the encyclopaedic entry for the concept associated with the unique individual picked out by the proper name, and possibly acquiring the status of defining or logical information in the process of lexical modulation. Such an extension is possible if the individual inside and individuals outside the proper name's denotation share a number of contextually relevant properties (Wałaszewska 2015). In both (6a) and (6b), the proper name Hitler, uniquely identifying Adolf Hitler, is used to represent a broader category of dictators and sociopaths, craving for world domination, of which the individual named Hitler is a salient member and whose name denotes it. Interestingly, there is a difference between (6a) and

(6b): in (6a), Putin is suggested as the most salient member (he has replaced Hitler), whereas in (6b), Putin is just one of the members of the broader category, whose most salient example is still Hitler.

4. Non-Literal Uses Of Proper Names In XYZ Constructions

The XYZ construction

One of the most interesting contexts for secondary uses of proper names is the so-called XYZ construction. The term 'XYZ construction' was originally used by Mark Turner (1991) to label the structure schematically described as 'X is the Y of Z', which can be illustrated by some of Turner's examples given below:

(7) a. Money is the source of all evil.

b. Death is the mother of beauty.

(Evans and Green 2006, 412–413)

Turner (1991) describes the construction as consisting of three elements, all of which are noun phrases labelled as X, Y, Z. Its purpose is to show the speaker's perspective of how the element X should be viewed.

The XYZ construction is an example of what has been called 'patterns of coining' (Kay 2002, 2013; see also Veale 2014), schemata (Van Lancker Sidtis 2004; Van Lancker Sidtis et al. 2015) or 'snowclones' (Pullum 2003).6 Patterns of coining are not classified as a grammatical construction; they are used for coining descriptions in a clear, pleasing way. As a result, such reusable descriptions sound novel and familiar at the same time: the content may be creative and original, but the schematic structure of each coinage makes it easy to understand. Schemata resemble formulaic expressions (e.g. idioms, proverbs) in that they contain elements easily identifiable by language users; for example, they have a fixed order of lexical elements or may trigger certain connotations. However, unlike formulaic expressions, they are highly versatile because they contain open free slots which can be creatively filled with lexical content (Van Lancker Sidtis 2004; Van Lancker Sidtis et al. 2015). Finally, a snowclone is understood as an extremely flexible phrasal template, which was originally described by Pullum (2003) as "a multi-use, customizable, instantly recognizable, time-worn, quoted or misquoted phrase or sentence that can be used in an entirely open array of different jokey variants by lazy journalists or writers". In other words, to become a snowclone, a specific fixed expression becomes less fixed as a result of introducing some variables (e.g. X, Y, Z), while the original meaning of the construction generalizes. The increase in schematicity is associated with increased productivity, at least for a certain period (Traugott 2014, 97–99; see also Traugott and Trousdale 2013).

In relevance theory, XYZ constructions can be analysed in terms of pragmatic routines, which has already been suggested for the 'X is the new Y'

snowclone (Wałaszewska 2020), and which seems to be working for different varieties of snowclones. The development of a pragmatic routine, which is a special kind of cognitive procedure, is based on "repeated derivation of the same sort of implications in processing a familiar stimulus" (Vega Moreno 2007, 3). In the case of snowclones, the familiar stimulus is the construction itself, which guides the reader/hearer along a certain inferential route to process the lexically encoded concepts and assumptions activated by them. Since the processing effort needed to interpret such structures may be (greatly) reduced by their schematicity, they are frequently used to convey novel and creative meanings.

Proper names in XYZ constructions

XYZ constructions in which the Y variable is a proper name, specifically a personal name of a famous person, are very common, as can be seen from the collection of the 'X is the Y of Z' snowclones available on the blog significantly called "The Rosa Parks of Blogs", created by Mark Peters and dedicated to this single structure.

7 Several imaginative examples taken from the blog are listed below:

(8) a. [The guy next to me at the post office]X

is the [Mozart]Y

of [wrapping a box]Z.

b. [I]X

am the [Ted Bundy]Y

of [work pass maintenance]Z. In my working life I have murdered dozens of them. They have been abandoned in cabs, bars, washing machines, dryers, trains, boyfriends, buses, lift wells, bins ...

c. After a few days, [I]X was the [Jackie Chan]Y of [beetle murder]Z. Swift. Using anything as a weapon: shoes, bars of soap, Kindles, condiment bottles. I grew familiar with the satisfying crunch of exoskeleton that meant that it was dead.

d. The chipotle hummus was possibly the best I have ever had. Smokey and sexy, [it (= the chipotle hummus)]X was the [Greta Garbo]Y of [hummus]Z.

The XYZ constructions where Y is a proper name of a person differ with respect to creativity: some are felt to be more creative, while others are perceived as less creative (Veale 2014). Creativity is a challenging concept to define as can be seen from the number of perspectives taken and definitions offered; it has undergone numerous revisions and reformulations. My understanding of creativity is based on Sternberg's (1999, 3) classic definition, according to which creativity is viewed as "the ability to produce work that is both novel (i.e. original, unexpected) and appropriate (i.e. adaptive concerning

task constraint)" since the qualities of novelty and appropriateness seem apt for the description of XYZ constructions. I believe that the examples discussed here fall under 'little-c' creativity as they illustrate everyday language use as opposed to 'Big-C' (eminent) Creativity of such world-changing geniuses as Einstein, Picasso or Shakespeare. Associations between ideas may be formed for a variety of reasons (functional or acoustic relatedness); remote associations tend to be original unlike those obvious ones (Hidalgo-Downing 2016; cf. Jones 2016).

As observed by Veale (2014), least creative are examples where both X and Y are filled with names of people from the same area of activity, e.g. two political leaders, two writers or two artists related to painting or drawing, etc.

(9) a. [David Cameron]X is the [Tony Blair]Y of [the conservative party]Z.

b. [Nicholas Sparks]X is the [Stephen King]Y of [the mush-brained romantic novel]Z.

c. [Milton Caniff]X is the [Rembrandt]Y of [the comics]Z.

To achieve more creativity (and possibly produce more humour and evoke more pleasing effects), such constructions exploit an individual person Y to describe a non-human X (Veale 2014). For example, as illustrated by the sentences in (10), people's names (here, names of famous leaders and actors) are used to attribute certain characteristics to machines, food, plants, animals, etc.

(10) a. [Toyota Prius]X is the [Che Guevara]Y of [the eco-friendly car movement]Z.

b. [Red meat]X is the [Donald Trump]Y of [cancer]Z.

c. [The potato]X is the [Tom Hanks]Y of [the vegetable world]Z.

d. [The Northern Pintail]X is the [Audrey Hepburn]Y of [the duck world]Z.

It is worth noting that XYZ constructions just as other snowclones may stay "close to their original source at first, but if they catch on, the examples get wilder and woolier" (Zimmer 2009), possibly because the associated ideas become more remote. As noted by Zimmer, 'X is the Cadillac of Y', as a version of the generic 'X is the Y of Z' snowclone, has proved really successful, and hence very productive. It has gone a long way from predictable and not-so-exciting 'X is the Cadillac of trucks', through more creative 'X is the Cadillac of lawnmowers', to totally wild 'X is the Cadillac of clot inhibitors', and acquired the sense of something of excellent quality and superior to everything else in its category.

An overview of approaches to the XYZ construction

Veale (2014) argues that such examples of XYZ constructions are more like similes than analogies8 since they are built around one highly salient

property stereotypically associated with the person whose proper name is used in place of the Y variable. In Veale's examples in (10) above, Che Guevara is 'revolutionary', Donald Trump is 'aggressive', Tom Hanks is 'versatile', and Audrey Hepburn is 'elegant'. This single property is shared by both X and Y (even though it is understood differently for X and Y) and hence serves as the basis for building a comparison between X and Y. Veale observes that comparisons constructed around one property, involving totally different concepts, tend to be perceived as "flimsy and gratuitous", and precisely because of their flimsiness they are likely to produce humour.

Within the Cognitive Linguistics paradigm, Turner (1991) originally analysed his examples of the XYZ construction (see the examples in [7] above) as metaphors, but later his analysis was recast in terms of blending. A more recent view is to see "the XYZ construction [as] a grammatical construction specialised for prompting for conceptual integration" (Evans and Green 2006, 412). The purpose of this construction is to provide a certain perspective (specified as the Z variable) from which a certain X should be presented.

Dancygier and Sweetser (2014) analyse such constructions in terms of blending processes which are evoked not only via lexical choices, but also via grammatical form. They (Dancygier and Sweetser 2014, 156) explain the abundance of proper names used as fillers of the Y slot in XYZ constructions by the ability of proper names to evoke rich framing rather than simply referring to individuals; for example, the name Shakespeare, which uniquely refers to the English playwright, is primarily thought of in terms of the plays authored by Shakespeare, Shakespearean characters, the concept of genius, etc. (Dancygier and Sweetser 2014, 101).

Rita Brdar-Szabó and Mario Brdar (2020, 298) argue that XYZ constructions are not cases of genuine blending and could be better explained "as metaphors based on metonymic paragon models". A paragon is defined by Lakoff (1987, 87) as an individual member of a category that "represent[s] either an ideal or its opposite" (see also Lakoff 1999, 404). Barcelona (2003, 38) modifies Lakoff 's analysis by postulating a chain of two metonymies: the first assigns a characteristic property to a particular famous name bearer, which paves the way for the creation of a figurative class of individuals sharing that property, and the second one activates that class from its ideal member. It is the latter metonymy that directly motivates the use of Shakespeare's name as a common noun (Barcelona 2003, 38). BrdarSzabó and Brdar (2020) insightfully notice that a number of the figurative XYZ constructions are used with explications, whose function is to guide addressees towards the right interpretation. Such explications justify the pairing of X and Y, as shown below:

(11) [Coriander]X is the [Gwyneth Paltrow]Y of [the herb world]Z – some people love it, some people don't!

The appended explication indicates what kind of relation there is between

X (coriander) and Y (Gwyneth Paltrow). It seems that giving reasons for the pairing may trigger an ad hoc creation of novel paragons or at least a modification of existing paragons. XYZ constructions referring to existing paragons do not need any explications.

Undoubtedly, all of the cognitive linguistics accounts offer interesting insights into the nature of non-literal uses of proper names in XYZ constructions. It is significant that there is no agreement among cognitive linguists about how to explain the discussed examples in conceptual terms. All these approaches focus on metaphors and metonymies construed as products of conceptual mappings or other conceptual operations; however, they fail to show how varied interpretations by individual hearers may be viewed as category extensions or metaphors, with no clear cut-off point between the two.

Category extension or metaphor? A relevance-theoretic analysis of non-literal uses of proper names in the XYZ construction

The time has come to pull together all the threads of relevance theory discussed above in order to provide a comprehensive explanation of how non-literal uses of proper names in the XYZ construction are interpreted. In particular, the following analysis is intended to show that even though such uses of proper names are best accounted for as cases of category extension, there are also examples that could qualify as metaphors. Significantly, there are also cases that cannot be easily classified as either category extensions or metaphors, which further supports the relevance-theoretic claim that there is a continuum of loose uses.

As mentioned above in Section 4.1, in relevance theory, XYZ constructions can be analysed in terms of pragmatic routines as constructions that guide the reader/listener through the interpretation process and hence facilitate it. In particular, it is the presence of the definite article that guides the reader/hearer towards the interpretation that a proper name used in the Y slot denotes a set of entities having certain properties associated with the name's bearer. This suggestion finds its mirror reflection in the recent relevance-theoretic proposal "that the need for ad hoc-concept construction may be overtly indicated by certain types of linguistic elements that accompany, or are added to, content words" (Padilla Cruz 2022, 131). Among expressions that can serve as lexical triggers of ad hoc concept constructions are determiners, for example articles (Padilla Cruz 2022, 134). Additionally, the construction shows that with respect to context Z, X has replaced Y as the most salient member of the category named after Y.

In the set of examples below, the Y variable is the proper name Donald Trump, which is used to communicate different ad hoc concepts. Examples (12a), (12b), (13b), and (14) come from the time when Donald Trump served as the 45th president of the United States (from 2017 to 2021). Examples (13a) and

(13c) come from the time when Donald Trump was the 2016 Republican presidential nominee and his presidential campaign was in full swing.

(12) a. Boris Johnson is the Donald Trump of Britain.

b. Narendra Modi is the Donald Trump of India.

The concept communicated by the use of Donald Trump in (12a) and (12b) seems to involve the projection of characteristic properties associated with the name bearer such as being a controversial state leader with nationalist and Islamophobic views onto the created broader category of which the most salient member is US President Donald Trump. However, in the context of the United Kingdom, it is Britain's Prime Minister Boris Johnson who is the most salient member, and, when restricted to the context of India, the most salient member of this category is Narendra Modi, the country's prime minister. The use of Donald Trump in these examples seems to be a category extension: there is no radical broadening.

On the other hand, the ad hoc concepts communicated by the use of Donald Trump in the examples below seem to be cases of metaphor: all of them involve the radical broadening based on the relatively peripheral properties associated with Donald Trump as the President of the United States, or with Donald Trump as the 2016 Republican presidential nominee.

(13) a. '5G' is the Donald Trump of telecom.

b. This place [the nightclub called LIV] is the Donald trump [sic!] of clubs, it lies, lies, lies. It's supposed to be the biggest and best club but it's actually the biggest and worst.

c. "The Revenant" is the Donald Trump of the trio [= three movies nominated for the Oscars in 2016: "The Revenant," "Spotlight," and "The Big Short"] – it's vain, crude, and blustery.

In (13a), Donald Trump is used to communicate the concept of, say, all hype and publicity, but little substance, based on the peripheral properties of the presidential candidate. In the context of telecommunications, the presidential candidate Donald Trump, regarded as the central member of the broadened category which contains entities that are all show and no substance has been replaced by the fifth generation of mobile internet connection, which is widely advertised and discussed with no hard facts. The ad hoc concept communicated in (13b) is so broadened as to include in its denotation entities definable by shameless deceitfulness used for manipulative purposes. The most salient member of this category is Donald Trump, who is associated with thousands of lies that he told or misleading claims that he made during his White House tenure. With respect to nightclubs, LIV has replaced Donald Trump to become the most salient member of the category. In (13c), the appended sentence somewhat indicates what properties associated with the presidential nominee are to be projected onto the broadened category of which Donald Trump is the most salient member, the category of, say, out-of-the-mainstream nominees of

various kind (not only human beings but also movies) whose most characteristic, or defining, properties are vanity, crudeness, and a tendency to browbeat others. In the context of the three Oscar nominees, the movie "The Revenant" is the most salient member of this category: it is not a mainstream Hollywood entertainment, and it is definitely different from the other two films in both tone and affect.

In (14), the denotation of the ad hoc concept communicated by the use of Donald Trump is broadened so as to include not only presidents of countries but also presidents of football clubs, all of whom share the property of having the urge to restore their 'organizations' to their former glory.

(14) De Carvalho is the Donald Trump of Portuguese football, the president of Sporting Lisbon who is trying to make his club great again.

On the one hand, the use of the proper name in (14) may be interpreted as a category extension since it involves the projection of characteristic properties associated with the name bearer such as being an outspoken, confrontational, unpredictable, and populist president of a certain 'organization' who is preoccupied with restoring greatness to his organization. On the other hand, the broadening may be viewed as more radical since being involved in politics is different from being involved in football, and hence the use of the proper name may be interpreted as a metaphor. The inability to classify this use of the proper name in a clear and unambiguous way seems to follow from the assumption, well-grounded in relevance theory, that varieties of loose use form a continuum and that they may merge into each other, with the distinction between them being thus obliterated.

5. Concluding remarks

Proper names are traditionally regarded as uniquely identifying individuals and hence they are inherently definite. Their meaning can be argued to be limited to reference or to come from a description of a certain kind. These two views – referentialist and descriptivist – may be reconciled, which has already been done within relevance theory by George Powell, by arguing that individual concepts expressed by proper names may be used to refer directly or through some descriptive content on different occasions. Apart from picking out its sole bearer, a proper name can be used to denote a set of persons sharing the same name, properties or products associated with the name bearer and some manifestations of the name bearer. Such secondary uses of proper names seem to be deviant, which grammat¬ically manifests itself in the loss of definiteness, and at least some of them can be treated as non-literal. An interesting type of non-literal use of proper names can be found in the so-called 'XYZ construction', which can be treated as an example of 'patterns of coining', schemata or 'snowclones', understood as structures with open free slots that can be filled with lexical content in a creative way. In general, such uses of proper

names are the more creative, the more they depart from their original reference. Creativity is understood in accordance with Sternberg's (1999, 3) definition in terms of novelty and appropriateness within 'little-c' creativity of everyday language use.

In relevance theory, non-literal uses of proper names in XYZ constructions can be analysed in terms of ad hoc concept formation. Ad hoc concepts are gen¬erated from lexicalised concepts as a result of the pragmatic processes of nar¬rowing or broadening, whereby their denotations become more restricted or expanded, respectively. Such unlexicalised concepts are constructed in response to the expectations of relevance and derived from the information stored in the logical and encyclopaedic entries for lexicalised concepts. On the relevance¬theoretic view, proper names in their referential use have no logical entries; non¬referential uses of proper names, however, may cause some items of encyclopaedic information to be treated as logical information. Non-literal uses of proper names are discussed in relevance theory as cases of broadening: category extension or metaphor. In the case of category extension, essential characteristic features asso¬ciated with the name bearer are presumably moved to the logical entry and are projected onto the newly created broader category of which the most salient member is the name bearer. In the case of metaphor, more peripheral, contin¬gent properties associated with the name bearer are used to create a broadened category, which not only results in a more radical broadening but also gives the impression of greater creativity.

In relevance theory, XYZ constructions can be analysed in terms of pragmatic routines as constructions specialised for conveying novel and creative meanings since the processing effort needed to interpret them may be reduced by the schematicity of the structure. XYZ constructions with the use of a proper name as variable Y communicate information that with respect to context Z, X has replaced Y as the most salient member of the category named after Y. An analysis of selected authentic examples of uses of the name Donald Trump in the XYZ con¬struction shows that, depending on what kind of properties are exploited, essen¬tial or peripheral, such uses may be classified as category extensions or metaphors. Importantly, it also shows, what is emphasised in relevance theory, that metaphor is not a natural kind and that in some cases it is hard (if not impossible) to classify a particular non-literal use of a proper name as a metaphor or as a category exten¬sion. This can be seen as confirmation of the relevance-theoretic continuum of loose uses.

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