

# Quasi-names

## Abstract

In this paper, I shall deal with quasi-(proper) names, that is expressions like ‘Mum’, ‘Dad’, ‘Grandpa’, ‘Grandma’ in English or ‘Papà’, ‘Mamma’, ‘Nonna’, ‘Nonno’ in Italian. I shall use examples both from English and Italian. Quasi-names are directly referential like proper names, even they apparently exhibit some conceptual materials, which, however, are not active and are inert. They can be used as vocatives or as arguments of verbs. I called terms like ‘Mum’, ‘Dad’ ‘quasi-names’ because they have certain characteristics of names (but they could also be called ‘indexical names’). They confer significance to an individual. Quasi-names are indexical, although the word ‘I’ does not appear in the proposition expressed.

## 1. Introduction.

In this paper, I shall deal with quasi-(proper) names, that is expressions like ‘Mum’, ‘Dad’, ‘Grandpa’, ‘Grandma’ in English or ‘Papà’, ‘Mamma’, ‘Nonna’, ‘Nonno’ in Italian<sup>1</sup>. I shall use examples both from English and Italian, given that in both languages quasi-names can be used in argument and non-argument positions (vocatives) and they are functionally different from names, in so far as they are indexical, from pronominals, nicknames and other categories. Most importantly, both in English and in Italian, they are directly referential and their conceptual dimension has become inert.

The first to use the term ‘quasi(-proper) names’ was Giusti (2015), who correctly says that these terms are directly referential and that they are not to be assimilated to descriptions. It must be interesting to explain why this should be the case and the answer to this question cannot but be complex and articulated. These expressions are often in the vocative case, as when one is calling someone else, and lack the definite article, perhaps an indication that they are not definite descriptions, but quasi-names. Like names, they are directly referring expressions, even if, unlike names, they are indexical, as their interpretation is normally connected with the interpretation of ‘I’ (that is to say the speaker). Even if they contain conceptual materials, these are inert from a referential point of view, functioning like appositives, and they do not mediate the referent (there is no route from the quasi-name and its conceptual materials to the referent). Quasi-names can be used for calling someone (a relative, in fact) or for predicating something of the referent. Alternatively, they can be used in a predicative way, as when one says ‘This is my mum’. Like proper names, they can be used for calling (in which case a speech act is made and often a multiple speech act is made as when one calls someone to scold her). This paper has a section on names and the speech act of calling someone. Needless to say, if a quasi-name can be used instead of a name, it too can be involved in the speech act of calling that must be kept distinct from the speech act of asserting. Names, as Jeshion (2009) says, are used in order to fix a referent and to stress a discourse continuity when speakers talk about the same referent, implying that there is identity between the individuals talked about (on different occasions). Pronominals and indexicals do not stress continuity in discourse (if they do so, they do pragmatically, through preferential interpretations for anaphors (Huang 2000)) and identity among individuals talked about. But quasi-names are indexical, so there might be a problem for Jeshion’s considerations (inherited from Strawson 1974). However, an indexical can stress continuity and identity if the context is kept the same. Since the quasi-name is

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<sup>1</sup> (‘Sister’, ‘Brother’, ‘Sorella’, ‘Fratello’ are sometimes used, but they are stylistically marked and, thus, are likely to generate conversational implicatures (in general, some ironic interpretations)).

indexed to the speaker and the speaker is presumably kept constant when the word 'I' is used again by the same person, this allows continuity in discourse and identity between the referents.

Before proceeding we should make clear the distinction between quasi-names used in the vocative ), as in the example 'Mamma, vieni qui' and those used as arguments of verbs as in 'Mamma è andata via'. This distinction which does not correspond to the presence or lack of syntactic features for quasi-names, has syntactic correlates for proper names, as in many dialects of Italian a proper name can take the definite article in argument position, but cannot, if used as a vocative. The use of quasi-names in argument positions is not always indexical (in the sense of referring to the first person). For example, XZ p.c. argues that one, when talking to children, can use 'Mamma' (in argument position), not to refer to himself but to the child (in referring to the child's mum). However, one should note that these uses are rare, they require specific contexts (and language games) and they are nevertheless indexical. The context shift has repercussions on the value of the indexical, which shifts from 'I' to 'You' (My mum → Your mum). Going back to the difference between vocatives and names or quasi-names in argument positions, one notices that in Italian the vocative admits transformations like 'Bellezza', 'Bella signora', 'esimia professoressa' (roughly, the addition of an adjective, or nominalization of an adjective). Quasi names with a vocative function can also admit transformations, as in 'Bella Mamma', 'Grande Papà', 'Carissima Nonna', but these cannot occur in argument positions. With quasi-names these, which appear to be modifiers, however, cannot modify anything, because we have already said that the concepts in quasi-names are inert. They are more or less conventional or idiomatic expressions not to be analysed in a compositional way. They are conventional locutions which serve to call the person in question by being nice to her. The alternative story, of course, would be to say that 'Bella Mamma', 'Grande Papà', 'Carissima Nonna' are not quasi-names, but idiomatic locutions, which look like quasi-names but are not, used to call someone, where concepts are reactivated. After all, the latter position is not unmotivated.

## 2. Referring.

In asserting states of knowledge, we represent the world as we know it and transmit/communicate such representations to our hearers/recipients. Of course, only part of language use is devoted to making representations of the world, that can be true or false. But, certainly, in our assertions, we refer to things, objects and individuals with the aim to predicate something true of them (which, if we are not lucky enough, may also turn out to be false). We usually assume that people value truth. Truth is a guarantee for successful action. In asserting things, we are bound, as Williamson (2000) says, to the knowledge rule ('Mary went to Paris': this is what I know). At least, they are committed to justifying their assertions and specifying their evidential basis, if required (if some doubt is cast on the truth of what they assert). We can refer to things, objects and individuals even if we do not (merely) utter assertions. In speech acts that are not representatives (descriptions of the world), we may urge someone to act on objects, but in order to do so, we need to refer to that object. Some objects are complete, others can be incomplete, as when the speaker or the hearer is represented as constructing an object (as Parsons 1990 stresses, I can say 'The house' even if a brick has been laid) (Higginbotham's lectures, Oxford, 1994). We can, nevertheless, refer to partial or incomplete objects or even to future objects, as when I say: 'I will build the table and then destroy it' (I will destroy the table which I have created, once I have created it) (See Asher 2000). The table may be merely part of a plan, but it can, nevertheless, be referred to. This amounts to speaking of a possible world in which I will create an object and refer to an object (or the idea of an object) in that possible world.

There are many ways to refer to objects or individuals. We can use pronominals or demonstratives (whether simple or complex). We can use general concepts that refer by being part of definite descriptions which have, among other things, uniqueness conditions. Or we can use proper names. Proper names, unlike pronominals or definite descriptions, do not rest on (arbitrary) conventions, which are beyond the users' control. There is always someone who chooses a proper name for someone else (usually the parents). Assigning a proper name is a conventional procedure but one that is controlled by one's will. Lexical items are not chosen by someone in particular, although scientists or great artists can sometimes propose them. No one can act as a legislator for language and all dictators who tried to reform language have miserably failed in this purpose, because language is fluid, democratic, far from being under someone's control. It is true that some authors like Manzoni, Shakespeare or Dante have been able to reshape their languages, but this has happened only because their changes were deemed reasonable and useful by the majority of people.

Pronominals (and proper names) can sometimes be used to refer back anaphorically to previously mentioned objects. Often, we reconstruct such links through pragmatics and choose the link that makes most sense (we choose the most rational route). Long-distance anaphors in Chinese, for example, seem to be under the influence of pragmatics (The Chinese translation of 'John said that the doctor should operate on him' is understood as if the anaphor 'him' is connected with 'John' rather than with 'the doctor' given that doctors normally do not operate on themselves (see Huang 2000)). While pronominals and definite descriptions are normally used to refer to something (whether objects or individuals), proper names can be used, in certain pragmemes or language games, without referring to anything, as reference is not what matters (see Capone 2020). I am not thinking of fictional names, but of cases of linguistic examples produced by a lecturer during a class. In a class, I can use a name without referring to anything because the purpose is not reference or truth or representing a state of the world. The purpose is to instantiate a particular language rule. In some examples, we can find names that do not refer and names that refer (e.g. to historical objects), as in 'John likes Plato'. This may be a linguistic example, yet Plato is taken to refer to a historical individual.<sup>2</sup>

In addition to these categories, we can add quasi-names like 'Mum', 'Dad', which start by capital letter like proper names and like proper names can be used either to refer to individuals and say something true or false about them, or to call someone in the vicinity, requiring his/her attention or sometimes requiring even an action (minimally that she should turn round and face us). Capitalization can be used to turn an NP into a proper name (see Jeshion 2009). I can utter 'Mum', with the illocutionary or perlocutionary effect of starting an action (Mum was supposed to come shopping with me and I am asking her to go out). It is not clear whether, in such cases, the utterance should be completed through an implicature (in which case it would be a sentential fragment (in the sense of Stainton 1998)). I suppose we can go for the most parsimonious theory and propose that 'Mum!' is multifunctional, as it can be used both to call an individual and to ask her to commit herself to an action.

It might be of interest to explore the similarities between proper names and quasi-names. I will mainly follow Jeshion's interpretation of Strawson's chapter two of *Subject and Predicate in Logic and Grammar*

Strawson construes name-giving as constrained primarily and most fundamentally by the semantic utility of names. We issue names in just those circumstances in which a circle of communicators needs to make identifying reference to a certain particular, there is an interest in the continuing identity of the particular across time, and there exists no short, natural description or title available to the circle as a single means of referring to that particular. According to Strawson, the reason

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<sup>2</sup> XY p. c. says "Pronouns and definite descriptions can also be used nonreferentially to instantiate language rules, as when I say 'he' is used to refer to a contextually definite male, or 'Kathy likes I' is ungrammatical".

why we name people but not our cars, frying pans, or the rooms of our house is that, for any particular person, there is a wide circle of language users that have an interest in the continued identity of and in referring to that person, yet lack any unique, natural singular term with which to refer. Thus, we introduce names for people (Jeshion 2009, 372).

Quasi-names are exceptions to Strawson's view, being cases of unique natural terms by which we refer. Yet, they closely resemble proper names in that their conceptual materials are inert and are not used to identify the referent; thus, like Proper Names, they directly refer to individuals. Adapting what Strawson says, a quasi-name can replace a proper name "in just those circumstances in which a circle of communicators needs to make identifying reference to a certain particular, there is an interest in the continuing identify of the particular across time".

### 3. Quasi-names

In this paper, I am going to discuss quasi names-like 'Dad', 'Mum'. Terms like 'Sister', 'Fratello', 'Brother-in-law' are less likely to be used as quasi-names, but in languages like Italian they can be so used, although they are somewhat marked. In Italian, it is marked to use a proper name for one's father or one's mother ('Venerina!') and a conversational implicature (due to the maxim of Manner) is likely to arise (my mother allows me to treat her without the appropriate distance). In Italian, the preferred way is to use 'Mamma' or 'Papà', for one's parents. However, for sisters and brothers it may be far preferable to use a proper name (e.g. 'Angela!'), while the use of 'Sorella' or 'Fratello' seems to be somewhat ironical. If I say: 'Sorella, perchè non prepari il Tiramisu?', 'Sister, can you prepare a Tiramisu?', I am somewhat being ironical and the utterance can be taken as meaning (something like) 'If you were a real sister, you would make me Tiramisu, but since you do not willingly do it, perhaps you are not a real sister'. These things can be said among a number of humorous utterances which we can proffer. Terms like 'Dad' or 'Mum' are clearly contextual elements (indexical), but this feature is shared by proper names as well (it is surprising to see that many scholars accept the fiction that a proper name refers directly and uniquely, while, instead, it is obvious that a name can be used to refer to many different individuals and contextual assumptions should be used to make one (and not another) referent salient and accessible. Even a proper name, to be understood properly, must be restricted to a context. The magical power of context to delimit proper names and their referents has never been discussed at length. Presumably, in a certain context a certain meaning is more salient than in another, and this may be, among other things, also a matter of frequency. However, 'Mum' and 'Dad' are not only contextual elements, but they are also indexicals. It never occurs to us to call John's mother 'mum', although it would be true to describe her as 'she is someone's mum or someone's mother' XZ p. c. says that this much depends on context, as I can ask a child 'Where is mum?'. In this case, I am putting myself into the child's shoes, I am conforming to his perspective. Analogous considerations apply to 'Dad'. The words 'Dad', 'Mum' can occur in sentential frames like 'This is my mum', 'My mum is happy', 'Mum!', 'Dad!'. In cases like 'This is my dad', they work more like predicates. In sentential frames like 'My dad is happy', 'dad' should be considered a general term; we obtain the referent by combining 'dad' with the possessive element 'My' and we obtain an NP, which has the characteristics of Russellian descriptions. The expression also requires a uniqueness condition, as a matter of logic. Of course, each one can have at most one dad and at most one mum. The uniqueness condition can be added as a matter of pragmatics, rather than as a matter of semantics, because it is given for free, following Modified Occam's Razor ( see Jaszczolt 1999). XZ p.c. considers that there are exceptions, as there can be cases of adoption, there can be cases of families with two mums and two dads, and there is also the use of 'Mamma' (in Italian) to address one's mother-in-law. If there are exceptions like these, then one is even more justified to see the uniqueness condition, when it is applicable, as

pragmatically motivated. One can reason like this for ‘The king of France’ as well, given that it is common knowledge that a state can have at most one king (surely there may be exceptions). When we have utterances like ‘The table is broken’, the uniqueness condition cannot be derived from knowledge of the world (encyclopaedic knowledge), but can be derived through what Kecskes (2013) calls ‘emergent presuppositions’, if we have segmented space in such a way that in using ‘The table’ we refer just to one table.

So far, we have discussed ‘Dad’ and ‘Mum’ as subjects in assertions (sentential frames) in which they refer to individuals about whom we go on to predicate something (that turns out to be true or false)<sup>3</sup>. Instead, when I say ‘This is my dad’, I am making a predicative use of ‘dad’ and I am saying that object *x* is contained in the set of ‘dads’. A uniqueness condition is added by the possessive element (in which case pragmatics has no work to do). It appears to me that ‘Dad’ and ‘Mum’ are *quasi names* a) because they are singular; b) they can appear as subjects in assertions and in such cases they directly refer to some individuals without the intermediation of concepts; even if they contain concepts (‘Dad’ after all expresses a concept), the search of the referent does not happen thanks to (or through) a concept; the concept is there but does nothing to restrict or narrow down the search (in the same way a non-restrictive relative clause does not restrict the search of the referent; so I propose that when we say ‘Dad is out’, I mean *X*, who is my dad (or who I call ‘Dad’), is out, where *X* acts as a pronominal that directly has access to a referent). c) they are used (they can be used) for calling someone. When ‘Dad’ is used in the second person, it is like saying ‘John!’, ‘Venerina!’, expecting them to answer or to come or to do something they are expected to do. They are essentially used in the vocative case. The vocative case in English may be indicated by a special intonation. In Italian it may be indicated either by intonation or by the marker ‘O’. ‘O papà’ (This is never used for animals, when we call them, so this vocative marker also has the feature + human). The same marker can be used to accompany proper names in the vocative case, as used to call someone, as in ‘O Sandro’, ‘O Angela’. ‘Dad’ and ‘Mum’ are indexicals because they are used to call the speaker’s father or mother. It would be very weird to call someone’s ‘John’s mum!’ (one can imagine that this might be used as a vocative, but it is certainly marked and it does not work as a quasi-name in argument position. The fact that this is not used this way does not mean that, in principle, it could not be so used. But not everything that could be used could be used legitimately. It is language use that legitimates or sanctions a certain expression. It is language that sanctions a certain use. However, I can imagine that one might use ‘John’s mum’ to call John’s mum, in certain cases, as when I have a list of people (mums) to call and I say ‘John’s mum! Fred’s mum!, Tom’s mum!’. But this looks like a special language game: calling a list of names. The utterance may also be interpretatively ambiguous between an utterance that calls a list of people and an utterance that requires expansion through an explicature (John’s mum! Fred’s mum!, Tom’s mum! All come over here). To some extent, the utterance that makes a list of quasi-names is more natural than calling ‘John’s mum!’. These expressions are quasi-names in that they can be used for calling, but they do not require some causal acts like baptisms that authorize agents to repeat such uses (a causal chain or a quasi-causal chain) (see Kripke 1980). Unlike names, ‘Dad’, ‘Mum’ are memorized like ordinary lexical items, but we have to remember that they have special uses. Quasi-names cannot be easily replaced by proper names presumably for pragmatic reasons; quasi-names in familiar contexts are less marked than the use of proper names; thus, the use of a proper name instead of a quasi-name would trigger a conversational implicature due to the maxim of Manner; the language game in which the quasi-name occurs is also regulated by social rules which ban the occurrence of some other type of expression (this is a social fact that requires investigation), but they can be easily replaced by pronominals like ‘You’ or complexes or pronominals and quasi-names (you mum). (In Italian the pronominal cannot be used as preceding a vocative). Names have an advantage over pronominals. They can be used in subsequent unconnected utterances. So, I guess that, at least in certain circumstances, it is not easy to replace

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<sup>3</sup> ‘Individual’ is a term used by Strawson both for objects and persons, but I normally use it to refer to persons, unless indicated otherwise.

‘Dad’ with ‘You’. In calling, I cannot say things like ‘You NOT you’, or ‘You come’. If I say in English ‘Come’, I am dropping a pronominal (one of the few cases where *pro* occurs), but it would be preposterous to say that I am using the null pronominal to call someone (however, the use of the imperative might be considered an implicit act of calling).

It appears that terms that serve to call someone are in complementary distribution with merely referential terms. You can say ‘My mum’ in stating a fact about the world. However, if you say ‘Mum’, in the vocative case, it will not do to replace it with ‘My mum’ or ‘My dad’ (but in Italian you can ornamental phrases like ‘Mio babbino caro’, ‘Mio babbo bello’) (See also Giusti 2015 on modification of names or quasi-names). *Prima facie*, this should mean that in calling someone ‘My mum’ one only has an ungrammatical use. Instead, if the speakers are reasonable, they would use ‘Mum’. ‘Mum’ is clearly a vocative in the Italian language. ‘My mum’ is not; it is at most nominative.

We should also consider the term of address ‘Cugino’, in the vocative, which vendors from Marocco use in their interaction with their clients (The use as vocative is, of course, very different from the use as argument of the verb). This is also directly referential, but not indexical. It possibly has the function of ‘*captatio benevolentiae*’ and serves to start interaction. Obviously, ‘cugino’ must be a translation (and a loan word) of a term which vendors use in Marocco. The speaker does not mean ‘my cousin’, while when she says ‘mum’ she means ‘my mum’ (or refers to her mum). It may also be different from ‘Mum’ in that it is preferably used at the beginning of a conversation – it has a phatic function in breaking the ice and building up a successful communication. Proper names can be used to establish continuity and identity among referents, something that ‘Mum’ or ‘Dad’ are also capable of doing, but ‘cousin’ only has an interactional function and it just happens to be referring to the addressee (under a clumsy mode of presentation). It has an interpersonal function in that it softens up the client.

#### 4. Strawson on names.

Strawson believes that the condition for using proper names is that they should favour efficient communication. Thus, he singled out three criteria for identifying proper names (Strawson 1974, 36):

- [1] A group of language users has a ‘frequent need or occasion to make identifying reference to a certain particular’.
- [2] Within this group of language users, ‘there is an interest in the continuing identity of the particular from occasion to occasion of reference’.
- [3] Within this group of language users, ‘there is no short description or title of that particular which . . . is always available and natural as a constant means of identifying reference to that particular’.

Clearly, conditions (1) and (2) are satisfied by quasi-names as well. Our use of ‘Mum’, ‘Dad’ is not sporadic, but systematic. We frequently use quasi-names to refer to people who are part of the family and, thus, are likely to be encountered on many occasions of family life, including telephone calls. The identity of the referents persists from occasion to occasion and, thus, it would be little efficient to use a pronominal, when a name or a quasi-name could be used. The use of the name or quasi-name, among other things, signifies that the same object persists, it can be recognized easily, and has an identity which is expressed by the name or quasi-name. None of this is implied by the use of a pronominal or a demonstrative.

What about condition (3)?

Strawson (1974) and Jeshion (2009) are persuaded that no other linguistic expressions can be used to signify that there is identity between an individual encountered before and one encountered now.<sup>4</sup> But this is not completely true, because quasi-names work like short descriptions but, for some reason, there is no route from the description to the referent; due to a linguistic convention, they very much work like proper names and, thus, are capable of referring directly to an object. Perhaps there is a story to tell about historical considerations on quasi names, but for the time being, all that is required is to suppose that in time quasi-names have lost the ability to refer by the restriction effected by the minimal description at least in a number of contexts. Proof of this is the fact that, unlike in its predicative use as ‘He is my dad’, ‘Dad’ (nominative or vocative case) normally does not take the article (e.g. in English or in the Italian translation). If such considerations could be proven for a large number of languages, then we would understand how the definite description has turned into a name or quasi-name. We needed a quasi-name because we wanted to refer directly, but at the same time use a mode of presentation that is partially indexical and which has some conceptual dimension which indexes the referent to a function within a family. Later on, I will claim that an appositive structure can be used to combine direct reference, with some materials that are partially descriptive.

## 5 Problems for the direct reference view

I have said that ‘Mum’ or ‘Dad’ (even in cases in which they are used as subjects in subject predicate structures) are directly referential. Certainly they appear to be so, even if they contain some conceptual structure (e.g. the concept ‘dad’). However, given a popular view of ‘directly referential’ I accept, if the proposition expressed does not contain the mode of presentation ‘dad’ or if this is **inert** for some reason, then ‘Dad’ works like a directly referential term. Let us see what Recanati 1990 has to say about this:

Suppose that a singular term *t* has a meaning by virtue of which it presents its reference in a certain way. To say that *t* is directly referential is to say that the mode of presentation of the reference of *t* is not part of the proposition expressed by the utterance *S(t)* in which *t* occurs, whereas the reference of *t* is part of the proposition expressed. Behind this double claim, there are two intuitions. The first intuition concerns the truth-conditions of the utterance. The mode of presentation of the reference is said not to be part of the proposition expressed because the

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<sup>4</sup> XY p.c. objects “We often use definite descriptions like ‘the president’ to refer to the same individual over long periods of time. The same is true of ‘Saturn’s rings.’” I agree with X Quasi-names are directly referential like proper names, even they apparently exhibit some conceptual materials, which, however, are not active and are inert. They can be used as vocatives or as arguments of verbs. When used as vocatives, they can be apparently modified as in ‘Bella Mamma’, although it may be reasonable to suppose that these uses do not really involve quasi-names, but involve real modification (to modify a concept, this concept has to be active, not INERT as in quasi-names). I called terms like ‘Mum’, ‘Dad’ ‘quasi-names’ because they have certain characteristics of names (but they could also be called ‘indexical names’). They confer significance to an individual. Quasi-names are indexical, although the word ‘I’ does not appear in the proposition expressed. There can be exceptions, as when one says ‘Mum is arriving’ to a child, by which he understands that his own mum is arriving, not the speaker’s mum. A context-shift justifies the shift in the content of the proposition expressed; nevertheless, ‘Mum’ remains indexical, because in this restricted context, it refers to the addressee’s mum. So, the context shift justifies the transformation my mum → your mum. Quasi-names arise due to linguistic conventions; in this respect, they are different from proper names.

reference's satisfying the mode of presentation is not part of the truth-conditions of what is said. Thus, by virtue of its linguistic meaning, the pronoun "I" presents its reference as having the property of being the speaker; yet the reference's having this property is no part of the truth-conditions of an utterance in which "I" occurs. When Paul says "I am French", what he says is true if and only if Paul is French. The property of being the speaker is not a constituent of the proposition expressed: it is used only to help the hearer identify the reference, which is a constituent of the proposition expressed (Recanati 1990, 698).

The considerations above are illuminating. Although the rule 'I refers to what the speaker refers to' allows us to reconstruct the referent that goes into the proposition expressed (or proffered), the concept 'the speaker' does not enter the proposition. In a sentence like 'Dad, come here', 'Dad' used as a quasi-name, in the vocative, although it is used to call Dad, does not enter the proposition 'Come here' (in this case, the content of the speech act). Even if it turned out that John is not the speaker's father, the utterance would be understood as calling a certain person and asking that person to come over here. The understanding of the sentence is not like this 'Given that Sally mentioned her father, since I am her father, I should do as she says'. The quasi-name is directly referential, as Sally's father understands that he is being addressed, even if he does not go through the recognition of his role as a father (he does not reason like this: Mary said 'Dad', I am her dad, in speaking she addressed me by her gaze, she presumably wanted to address and call her dad (given the satisfaction conditions for the use of 'Dad', thus, since I am her dad, she wanted to call me). Things in the third person (assertions in which 'Dad' is used as subject) are more complicated. 'Dad went to the cinema' is understood (within the circle of those who know that Dad is John) as 'John went to the cinema' if Dad's name is John. How can it be that the mode of presentation used in the utterance does not appear in the proposition expressed? If the speaker focused on the role or function of being a father, then it should be imperative that the mode of presentation 'Dad' appear in the proposition. But if 'Dad' is used as a quasi-name it will be ok to replace it with the proper name as being part of the proposition expressed.

XY p.c. says that 'Dad' is an indexical. We need a context to understand whose dad we are talking about. Normally it is the speaker's context, as 'dad' refers to the speaker's dad. But since we need to have access to the concept of the speaker to know the referent, the same considerations that, according to Recanati, apply to 'I', apply to 'Dad', and, thus, 'dad' cannot appear in the proposition expressed because it would need a context to be understood. We usually take propositions to be unambiguous fully contextualized elements. Thus, it is licit to refer to Dad as 'John' as it is the most neutral way to refer to him without making use of context-sensitive elements.

Quasi-names remind us closely of definite descriptions that have turned into Proper Names (see Brian Rabern 2015). He too focuses on descriptions that have become inert in time (The holy Roman empire is neither holy nor Roman, thus the description is inert).

As Marcus says:

... it often happens, in a growing, changing language, that a descriptive phrase comes to be used as a proper name—an identifying tag—and the descriptive meaning is lost or ignored. Sometimes we use certain devices such as capitalization and dropping the definite article, to indicate the change in use. 'The evening star' becomes 'Evening Star', 'the morning star' becomes 'Morning Star', and they may come to be used as names for the same thing. Singular descriptions such as 'the little corporal', 'the Prince of Denmark', 'the sage of Concord', or 'the great dissenter', are as we know often used as alternative proper names of Napoleon, Hamlet, Thoreau and Oliver Wendell Holmes. (Marcus 1961, p. 309)

Soames (2002) draws attention to a phenomenon that is somehow related to quasi-names, such as 'the Columbia River', 'the Empire State Building', 'the Brooklyn Bridge', 'the Eiffel Tower'.

Soames says these are also partially descriptive names, which he defines as follows:



*A partially descriptive name (italics mine) n* is semantically associated with both a descriptive property *PD* and a referent *o*. The referent is *o* determined in part by having the property *PD* and in part by the same nondescriptive mechanisms that determine the reference of ordinary nondescriptive names—for instance, by a historical chain of transmission leading back to *o*. The semantic content of *n* includes both *o* and *D* (Soames 2002, p. 110)

Unlike quasi-names, the conceptual materials are not inert; in fact, if you hear ‘The Columbia river’ you can look for a river nearby; if you hear, ‘The Brooklyn Bridge’, you can look for a bridge nearby. Nevertheless, these phrases are capitalized and they are represented as proper names. They refer both to the referent and the parts mentioned in the NP. However, it is quite possible that once the name is circulated and used frequently, the string of words is no longer analysed as a complex structure. Through a principle of laziness, the speakers may directly go to the referent. In any case, these partially descriptive names are unlike quasi-names. In fact, they cannot be used in the vocative, to call someone or something (it is true that they refer to things, but even if they referred to persons, they could not be used to call them (I would find it odd to call Alexander the Great by using a capitalized description: ‘Alexander the Great, we would like to talk to you’).

## 6. Signs, proper names, quasi-names.

At this point, it may be useful to compare signs in general (as conceived by De Saussure), proper names and quasi-names. Signs, in general, according to Saussure are relations between a signifier (the form) and a signified (the concept) that have the following characteristics. They are arbitrary, they are conventional, they escape the control of someone in particular (none of us can coin words<sup>5</sup>), they are part of a structure. Dictators have tried on many occasions to change/reform/purge the language, by adding their favourite words, but after the period of their hegemony has ended, the language returned to its normal state. This shows that language is a democratic entity, where no one can impose a certain language use, lexemes or syntactic rules. Sometimes literary authors like Manzoni or Dante or Shakespeare have been influential in changing language (by extensions of meaning). For example, none of us can forget the (unforgettable) Perpetua, Don Abbondio’s servant, from which the common noun ‘perpetua’ derived. People these days understand the concept ‘perpetua’, as a Manzonian creation, but my impression is that this function has been lost (perhaps the word ‘pepetua’ has been replaced by the word ‘donna di servizio’ and, then, ‘colf’). So, there is no guarantee that a new language use will be preserved for ever. Unlike common nouns, proper names, although they are already part of the language and almost no one attempts to create a new proper name, are applied to a referent in virtue of a causal connection (usually the intentions of the parents during the ceremony of the baptism)<sup>6</sup>. And certain felicity conditions must be in place: we need the priest to record the name in a register. Of course, it is not always the case that we witness a baptism. Usually, in hearing the use of a name, we trust that the language users have witnessed a causal event or are **deferring** to uses by other language users. We may find the following considerations by Jeshion (2009) useful.

Unlike descriptions and indexicals, whose reference determination is highly contextually sensitive, proper names have their referents fixed. By virtue of our setting up conventions of

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<sup>5</sup> XY p.c. comments: “I think you mean that none of us can make a word be a word of a natural language like English. People coin words all the time. The word ‘googol’ (referring to the number) was coined by a mathematician (or his nephew). It did not become the English word for the number, however, until others started using it”. I agree that certain scientists have the privilege of coining words, however it will take a long time for a word newly coined to enter ordinary language use and be circulated.

<sup>6</sup> It is true that many anarchists have created names for their children (in addition to their official ones), that nick-names are usually invented), but these uses do not normally follow the rules for the application of proper names.

name-bearer relations with acts of reference-fixing, proper names function in communication as long- term, interpersonally available linguistic representations of their referents (Jeshion 2009, 371).

So quasi-names are like names in one respect, because they serve to express singular thoughts and they have their referents “fixed”, in another respect they behave like indexical expressions “whose reference determination is highly contextually sensitive”. Both names and quasi-names refer to individuals in virtue of conventions, but the conventions for the use of proper names very much resemble felicity-conditions of speech acts (in that the first use of a proper name is a speech act proper, as Garcia-Carpintero 2000 says), while the rules determining the referent of quasi-names are very much like the ordinary rules that regulate the use of the lexicon. These rules are at the origin of the words, but they are not Kaplanian characters, in that when people use such words, they tend to ignore such rules and, in particular, they do not use them to fix the referent, as the referent is fixed in a direct way, like for a proper name.

Quasi-names are there by convention; when we hear ‘Dad’ we know what the concept of ‘dad’ is, but we need not go through the intermediation of this concept to have access to the referent.<sup>7</sup> There may be a rule of use connected with it, but this does not consist of a concept or of satisfaction conditions (the search of a referent capable of satisfying a concept). When I use ‘The king of France’ I go through the concept and, thus, I am able to restrict the referent. When I hear ‘Dad’ it does not happen that I go through a concept to know that I was referred to. The access to the referent is direct as if a proper name was used. The word is indexical and it is the speaker’s dad that is being referred to, not any dad that is present. If the quasi-name was not a quasi-name, but only a common noun expressing the concept ‘dad’, then any dad at all in the vicinity in hearing John call ‘Dad!’ would turn round, having the feeling of being called. But this is not the case. Only John’s dad turns round and addresses John. The others are excluded from the consequences of the speech act. Of course, proper names are not, in general, indexical. When I say ‘John’, I am not assuming that he is ‘my John’. The fact that a quasi-name is indexical guarantees that it works like a proper name, because one is able to restrict the referent to the speaker’s dad and this has the effect that only one person is being addressed, just as it happens for a proper name. If ‘Dad’ was not indexical, anyone in the vicinity on hearing ‘Dad!’ would turn round and wonder whether they were addressed by the speaker. But this does not happen. Quasi-names have various characteristics, but, most importantly, when one uses them or hears them, one bypasses the concept – this is required for the quasi-name to be directly referential. In many occasions we bypass concepts (or some of the concepts expressed by a description).

So what are quasi-names?

One may try with the following definitions.

- 1) they can be used as directly referential subjects;
- 2) they can be used to call people.
- 3) they are not introduced by actions like baptism.

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<sup>7</sup> XY p.c. writes: “What you write here does not seem true. If I hear someone say ‘Dad is home,’ what I know is that ‘Dad’ refers to the speaker’s father. If I use the word ‘Dad’, I know that I am using it to refer to my father”. Well, XY says this because he knows that the word ‘Dad’ is indexical. An indexical requires a procedure for interpretation that determines the meaning of that expression. But this does not exclude that there is a semantic relation between ‘Dad’ and ‘This is my dad’. We should find the two different uses of ‘dad’ explained in the lexicon. Alternatively, we could argue, following XY, that ‘Dad’ only has a procedural meaning and that the relationship between ‘my dad’ and ‘dad’ is of a historical kind. Both ways are possible. In any case, ‘Dad’ is a case of direct reference, but the reference is less direct than that of say ‘John’, because to process the indexical structure we also need to process ‘Dad’.

- 4) they are memorized like ordinary lexical items.<sup>8</sup>
- 5) When used in the third person, they can be replaced with a proper name, *salva veritate*, if the person who bears that name can be assigned the predicate.

XY p.c. objects to each of these conditions (presumably he thinks that none of them on its own suffices to define quasi names). He says that (1) cannot distinguish between a quasi-name and a proper name, because proper names are also directly referential; that proper names too are used to call people, so (2) does not distinguish between quasi-names and proper names. He says (3) is not sufficient because nicknames are not introduced through baptism, nevertheless they are directly referential. He says that (4) is false because proper names like Italy and Saturn are memorized as lexical items. He objects to (5) because by replacing in ‘Dad is John’ ‘my dad’ with ‘John’ we obtain John is John, which is clearly uninformative (the same would happen by replacing ‘my dad’ with ‘Jonn’ in ‘John is my dad’, which would amount to ‘John is John’).

I clearly cannot say that XY’s considerations are wrong. However, we can interpret things in a different light. The use of ‘quasi-name’ hints that quasi-names, despite having conceptual structure, however inert, work as names. So, the objection that proper names too can be directly referential does not seem to me to be a decisive objection, because it shows that I am right in assimilating quasi-names to names. Analogously (2) shows that quasi-names can be assimilated to proper names. Nicknames, like quasi-names, are not introduced by baptism. Well, perhaps baptism is NOT so important as the creation of a rule of use according to which a person should be called in a certain way. This rule would be associated with the speech act ‘giving a name to a child’. For proper names, it is the parents that decide the rule. For nicknames, perhaps it is the most influential individuals of the community who establish the rule. XY also says that names, sometimes, are memorized like lexical items: see Italy or Saturn. Yes, perhaps you can find ‘Italy’ and ‘Saturn’ in a dictionary, but what about the majority of proper names? Can we find them in dictionaries? Furthermore, one could defend the position that Italy has a non-directly-referential use, more or less like Aristotle, the father of logic and rhetoric. One knows that Italy is the state in the Mediterranean which has borders with Switzerland, France, etc. ‘Italy’ may be ambiguous between a directly referential and non-directly referential use. Concerning (5), the considerations by XY are applied to the predicative use of ‘my dad’. ‘This is my dad’ is clearly a predicative use. And ‘my dad’ in subject position has a referential use that is coupled with a predicative use: the x who is my dad. Perhaps it is wrong to try to distinguish maximally proper names from quasi-names, as we have to see what they have in common, rather than what their difference are. Yet, there are some crucial differences. According to Jeshion (2009) “Their broader psycho-semantic function is as common singular representations of their referents for long-term trans-personal, trans-contextual thought and talk.” This, clearly, sets proper names apart from pronominals. A pronominal reaches the referent through some contextual clues and, needless to say, the referent may switch if the context changes. Proper names, instead, guarantee trans-contextual thought (what Jeshion 2009 calls the transferral

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<sup>8</sup> XY p.c. writes: “The conjunction of 1) to 4) almost suffices to define quasi-names. I say “almost,” because there are some (proper) names for which 1)-4) are all true too. One example is ‘Aristotle’ (his parents gave him a Greek name from which ‘Aristotle’ evolved). Gareth Evans pointed out that ‘Madagascar’ is another example.

I think you can define quasi-names by adding one more defining property: they are indexical. That distinguished quasi-names from all names. The fact that they are indexical is one of your main points. Why not use it?”

My reply is that yes, I agree with XY, but from the very start, quoting XZ, I said that quasi names are indexical. But it is not enough to say that quasi-names are indexical, in so far as many proper names are indexical too (to some extent). Some names index people to the Jewish community, some names index people to the Christian/Catholic community, some names index people to a community of people who appreciate the classical world (Socrates). They are indexical in the special sense that the **speaker plays a key role in the indexation process**. However, the speaker does not appear in the proposition expressed.

of singular thought from an individual to another regardless of the persisting or not of contextual clues), given that the referent persists through the use of the same proper name. If these considerations were accepted *toto corde*, then we should minimally say that proper names and quasi-names have got distinct functions and that quasi-names belong to the set of context-dependent (or context-sensitive) expressions, while proper names do not. Yet, how many times does it happen that when we proffer the utterance 'John', we refer to a different John? It appears that trans-contextual effects can be achieved *pragmatically* and this may be easier with proper names than with pronominals, because proper names restrict the referent to a greater extent and guarantee direct reference given that no concept seems to be involved. So, if there is a difference between proper names and pronominals, this may be a matter of degree. Words like 'Mum' or 'Dad' guarantee trans-contextual thought *to a greater extent* than proper names because they are indexical. The contexts in which they are interpreted may change, but with no effect on direct reference. Given that the referent is indexed to the main speaker, we can proceed smoothly to the next section of discourse and use the quasi-name to refer to the same person. These considerations seem to me to be far from being unimportant.

Before concluding this section, I would like to address an issue that seems to me to be close or at least related to the issue of quasi-names. Jeshion (2009) discusses the case of 'The Unabomber', a name that was introduced by the newspapers for the person responsible of a number of crimes (it should be mentioned that in Italy as well someone sent parcels containing explosives and was also called 'Unabomber'). Could it be similar or close enough to quasi-names? A similarity is that, like for quasi-names ('Dad') there was not a causal link between a ceremony (a baptism) and the circulation of the name. The causal link guarantees that there is a convention whereby referent X is called 'NP'. This convention is initiated by a speech act. A baptism is nothing but a complex speech act involving participants that play appropriate roles. When a name is given, someone normally gives the name and with proper names it is normally the father and the mother who give the name. But names like 'The Unabomber' were chosen by the press and there has never been an official speech act legitimizing the use of the name. (So, they are quite anomalous as names, being *artificial names*). Furthermore, these names have some conceptual materials. We have seen that quasi-names too have conceptual materials, which, however, remains inert. But quasi-names, differently from names like 'Unabomber', seem to have been sanctioned not by a speech act or a convention, but they are part of the dictionary. The dictionary tells us how to use them. Instead, names like 'Unabomber' were sanctioned by a convention whereby a restricted group of language users started to use that name which has conceptual materials. Perhaps one or two authoritative reporters started the use, which then circulated among language users. A significant difference between names like 'Unabomber' and quasi-names like 'Dad' is that 'Dad' can be used in the vocative for calling, whereas 'Unabomber' cannot (But surely one could write a newspaper article and say 'Unabomber, stop doing that'. This would perhaps mean that the speaker is urging The Unabomber to stop that, but I doubt that he is calling someone in particular. Suppose The Unabomber never reads newspaper articles and has no idea that reporters have called him (and the vast majority of readers know of him as) 'The Unabomber'. In this case, the felicity conditions for calling are violated, as calling minimally requires that both the speaker and the addressee use a certain name (the same name) to refer to the person called (true, one rarely calls himself say by the name 'Alessandro' and prefers to use the word 'I'; however if called 'Alessandro', one knows that this is the right name for addressing him). If we speculate further on the differences between The Unabomber and quasi-names like 'Dad', 'Dad' is a quasi-name that refers to X (if proffered by X's son), whereas 'The Unabomber' does not refer to anyone in particular, it does not directly refer to the individual X. The term is like a cheque that must be cashed, AFTER we discover the referent. All we know about these terms, is that they have some conceptual materials that can determine or restrict the referent. But we also know that, for the time being, the referent has not been discovered. So, uttering 'Unabomber' is very different from uttering 'Aristotle', because even if we do not know the individual Aristotle by acquaintance, at least some people were acquainted with him and,

thus, after hearing 'Aristotle', we assume there is a causal chain from the people who knew Aristotle (and were also acquainted with his name) to the people who are currently using 'Aristotle'. A name, after all, is linked to a file where we keep conceptual information that allows us to fix the referent. The problem with 'Unabomber' is that we cannot fix the referent, even if the conceptual materials of the name help us restrict the reference.

So, can 'The Unabomber' be a quasi-name?<sup>9</sup> Unlike quasi-names it cannot be used in the vocative to call someone (or, if so used, it would be quite weird, given that the felicity conditions of the speech act 'calling' are not or need not be satisfied). Quasi-names generally refer to people that we know, but 'The Unabomber' (as used by reporters) does not refer to someone anyone knows. Quasi-names have conceptual materials that are inert and, thus, do not serve to fix the referent. The Unabomber has conceptual materials that can be used to find the referent. However, 'The Unabomber' very much works like a name in that it is capitalized. It is different from a proper name in that the convention started among reporters when the referent of the name was not known, a proper name is usually given to a person immediately after he was born, the link between a proper name and a referent is usually established at the beginning of someone's life. The link between a name like 'Unabomber' and the referent is established by a judge in court after a trial. All we can say about Unabomber is that it is an artificially created name, an artificial name.

## 6 On the speech act of calling someone.

We may be surprised to note that the use of a name or a quasi-name in calling someone amounts to a speech act or a language game in the sense of Wittgenstein (furthermore, you do not succeed in calling a person, unless that person provides an appropriate response). Like speech acts and language games, calling someone has some felicity conditions. We normally call someone who is intent on a course of action that is different from ours, in order to get his/her attention and for him/her to embark on a course of action which did not matter to her/him before the calling, as s/he was intent on doing something else. We presuppose somehow that s/he attended some other business. If I call John, when John walks in the street in the opposite direction, it is not clear that he would have turned round anyway, but when I call "John", he turns round and seeks the source of the calling. If he does not recognize the face of the person who called him, he may reach the conclusion that the speaker was under a false impression (that he called the wrong person); but if he recognizes the face of the person who called him, he may stop, direct his attention towards that person, and address him/her to see what the reason for calling him was. There are differences between addressing someone and calling her. We can address someone by merely using a pronominal, but if we are calling her by name, then we are obviously calling her. Calling someone can bring with it perlocutionary or illocutionary effects. For example, I may call Angela to wake her up, so I am not only calling her, but I am also waking her up (Capone forthcoming). Perlocutionary acts are consequences of locutionary acts. An example by Wittgenstein is this. In delivering a lecture, I may succeed in getting my students to sleep. This can be an unintended or intended event. But certainly, we do not define the illocutionary act of calling (or giving the lecture) as waking someone up or getting her to sleep. However, in using a proper name or a quasi-name, I may scold someone, using derogatory intonation. We can set up a case in favour of having two illocutionary forces associated with calling someone by proper name or quasi-name.

Can one call someone without believing that he exists (that he is alive)? The warden at Auschwitz may call 'John Morpurgo', without having a strong belief that he is alive or dead. After all, at roll calls a number of people systematically do not respond, which usually means that they

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<sup>9</sup> The term behaves differently in English and in Italian. In English it cannot be a quasi-name, given that it has the article. In Italian it can be used without the article. In Italian it can be used to refer to a person of whom we know the actions and of whom we presuppose the existence, but it is rarely used as a quasi-name, in the vocative, although we might use it that way (marked thought aht use might be).

have died. But a roll call is different from calling someone, presupposing that he is alive (as we normally do when we call people we know). So, there are at least two senses of calling someone, that is pretending to call him, and calling him. Only the latter presupposes the existence of the referent of the proper name used<sup>10</sup>. Another difference is that, when we call someone, we usually call people we know (in addition to knowing that they exist, we know what their faces are like). After all, we could not call someone if we did not recognize him/her. But things are not always like this. I may be waiting for a certain John, who is to arrive at Catania's airport, and when a new tide of tourists enters the airport from one of the international gates, I start calling 'John Woodhouse'. I do not know the person, I do not know what his face looks like, but I rely on his recognizing me as the person who must drive him to the hotel because I am the only one who calls 'John Woodhouse'. The presupposition is that there is an X, X being John Woodhouse, but not that I know him. But perhaps this can be best described not as calling someone, which is directed to a known object, but attracting some's attention.

While with proper names it may be possible to shout a proper name, without presupposing that one knows the referent (take the case of the person who has been asked to take a person he doesn't know from the airport) with Quasi-names you always presuppose that you know the referent. How can you call 'Mum' if you do not know your mum? <sup>11</sup>Certainly, you will not hope that anyone who is a mum will turn round to see what it is that you want. So, terms like 'Mum', 'Dad', 'Grandpa' are more individuating than proper names and, in certain circumstances, can select a referent when a proper name could not. The expression 'cugino' as used by a vendor from Marocco is used for the purpose of addressing someone, but perhaps not for the purpose of calling someone. Suppose that in a crowd of people you shout 'Cugino'. Who do you think is likely to reply? Nobody will believe he is being addressed or called by the use of 'Cugino' (I noted the use of 'Cugino' but not of 'Cugina' as a term of address). After all, 'Cugino' works only if you are in a place where you and the addressee are likely to look at each other in the face. The addressee believes he is being addressed because the speaker is looking at him and he is the only candidate for addressee (as other people are far away).

Before closing this section, it might be of some interest to investigate some peculiar terms of address in Italian (Southern Italian). It often happens that you address a young man of the same age as you with the term of address 'Compare' (Godfather). This is not a quasi-name, because it does refer uniquely to some X. The term is a directly referring expression, but it does not take nominative case, but only vocative case (the use in the nominative case is quite different, being literal). The term in the past used to be employed by young people, but it would not be impossible to hear it used among adults. It creates some complicity between the speaker and the addressee. I would say that only the masculine form exists, because I never see (hear) girls say to their peers 'comare' to express or invoke complicity. The term is referential, though it does not occur in the third person, it serves to address someone of roughly the same age and it functions at the interpersonal level by expressing an offer of complicity and requiring a further offer of complicity on the part of the addressee. This term should be taken for what it is, a way of addressing someone, but it cannot work to call someone, if there are too many people present. You cannot shout in the crowd 'Compare' hoping that the person addressed realizes that you are addressing him and want to talk to him (although the other use would be legitimate for calling). Of course, withing a small group of people it might work to call someone in particular, selecting him or her as addressee.

Unlike 'Compare', or 'Bro', there are NPs which can be used to refer, but not for addressing or calling someone, because they are intrinsically impolite or because the individual in question is

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<sup>10</sup> The roll-call in the class is done to verify the presence of a student. In this case, it not the lack of an existential presupposition but the lack of the supposition that the student is present that render the roll-call different from the use of a name or quasi-name in the vocative.

<sup>11</sup> XZ notes that an orphan might call his mum in a prayer (even if he does not know her). In this case, would we say he knows his mum or not? Well, perhaps he has an idea of what his mum could be like, he minimally knows that for some reason she left him. This might count as minimal knowledge.

not aware of their use and once this use is applied to him or her, he does not recognize himself through this mode of presentation. This is the case of nick-names, that are very rarely or never used in the vocative case.

Are nick-names quasi names? They may have some conceptual materials and they can be used to refer to individuals known in the community (by that nick name, in addition by some other name). The conceptual materials they contain, derogatory or laudatory as they may be are usually inert, as people do not bother to process them. I discovered by chance that a friend of mine, within the community of his village, was called 'Nino mutanda (Nino underwear)', presumably because he sold intimate clothes, underwear, etc. In these small towns it may appear strange that a male individual should own this kind of shop. Nick-names can sometimes be so nasty that the individual in question does not know that these terms refer to him (as they are hidden from him). So, understandably, they cannot be used to call him because he would not respond to them (take a dog, which you call by some other name than his, he certainly would not respond if you called him by a name invented by yourself). So, nicknames, that closely resemble quasi-names in that they contain conceptual constituents which are not activated (after a nick-name circulates few wonder why that person was attributed that name), nevertheless cannot be used to call someone engaging him or her in interaction (presumably for tact reasons).

## **7 The functions of 'Dad', 'Mum'.**

In an assertion, you can predicate something about the subject. The subject has to refer to some object X for the assertion to be true or false about that object. So, you can say things like 'Dad is happy', or 'Dad is ill'. Presumably to use quasi-names in subject positions in assertions that can be true or false, you are predicating a quality of X, where X is defined relationally in relation to the speaker. So 'Dad' works like an indexical. However, you can use 'Dad', 'Mum' to call your father and your mother. Perhaps they are looking in a different direction or doing something else, so by calling them you get them to turn to you and address an issue that is of interest to you. For calling your parents, it would not normally do to use 'John' or 'Angela' even if John and Angela are your dad and mum, nor would it do to use a plain pronominal like 'You' (occasionally we may say 'You, I do not mean You', but understandably this utterance would be quite ambiguous). Of course, some people use 'Angela' instead of 'Mum', but it should be said that, when you address your mum within a large group of people and call her 'Angela' there is no guarantee that only your mum will turn round, as there may be other Angelas and they may feel themselves addressed. Quasi-names are certainly less ambiguous than proper names and pronominals. Proper names can refer to more than one individual, and one needs to know which individual is salient in context; a pronominal could be used to refer to anyone at all. Instead 'Dad', 'Mum' refer uniquely to or call uniquely only the speaker's dad or mum. Similar stories can be noted for quasi-names like 'Grandpa' or 'Grandma'. The moral to draw is that, while a proper name can directly refer to an individual X, a quasi-name is even more direct than a proper name, because there can be no ambiguity in using it and the quasi-name must refer uniquely to an individual or uniquely call that individual. The result of using a proper name or a pronominal may be the same as the result of using a quasi-name, in so far as the speaker, by the name, or quasi-name, may be referring directly to an individual. But the use of a quasi-name is less interpretatively ambiguous (to use a term by Jaszczolt 1999) and, thus, it happens less frequently that the speaker's intention is misunderstood. Rules of use may also be slightly different, because a proper name can be used by addressing anyone at all, while a quasi-name is normally used within a circle of relatives or, at most, friends. So, a quasi-name is even more indexical than we initially thought, because it indexes the person called (by the quasi-name) to the speaker, but it also serves to index the speaker to a circle of relatives or friends.

The speaker does not merely use the quasi-name to refer to an individual or call that individual, but the voice can be modulated in such a way that using the quasi-name amounts to

scolding someone or praising someone or show surprise. It is of some interest that the use of a quasi-name can constitute a speech act. But this is not a property that applies only to quasi-names, because proper names can be used this way too. This can be taken as showing that quasi-names have functions that are similar to those of proper names.

## 8 Quasi-names and presuppositions

I have taken quasi-names to be directly referential, at least in the sense that we do not proceed from a concept to a referent, even if the concept may be there for inspection. Sometimes a concept may be by-passed altogether and the route, then, is directly from the expression to the referent. Nevertheless, quasi-names are presuppositional expressions and the presuppositions contain fragments of conceptual materials. So, we call someone 'Dad' because he is our 'dad'. The presupposition may not be individuating, but it is still there and can be used. Even when we use proper names, which are directly referential, we nevertheless open a file, which we may attach to the name, which can be filled with conceptual information. So, for Aristotle we keep a file that includes the information that he was a philosopher, the most important Greek philosopher, that he wrote on rhetoric and logic, etc. Depending on the circle of people who use the name Aristotle, the file can be bigger or smaller or can even contain information outside the sphere of philosophy (say in case he grew the biggest onions in Greece). For quasi-names, we can keep files, whose information can be known to members of the family rather than to people in general.

Definite descriptions, exactly like quasi-names, have presuppositions, but such presuppositions are individuating, that is to say they restrict the reference (and allow us to reach the referent). So, if I say 'The king of England' I am not only referring to the person who inherited the title but also to Charles. As we know well, presuppositions can be cancelled in negative sentences, so if I say 'The king of France is not wise, because there is no king of France' here I cannot reach a referent (or the referent) because the presupposition, being cancelled, cannot provide any referent. A presuppositional account is a nice way to recognize that an expression can have a referent and also express a mode of presentation (which, in this case, plays a role in individuating a referent). Proper names can be considered cases of a similar type, as here we also have a presupposition that restricts the referent, although it does not individuate it completely. So, 'John is there' is an utterance that refers to John under the mode of presentation 'John', presupposing that he is called 'John', and the mode of presentation serves to restrict the reference, although it does not completely individuate it through a concept. Quasi-names used in an indexical way ('Dad' uttered among two brothers) also presuppose some conceptual materials (who is my dad), but these materials are not individuating, given that the quasi-name functions like a name). Notice that when you deny a sentence with a definite description, you can cancel the presupposition. But with quasi-names you cannot (Dad has not arrived → I have no dad).<sup>12</sup> So quasi names side with proper names, rather than with definite descriptions. You cannot say 'John did not arrive because no one is called John or because the person I have in mind is not called 'John''. We should now ask, given that 'Dad' is directly referential, that its presupposition cannot be cancelled, why should the quasi-name take the form of a quasi-definite description, why should it contain conceptual materials. But this is akin to the problem of non-restrictive relative clauses. The non-restrictive relative clause adds additional

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<sup>12</sup> XY objects: "You can! But you need to use another example. Suppose a young boy hears the front door open and says "Dad has arrived." An older brother might respond by saying "Dad has not arrived, Step-Dad has arrived." I believe this is a tricky example. One of the brothers (it appears) seems disposed to call his step-Dad 'Dad', while the other brother is not. So, there is no consensus on the use of 'Dad' or 'Step-Dad'. However, if the first brother is known to call his stepfather Dad, it makes little sense to say 'Dad has not arrived (because we have no dad), step-Dad has arrived. This example does not show that the presupposition 'We have a dad' has been denied, because even if one has a step-father, one still has a dad, who is in Heaven. Furthermore, if we know that the first brother means 'step-dad' by 'Dad', he should not be taken to mean Dad by 'Dad' in the first case and the metalinguistic negation does not work. The presupposition is not there in the discourse and, therefore, it cannot be denied.



information, but is not individuating. If I say 'John, who is so clever, should have realized that this was a trap' I secure the referent through the use of the name, certainly not through the relative clause. So, a quasi-name stands for a name, but the conceptual material that is available is not individuating because it is not restrictive. More or less, we can interpret it as 'You, dad', in which case 'Dad' is an apposition similar in structure to a non-restrictive relative clause. 'you' is there but unexpressed. While 'You' is generally not used for calling people, 'You Dad' or 'You John' can be so used.

I want to finish this paper with some final considerations indebted to Jeshion (2009).

Names are not just devices of direct reference affording common, stable ways of thinking and speaking about particulars; and their associated mental names are not merely singular mental representations for long-term use. Proper names and their associated mental representations are, additionally, and by their nature, markers of their referents' significance. The thesis marks a departure from a tradition in philosophy of language to regard only the semantic properties of proper names as giving their primary linguistic function and as determining what it is to understand them. Jeshion (2009, 373)

Jeshion talks about the significance of names and reaches the conclusion that we generate a proper name only if an individual or an object is significant for us. So, we do not assign a proper name to a billiard ball or to the butterfly that floats over my hand or to a worm. We give names only to individuals or things that are significant for us in our emotional life (so I may decide to call my dog 'Braccobaldo', but only after I have decided to retain him as my own dog after rescuing him from a desolate place very distant from people). Not only do we give names to things that are significant for us, but by using proper names, we want to enhance the significance of the referent.

Jeshion formulates two principles that take care of the significance of names:

1. *Naming Underscores Significance Principle*: Naming an individual underscores or enhances the name's referent's significance for those that think of that individual through the name.
2. *Names as Bearers of Significance Principle*: An agent's construing a term as a name causes that agent to take the name's referent as an individual accorded significance.

So, now, what about quasi-names like 'Dad' or 'Mum'. Do the considerations by Jeshion for proper names still hold? I presume that the reply to this question is positive. Quasi-names too (and perhaps to a greater extent) enhance the significance of the referent by keeping that referent apart from all other referents of the same kind through an expression that is uniquely individuating (being indexical among other things), and that is active on the expressive dimension of the functions of language (we could probably say that quasi-names are used as expressives as well).

The considerations so far may not be negligible because they expand our knowledge on the language game of generating and using proper names and of using related resources for expanding our use of proper names.

## Conclusion

In this paper, I have discussed the distinctions between proper names, quasi-names, and nicknames. Proper names are mainly used to refer to individuals (normally persons, although we may assimilate animals and other objects to persons), when used in argument positions of verbs or to call someone (or to address and to call someone). When used as vocatives, in many Italian dialects, they cannot take the definite article. Names are directly referential (although sometimes they are analysed as predicates) in that we do not make use of a concept to reach the referent. They normally refer to X, but they are associated with a minimal presupposition (that the individual is called X). They are also associated with a file in which, in addition to the presupposition that the individual is called X, we may add presuppositions about historical or scientific achievements (Aristotle is a great philosopher

of the past, he has written, among other things, on rhetoric, etc.). These presuppositions are not linguistic, but represent knowledge of the world, possibly background knowledge. Proper names are normally used referentially, but in certain language games (like lecturing on syntax) the referent is not important, as students do not bother about it. Proper names are not assigned through a convention or rules of language use, but come into existence through speech acts like 'This child is called 'Alessandro''. A causal chain explains how a name is propagated and used by people who were not present at the ceremony. Sometimes not even a ceremony is required. Certain scientists have the right to call a particle 'X' because they discovered that particle.

Quasi-names are directly referential like proper names, even they apparently exhibit some conceptual materials, which, however, are not active and are inert. They can be used as vocatives or as arguments of verbs. When used as vocatives, they can be apparently modified as in 'Bella Mamma', although it may be reasonable to suppose that these uses do not really involve quasi-names, but involve real modification (to modify a concept, this concept has to be active, not INERT as in quasi-names). I called terms like 'Mum', 'Dad' 'quasi-names' because they have certain characteristics of names (but they could also be called 'indexical names'). They confer significance to an individual. Quasi-names are indexical, although the word 'I' does not appear in the proposition expressed. There can be exceptions, as when one says 'Mum is arriving' to a child, by which he understands that his own mum is arriving, not the speaker's mum. A context-shift justifies the shift in the content of the proposition expressed; nevertheless, 'Mum' remains indexical, because in this restricted context, it refers to the addressee's mum. So, the context shift justifies the transformation my mum → your mum. Quasi-names arise due to linguistic conventions; in this respect, they are different from proper names.

Quasi-names belong to the set of context-dependent (or context-sensitive) expressions, while proper names do not. Proper names can facilitate trans-contextual effects. It appears that trans-contextual effects can be achieved *pragmatically* and this may be easier with proper names than with pronominals, because proper names restrict the referent to a greater extent and guarantee direct reference given that no concept seems to be involved. So, if there is a difference between proper names and pronominals, this may be a matter of degree. Quasi-names like 'Mum' or 'Dad' guarantee trans-contextual thought *to a greater extent* than proper names because they are indexical.

Nick-names are directly referential. They do not arise due to a linguistic convention, but are introduced by some individuals that are prominent in a linguistic community and propagate until they are normally used. Nick-names range from terms expressing a positive evaluation to terms expressing a negative evaluation. The use of nick-names in the vocative is quite tricky, because if the nickname expresses a negative evaluation, then its use would damage the fact of the recipient; hence, it goes without saying that it will not be used. The person who bears a nick-name may not be aware of his nick-name, if this expresses negative evaluation. Thus, nicknames are different from proper names, which normally require knowledge of the name by the bearer of the name, although cases have been reported in the literature which concern amnesia. One may forget one's own name, occasionally.

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