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## Frege on Proper Names: Sense, Reference and First-Person Psychological Statements

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#### **Abstract**

*This article delves the context of the term I within the structure of two-tier meaning of proper name by Gottlob Frege. It begins by explaining how the problem of proper names arises from questions concerning linguistic reference and the capacity of expressions to refer particular objects. The discussion shall explore Frege's expanded theory of proper names that is. According to him proper name is not only an ordinary names but also definite descriptions and declarative complete sentences. So that Frege introduced a Central to the analysis is Frege's distinction of sense and reference. The concept of sense is important to address cognitive significance of identical statements. This article also analysis that the sense of a proper name is objective and shareable to every speaker of that speaker but distinct from subjective mental image. The central analysis of this paper is that can we apply this two-tier meaning of proper in the first person psychological statement such as 'I am feeling anxiety for my thesis.' It argues that, unlike ordinary proper names, the first-person pronoun "I" indicate a distinctive cognitive role that hold out against in terms of Frege's concept sense.*

**Keywords:** Gottlob Frege, proper names, sense and reference, definite descriptions, truth-values, objectivity of meaning, first person psychological statements.

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#### **Introduction: The Linguistic Turn and the Problem of Proper Names**

Before turning to Gottlob Frege's account of proper names, it is necessary to address a preliminary question: why does the discussion of proper names arise in the first place? This question can be situated within the broader philosophical developments of the between nineteenth and twentieth centuries, when a number of philosophers maintained that many traditional philosophical problems originate from misunderstandings of language. On this view, a careful analysis of language has the potential to dissolve, or at least clarify, such problems.

Philosophers associated with this linguistic turn argued that our access to the world is mediated through language, and that there exists a significant correspondence between the structure of language and reality. So we can describe the world by the means of linguistic expressions. Prominent philosophers of this view are G. E. Moore, Bertrand Russell, and Gottlob Frege. They faced a central problem while analyzing the language that is the referential capacity of the term by which we express our thought. When a term or word can genuinely indicate or refer an object or a person is called proper name. The issues of Volume-XII, Special Issue

proper names theory directly arises from this concern. It raises fundamental questions about whether such expressions possess a genuine referential function, or not. All above the philosophers discuss their opinion on this matter and try to examine which terms properly refer to objects or persons directly in this actual world. In this article I shall focus on the view of Fregean concept of proper name within the framework of First Person statement.

But when we apply the concept of proper name theory to the first person psychological statement such as I am in pain or I am feeling nervous, an important issue arises. As we know that these types of statement possess a unique epistemological status. These statements are immune to error through misidentification. The person who asserts this statement possesses privileged access. This type of self-knowledge is immediate and direct to the speaker. So this article tries to analysis that whether Frege's account of proper names can illuminate – or perhaps undermines – our understanding of such self-knowledge.

### **Frege's Extended Conception of Proper Names:**

Frege uses the expression 'proper name' (Eigennamen) in an extended sense within his philosophy. He includes not only the words or phrases that we generally know as proper names, but also expressions that we do not usually think of as proper names, such as definite descriptions and ordinary names used in everyday language. Remarkably, even assertor sentences are called proper names by Frege. According to him, a proper name is a type of linguistic expression that indicates to a single object. In Frege's words, "A proper name is a name of an object. It is fairly obvious that by a name of an object he means 'a name of a single object.'"<sup>1</sup> Building on the distinction between complete and incomplete expressions, Frege treats definite descriptions as a type of proper name. Such expressions function as complete expressions because they are intended to refer to a determinate object. Examples include phrases like "the teacher of Plato" or "the author of Waverley." In such cases, the definite article "the" plays a crucial role, as it indicates reference to one and only one object or person. Because these expressions aim at uniquely identifying a particular entity, they are regarded as complete (or saturated) expressions. In his own word "A proper name is a name of an object....An object is that which is not a concept. And a concept is that which corresponds to the predicate in a statement."<sup>2</sup>

Unlike incomplete expressions, they do not contain any gaps that require further completion. For this reason, Frege includes definite descriptions within the broader category of proper names.

Extending this line of analysis, Frege further maintains that a complete declarative sentence may also be considered as a proper name in the logical sense. Such sentences are complete expressions, since they contain no gaps and are capable of referring to an object. In this case, however, the "object" referred to is not an ordinary entity but a truth-value – namely, either the True or the False. As Frege famously states "every declarative sentence, in so far as it has a reference, is to be regarded as a proper name, and its reference, if it has one, is either the True or the False."<sup>3</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> Frege, G. "On Sense and Referencr, " Oxford University Pres, Blackwell, 1952. p. 22

<sup>2</sup> Ibid. p. 23

<sup>3</sup> <sup>3</sup> ibid.p. 27

From this perspective, a proper name cannot function as a predicate, nor can it be substituted for one. A predicate, being an incomplete or unsaturated expression, requires completion by a subject; by contrast, a proper name is complete symbol and serves precisely to fill such a role. The entity which is designated by a proper name is not a trivial fragment but a complete object that contributes to the determination of a truth-value when combined with a predicate.

From the above discussion we can say that the concept of proper names by Frege is thus significantly more inclusive than the established perception. In our traditional usage of language, proper names are associate with particular persons or objects. But within Frege extends much it. He said that proper name is not only referring to the individuals such as persons, animals, or physical objects but also the abstract entities such as numbers, points, and the truth-values themselves. Any language expression that is complete in itself—whether an ordinary name, a definite description, or a full declarative sentence—can be treated as a proper name. As it genuinely refers or indicates to a determinate object.

### **Sense and Reference: The Two-Tier Theory of Meaning:**

While Frege analyze the structure of knowledge, he understands that the meaning of a linguistic expression cannot be amply explained by reference alone. Regarding this issues he introduce the notion of sense in his theory of proper name. According to Frege proper names possess both reference and sense. This addition to the proper name is known as the two-tier theory of meaning in philosophy. On the contrary, philosophers such as Mill, Russell Wittgenstein etc. denied this Fregean sense theory. Mill argues that proper names have only denotative that is they refer to objects but cannot connote or describe any essential qualities of object. But according to Frege every proper name must have to possess reference and sense. Now the question arises that what is the significance of sense regarding proper name? Frege analyzed that if we not introduce the sense of proper name then we will not be able to explain the Identity Statements. He discussed this problem in his famous essay *On Sense and Reference*. He stated two identical statements: such as “The morning star is the morning star” ( $a = a$ ) and “The morning star is the evening star” ( $a = b$ ). According to him the above two statements are true. But these two statements have difference cognitive value. The first statement the morning star is the morning star ( $a = a$ ) is trivial, analytic, and uninformative. This statement merely expresses an object which is identical with itself. One the other side the second statement the morning star is the evening star ( $a = b$ ) is informative. This statement was historically discovered by astronomical observation. It expresses new knowledge that the object seen in the morning is identical with the object seen in the evening. According to Frege the reference of a term is the object it stands for but its sense is the mode of presentation of that object. The mode of the presentation means the way in which the object can be referred. We have seen that the above identical statement referred the same object but the mode of presentation is different. So it becomes clear that the concept sense in this analysis of language is crucial. As Frege writes: “It is natural, now, to think of their being connected with a sign (name, combination of words, letter), besides that to which the sign refers, which may be called the reference of the sign, also what I should like to call the sense of the sign, wherein the

mode of presentation is contained.... The reference of 'evening star' would be the same as that of 'morning star', but not the sense."<sup>4</sup>

Frege showed that the sense of the proper name plays a significant role in cases where reference is undetermined. He explained by statement like "Odysseus was set ashore at Ithaca while asleep." Even if it is doubtful whether "Odysseus" has a genuine reference, the statement is still meaningful as it possesses sense. It becomes clear that meaning of a term cannot be inferred by the reference alone.

Frege concludes that language operates at two levels: sense provides the cognitive route through which an object is presented, while reference connects language to the world. It is the distinction between these two that explains how language can be both meaningful and informative. The sentence "Odysseus was set ashore at Ithaca while sound asleep" obviously has a sense. But since it is doubtful whether the name "Odysseus" occurring therein has reference, it is also doubtful whether the whole sentence also has one. ... Hence it is a matter of no concern to us whether the name "Odysseus", for instance, has reference, so long as we accept the poem as a work of art. It is striving for truth that drives us always to advance from the sense to the reference."<sup>5</sup>

### **The objectivity of Sense:**

According to Frege, meaning (sense) must be clearly distinguished from mental images or subjective ideas. Frege firmly rejects the opinion that the meaning of a word is identical with a mental image. It is true that a particular word may be associated with a certain mental image in an individual's mind; however, such an image cannot constitute its meaning. Mental images are inherently subjective: they vary from person to person and may even differ for the same individual at different times.

On the contrary, meaning, in Frege's view, is objective and shareable. Different speakers of the same language are able to hold the exact sense of an expression and engage in meaningful, impersonal discussion about it. When we refer to mental images, there is question naturally arises that whose image is it? This question indicates our private mental state. On the contrary, meaning exceed individual subjectivity. It provides a common ground for communication of language.

Frege explained this distinction by a well-known analogy. He said that just imagine few persons observing the moon by a telescope. In this place the moon is a reference as it corresponds to the reference of an expression. The image formed by the telescope's lens corresponds to its sense. On the other hand the image found on the observer's own retina corresponds to a mental image. The sense in this telescopic image though dependent on the perspective of observation is objective. As we all know that it can be shared by observers. But the image of the observers' retina is subjective as it is different to every person. So Frege conclude that meaning is objective and communicable. Frege noted that "The sense of a proper name is grasped by everybody who is sufficiently familiar with the language or totality of designations to which it belongs."<sup>6</sup> According to him the sense of a proper name is understandable to the all speakers of that language. The same method is applicable to the ordinary language, the name "Aristotle" can be understood as "the

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<sup>4</sup> Ibid. p.24

<sup>5</sup> Ibid. p., 28

<sup>6</sup> Ibid. p. 24

student of Plato and teacher of Alexander," while another may understand it as "the author of the book *Metaphysics*." We have seen that the reference is same but the sense is differing.

So we can say that Frege introduced the theory of sense to make the language more precise and clear for the better understanding of language.

### **Sense and reference in Self-Knowledge:**

Now we will understand the above theory within the framework of self-knowledge. The understanding of our own mental states such as 'I am feeling anxiety for my theses is called self-knowledge. There are several issues arises regarding this self-ascriptive statement. As we earlier mentioned that the self-knowledge possesses a privileged access to the person who ascribe their mental state. In the statement 'I am feeling anxiety for my thesis' the term "I," has no analogous to explain. This suggests that the access of the mode of presentation of the reference I am purely subjective. It is noticeable that the term I can refer to myself from a first-person perspective. But it cannot be shareable to third person. One could argue that the reference of "I" is indeed objective as it is indexical. The reference of the term I depends on the context of utterance. This argument faces a serious criticism. The sense of the term I cannot be accessible to any third person as it includes an element of self-consciousness.

In any person statement the sense of "I" might be identical for all speakers. But each speaker associates different mental images with it. Frege believe that a thought regarding first person statement is unique to that person who ascribe to her or himself. Whenever we state such expression nobody can express the same thing which I mean. Every person possesses a privileged way of presenting ourselves. So, the term I in the first-person statement cannot play the same role as an proper name with a sense and reference. Frege named this indexical term as hybrid proper name in his theory.

### **Conclusion:**

We have seen that Frege's theory of proper names occupies a significant place in the philosophy of language. The concept of proper names is not merely limited in the context of ordinary personal names but broader than common usage suggests. It includes definite descriptions and complete declarative sentences. Insofar as these refer to truth-values (True and False). This expansion of the notion of a proper name reveals the depth of Frege's logical analysis. It shows that what matters is not grammatical form but logical function of language. He also mentioned a distinction between proper names and predicates in the context of complete and incomplete sentences. Proper names are complete and referential, whereas predicates are incomplete or undetermined. This distinction plays a crucial role in philosophy important because it prevents language from being reduced to mere grammatical appearance. Frege's analysis depends on the role an expression plays in judgment, not simply on how it looks in ordinary language. In this way, his theory offers a systematic account of reference and expression that avoids the confusions or misunderstanding of ordinary language.

Frege's two-tier theory of meaning i.e. the distinction of sense and reference explains how language can be informative without becoming trivial. Identity statements are meaningful precisely as the two expressions, by sharing the same reference, present the object in different ways. Identity statement without the notion of sense, such statements

would empty repetitions of identity. So, Frege concluded that meaning cannot be inferred to reference alone. His insistence that sense is objective, and not a private mental image, further strengthens his account by making shared communication possible.

But we have seen that its emphasis on objectivity sense, it faces difficulty when we apply it within first-person psychological statements such as "I am feeling anxiety for my thesis." The pronoun "I" does not function exactly like an ordinary proper name. Its cognitive significance is tied to the speaker's immediate and self-awareness rather than to a publicly shared mode of presentation i.e. sense. Self-ascription of a first-person knowledge that cannot be fully analyzed by a purely objective semantics. For this reason, Frege's framework does not by itself provide a complete account of subjective self-knowledge.

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