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## Questions of reference

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This paper defends a piece of conventional wisdom (that descriptivism fails) with conventional arguments (namely, from incompleteness and redundancy) against a recent case made by Jens Kipper and Zeynep Soysal.

### Introduction

A fond adage has it that in philosophy, the questions tend to be more important than the answers. Personally, this lesson came to me most concretely from my PhD supervisor, Professor Raatikainen, who above all has taught me to question my questions.

Let me illustrate with an anecdote. I first read the paper ‘Theories of reference: What was the question?’ (Raatikainen 2020) in October 2020. In my notes, preserved pristine in their digital form, I wrote:

And the answer to ‘What reference is?’ is that it is whatever subjects ought to take as serving as the standard of truth for their assertions; and I think Brandom is right that the mechanism of standard selection is a relation internal to language, not between language and the world, although since language is lumpy, the line is somewhat blurred anyway.

Two years later – exactly to a day, as it happens – I wrote a follow-up comment:

Think again.

It suffices to say that during those two years, my answers had shifted, and with them, the questions. While the direction of influence is clear enough, I, for one, could only see it after the fact. The process was above all guided by the arguments I came to work through by myself after the prolonged, tacit, passive exposure to Professor Raatikainen's work on reference.

This paper discusses the topic which I consider to be of fundamental importance to language – theory of reference – from Kripke's causal-historical viewpoint. In particular, I extend the defence of this viewpoint made in Raatikainen (2020) against recent criticism, owing to Kipper and Soysal (2022), that favours the descriptivist alternative. I proceed by characterising Kipper and Soysal's arguments and showing how they can be responded to mostly based on arguments already made in Raatikainen (2020).

In the first section I focus on one key deficit of descriptivism, namely that its explanations of reference are essentially incomplete. After that, I will focus on another key deficit, according to which the explanations are redundant.

## Against descriptivism I: Incompleteness

The first problem with Kipper and Soysal (2022) is how they define 'descriptivism':

**Descriptivism** For any speaker, S, expression, e, and class, C, if S refers to C with e, then there is a property, F, such that (i) S intends to refer to all and only Fs with e, and (ii) C is the class of all and only Fs; and S refers to C with e because F satisfies (i) and (ii). (Kipper and Soysal 2022, 655)

It is clear that 'descriptivism' is here defined as a theory concerning only reference, whereas, as Raatikainen (2020, 70–71) reminds us, the descriptivism that Kripke targets in *Naming and Necessity* (1980, henceforth abbreviated as NN) is first and foremost defined as a theory of meaning by both its supporters and Kripke himself. The reason this is a problem is that Kipper and Soysal explicitly frame their defence of descriptivism as Kripkean in nature, meaning that their claim is that Kripke himself (along with some other notable externalists) is committed to descriptivism as they define it, based on what he says in (NN). This latter part is partially true: Kripke indeed explicitly accepts many of the claims made by Kipper and Soysal, as we shall shortly see. But it should be stressed from the start that, unlike Kipper and Soysal at times imply, these other claims do not fall under the descriptivism that Kripke criticises in (NN).

While this problem is not strictly speaking a fault in argumentation, it carries a risk of confusing the debate. One can see this in how, at the end of their paper, Kipper and Soysal (2022, 664–665) claim that their definition of 'descriptivism' is immune

to Kripke's semantic arguments – namely, arguments from ignorance and error – against descriptivism. This is confusing because their definition of descriptivism (i.e., a theory of reference) is not the definition of descriptivism used by Kripke (i.e., a theory of meaning) when he formulated the arguments from ignorance and error. It is hardly surprising, then, to find the arguments weak when they are misapplied in this fashion. That being said, even when descriptivism is understood as a theory of reference only, the arguments from ignorance and error have some traction, as I will explain later.

Moving on, let's review Kipper and Soysal's arguments for descriptivism, understood henceforth as a theory of reference only. They begin by observing that Kripke in (NN) allowed that sometimes the reference of a proper name can be fixed with the help of a definite description: the famous cases he mentions are the namings of Neptune and Jack the Ripper. Based on these examples, Kipper and Soysal suggest that Kripke is committed to the following principle:

**SI** For any speaker, S, and expression, e, if there is a property, F, such that S intends to refer to all and only Fs with e, then S refers with e to the class, C, of all and only Fs, and S refers to C with e because (i) S intends to refer to all and only Fs with e and (ii) C is the class of all and only Fs. (Kipper and Soysal 2022, 656)

First, a word on exegesis. One characteristic, well-known trait of Kripke is his extreme caution in committing himself to any philosophical theory, or to develop one himself. As explained by Raatikainen (2020, 76), at many places in NN Kripke explicitly declines to give a theory of either meaning or reference to replace the one he's rejecting – at most he gestures towards 'a better picture'. With that in mind, I would hesitate to pin a general principle any such as SI on Kripke, who always preferred to keep the argumentation on the level of concrete examples and cases.

Furthermore, even supposing that Kripke would find SI acceptable, it is another question whether it is true. One reason to think it is not is explored in a recent paper by Jani Sinokki (2021). His discussion points to good reasons to caution against drawing a generalised principle like SI from the concrete examples discussed by Kripke, and is worth quoting at length:

It seems that most familiar instances of "refence fixing" [*sic*] by description turn on closer inspection to presuppose ordinary causal-informational connections. Consider the famous case of fixing the reference of "Neptune." Alexis Bouvard first noticed certain irregularities in the orbit of Uranus and suggested that their cause of is another planet (as opposed to the Le Verrier, who only later calculated the location of the suggested planet). If Bouvard used the name "Neptune" for that planet, then his coining this name for the planet took place by simple causal-informational connection. There was the data (visible light) that was information about an event (unexpected

irregularities in Uranus' orbit), which originated from something. With the realization that the cause of the perturbations is singular thing, a planet, Bouvard used this causal-informational connection to tag this object (not yet directly observed) with the name "Neptune." Importantly, even before coining the name, there was a question to be asked by using the data Bouvard was trying to interpret: "What is that?" or "What is the cause of that?" The truth-values of the answers to these questions are determined already by the actual history of the causal information coming from an object about which the question is asked, so also the reference must precede the use of any description used to *introduce* the name. (Sinokki 2021, 342; footnote omitted)

Another famous example by Kripke that Kipper and Soysal (2022, 656) appeal to as defence of SI, is the coining of the word 'Gödel' as a descriptive name for whomever invented the incompleteness theorems, which Kripke makes in (NN, 91). Briefly, in such a case, the speaker uses a definite description to fix the reference of a name, which Kipper and Soysal take to mean that sometimes the intention to refer alone is sufficient to refer.<sup>1</sup> However, here it is left open how the reference of the words in the associated description, in this example the reference of 'the incompleteness theorems', is established. If the reference is causal-historical, then this case also is not a 'pure' example of fixing the reference by description, but a hybrid case. This would be in conflict with SI, assuming that a descriptive intention alone is sufficient to fix reference for *every* expression. Suppose, then, that the reference of 'the incompleteness theorems of arithmetic' is not causal-historical but can itself be given a descriptivist explanation in line with SI. This effectively means that the introducer of 'Gödel' is able to describe the incompleteness theorems without reference to anyone else's work. But doesn't that obviously mean that the speaker herself has independently invented the incompleteness theorems? If so, it seems that not many people can coin the name 'Gödel' in the *purely* descriptivist fashion, i.e. in the fashion where the terms in the introducing description also are given a descriptivist explanation.<sup>2</sup>

The previous discussion offers reasons to caution us from drawing a generalised principle like SI from the concrete examples discussed by Kripke.<sup>3</sup> Suppose, though,

<sup>1</sup> It should be emphasised that Kripke himself would not call the Gödel example as the introduction of a *proper name* solely with the means of a description, as he explains elsewhere (Kripke 1977, 260, fn.9)

<sup>2</sup> It could be objected that this problem is merely an artefact of the particular example, namely the incompleteness theorems and their inherent difficulty. The objection would be premature, as the following discussion will reveal. The main point is that in order to fix reference purely descriptively in the spirit of SI, the reference of the terms in the associated description must also be fixed only descriptively, which introduces the essential problems regardless of what these descriptions are.

<sup>3</sup> And by that token cautions us also from attributing the commitment to SI to him. Indeed, my elaboration of the Gödel example is more or less directly analogical to what Kripke says about fixing the reference of 'Einstein' by the description 'the author of the theory of relativity' (NN, 82). So, it's not unreasonable to say that Kripke was well-aware of the problems of a generalised principle like SI.

that SI, or perhaps some appropriately adjusted replacement, is true. Granted that, there is another important weakness inherent in the principle which Kipper and Soysal do not seem to notice. The weakness is that SI does not stand for an autonomous mechanism of reference fixing: it is parasitic on some other, merely presupposed mechanism of reference. So, even if SI is true, the explanation of reference it provides is essentially incomplete and dependent on some other theory of reference. Let me explain this thought in detail.

The thought is due to Michael Devitt's observation that description theories of reference are essentially incomplete (Devitt 1996, 159; see also Devitt and Sterelny 1999). We can see the incompleteness problem by asking how the speaker S is related to the property F in SI. Presumably, F must be associated with some kind of mental representation in S's mind; this is also suggested by Frank Jackson's (1998) discussion, to whom Kipper and Soysal refer. But now it follows that, in order for S to refer to C with e via F, she must already have a representational, referential relation in her mind to F. What is the medium of this association, or the nature of the mental reference? This is not what SI, or the description theory as such, is able to explain; it merely presupposes that some such relation exists.

Now, Jackson for one believes that this outcome is not a major problem for the description theory of reference:

There is of course an important problem of reference for the words of mentalese (if such there be), and more generally for how we refer in thought, but, as signalled earlier, this is not the problem of reference that the Lockean description theory we are defending is concerned with. (Jackson 1998, 204)

In contrast, I agree with Devitt that incompleteness poses a major problem for the description theory of reference. The reason is that the incompleteness problem makes the explanations provided by the description theory parasitic on whatever explains reference at the mental level – it merely passes the buck, as Devitt puts it.

It is vital not to misunderstand the incompleteness problem as the unreasonable demand that, in order to explain anything, a theory should explain everything. If that was the case, only theories in fundamental physics would be genuinely explanatory – quite possibly not even those. Rather, the main point of the incompleteness problem is that the description theory, as Devitt says, explains the reference of some term *by appealing to the reference of other terms*, i.e. representings in Mentalese or in some other mental medium (basic representings in Mentalese are often called 'terms' or 'words' for convenience). The theory presumes what it seeks to explain. This could be a perfectly valid explanation, perhaps an interesting one to some extent, but the answer it gives is essentially incomplete as concerns the *nature* of reference. That is to say, descriptivism does not do what we most of all want a theory of reference to do, namely explain reference without appealing to reference; explain reference in an ultimate sense, as it were.

How does the causal-historical account fare better in this regard? Simply put, the causal-historical account states that the buck stops at what Devitt (1996, 167) calls ‘grounding uses’, which paradigmatically involves a perceptual contact between the speaker and a token referent. Reference can then be borrowed to those speakers who haven’t had perceptual contact with the referent, forming a chain-like network of causal-historical relations. This is, of course, only to provide the rough gist of the account, but the important point is that this account can explain reference in an ultimate sense, i.e. without appealing to reference established at the level of some mental medium.

Kipper and Soysal argue that denying SI leads to highly implausible conclusions. Consider again the example where someone coins the word ‘Gödel’ as a descriptive name for the prover of the incompleteness theorems. Such a speaker, called David, is disposed to conform all the credences of his beliefs involving ‘Gödel’ (only) to whatever information he gleans about the prover of incompleteness theorems. They then claim that:

Someone who denies SI holds that it is possible that the reference of David’s use of ‘Gödel’ isn’t explained by his intentions, such that he might refer to something other than  $\{x \mid x \text{ is the prover of the incompleteness theorems}\}$ .  
(Kipper and Soysal 2022, 661)

As we saw above, however, the key anti-descriptivist objection against SI is not that it doesn’t work anywhere, but rather that it cannot work everywhere (i.e., it is incomplete). So, someone who rejects SI is not committed to denying that David couldn’t successfully coin a descriptive name as he does, i.e. intend to use the name as applying only to whoever proved the incompleteness theorems. Indeed, since by hypothesis David is rational, and because his intention about the reference of ‘Gödel’ makes it an analytic truth in his idiolect that ‘Gödel’, if it refers, refers to whoever proved the incompleteness theorems, it is trivial that there exists ‘no possible piece of information David could get that would break this connection between his ‘Gödel’-utterances, credences, and the property of being the prover of the incompleteness theorems’ (Kipper and Soysal 2022, 661). This is an irrelevance, however, for the interest in the example should be on the question of how the reference of the expression ‘the prover of the incompleteness theorems’ is to be determined. As we saw above, there are two options. If the reference is fixed purely descriptively, that can only mean that David himself counts as a prover of the incompleteness theorems as much as anyone else because he can correctly formulate the theorems without reference to anyone else’s work. (Again, this is surely not how most people refer to the incompleteness theorems!) However, if the reference is fixed causal-historically, then this is a hybrid case of explaining reference, and thus not a counter-example to externalism.

Kipper and Soysal further claim that anyone who denies SI must claim that ‘we have no control over the meanings of our words’ (2022, 661). (I ignore the point that

here the authors speak explicitly of meaning, although at the beginning of the paper they define Descriptivism as a theory of reference.) This seems quite hyperbolic and is surely something which a reasonable form of externalism should dodge. Indeed, there is a simple way in which to dodge the accusation. The key point is to agree that we do indeed have control over the reference (and meaning) of our words, but that the control is never *total* in the sense that one could, by oneself, determine the meanings and references of *every* word one ever used, as opposed to any single word considered in isolation. This is compatible with saying that David can use his control to coin the name ‘Gödel’ as he does by relying on the control others have wielded in determining the meanings and references of other words, for example, by borrowing the reference of ‘the prover of the incompleteness theorems’.

In any case, externalism is not so much a claim about *control* as it is about *knowledge* of meaning and reference. Since reference is fixed by use<sup>4</sup>, and since we are firmly in control of how we use language, externalism allows that we have indirect control over the reference of our words.<sup>5</sup> What we often lack, especially in the case of proper names and natural kind terms, is complete knowledge about the referents and the nature of the referential relation itself.

## Against descriptivism II: Redundancy

The previous section argued that there are problems in the claim, encapsulated by SI, that descriptive intentions *alone* may suffice to fix the reference of *every* term (as opposed to any term considered in isolation). I first pointed out, following Sinokki (2021), that we should be cautious about drawing a generalised principle from the concrete examples discussed by Kripke because, arguably, these cases (e.g. the naming of Neptune and Jack the Ripper) are not purely descriptive, but rather hybrid cases, of reference fixing. That is to say, the success of reference here includes both a descriptive-intentional element and a causal-informational element. Second, following Devitt, I pointed out that even if a rare case of purely descriptive explanation of reference can be found in real life, the explanation provided by SI is essentially incomplete, as it merely passes the buck to whatever explains the speaker’s reference to the property F in the mental medium.

In this section I tackle the complementary idea by Kipper and Soysal, according to which descriptive intentions are not only a sufficient but also a necessary component in explaining reference. Their initial formulation of the idea goes as follows:

**NI** For any speaker, S, expression, e, and class, C, if there is a relation, E, between S, e, and C’s members, because of which S refers to C with e, then

<sup>4</sup> This is implicit in Kripke’s notion of ‘initial baptism’. The idea is developed further by Devitt (1981; 1996).

<sup>5</sup> As a perceptive reviewer points out, much more would need to be said here about the nature of semantic control in an externalist setting. Here I can only refer the reader to the discussion in Steffen Koch (2021) as an example of how to understand the ‘indirect control’ that externalism allows for the reference of our words.

S intends to refer to all and only the things that are E-related to e and S.  
(Kipper and Soysal 2022, 657)

In other words, the idea is that no purely causal-historical relation can be sufficient to fix reference, because wherever such a relation explains reference, a descriptive intention to refer via the causal-historical relation is needed. But, because such an intention is, per SI, always sufficient to fix reference, it follows that descriptive intentions alone are really both necessary and sufficient to fix the reference of any term – therefore, Descriptivism is vindicated.

The key deficit in SI, we recall, was that the explanation it offers is essentially incomplete. The key deficit in NI, on the other hand, is that the explanation it offers is essentially redundant. Supposing that there is a relation, E, *because of which* S refers to C with e, why is it additionally necessary for S to intend to refer to C with e? The main reasoning provided by Kipper and Soysal is that, apparently, Kripke and Putnam thought that intentions play an important role in explaining reference (Kipper and Soysal 2022, 657). While this is true, I think that Kipper and Soysal make a mistake in *how* intentions play their important role – for Kripke, in particular.

There are two key aspects in Kipper and Soysal's understanding of referential intentions, concerning the acts of borrowing and fixing reference. First is that the intention to refer must, for them, include some *descriptive content*: it must be an intention to refer to C via a certain relation, E. Second is that the intention must be *present* in every act of referring with a word. I argue that both claims are false, and that attributing them to Kripke, at least, is wrong.

Let's start with the second claim, that the intention to refer must always be present in the act of using a word referentially for the reference to succeed. Now, Kripke said:

When the name is 'passed from link to link', the receiver of the name must, I think, intend *when he learns it* to use it with the same reference as the man from whom he heard it. If I hear the name 'Napoleon' and decide it would be a nice name for my pet aardvark, I do not satisfy this condition.  
(Kripke 1980, 96; my italics)

Kipper and Soysal (2022, 659) note that according to Devitt (2006, fn.6) and Raatikainen (2020), a natural reading of Kripke's thought here is that the intention to refer in accordance with original use need only be present when the name is originally borrowed, but that it is not needed later while using the name to refer in accordance with original use. The idea is consistently implied elsewhere in (NN) as well:

I may then say, 'Look, by "Gödel" I shall mean the man Joe thinks proved the incompleteness of arithmetic'. Joe may then pass the thing over to Harry. One has to be very careful that this doesn't come round in a circle. Is one



really sure that this won't happen? [...] You may not even remember whom you heard of Gödel. (NN, 90)

A speaker who is on the far end of this chain, who has heard about, say Richard Feynman, in the market place or elsewhere, may be referring to Richard Feynman even though he can't remember from whom he first heard of Feynman or from whom he ever heard of Feynman. He knows that Feynman is a famous physicist. A certain passage of communication reaching ultimately to the man himself does reach the speaker. He then is referring to Feynman even though he can't identify him uniquely. (NN, 91)

On our view, it is not how the speaker thinks he got the reference, but the actual chain of communication, which is relevant. (NN, 93)

If the speaker need not presently remember where she borrowed a name in order to refer with it in accordance with original use, then surely no present intention to use it in accordance with original use is needed, either.

Kipper and Soysal disagree, since the truth of NI requires that the descriptive intention be present in every act of using the name referentially:

If Devitt's suggestion is correct, then NI is false, and reference can often be explained by external relations. However, Devitt's suggestion isn't credible. Assume, for instance, that the patient in Burge's thought experiment had the intention to defer to the experts' usage of 'arthritis' when he first heard the term, but later loses this intention and decides, instead, to use it to refer to tharthrititis, which includes inflammations of muscles. This seems clearly possible. Just as a speaker can stipulate a term to have a certain reference when they first hear it, they can perform such a stipulation later. But Devitt's suggestion seems to imply that this is impossible. Accordingly, if a speaker once had the intention to defer to others' usage, they won't be able to use this term with a different reference later, even if they want to. Such a view would entail that we only have control over the meanings of our words when we first encounter these words, which seems no less absurd than the view that we have no control at all over those meanings. (Kipper and Soysal 2022, 659)

The main objection to Devitt's (and by the same token, Raatikainen's) reading of Kripke, according to which the intention to defer with a term need not be present in every act of referring with it in accordance with original use, is that this would make later stipulations of novel reference impossible for the term. This, however, seems clearly possible, as showcased by Kripke's example of using the name 'Napoleon' as a name for a pet aardvark. The objection fails, though, because Devitt's (and Raatikainen's) reading of Kripke is compatible with the possibility that the speaker, after borrowing the name 'Napoleon', later decides to call her pet aardvark that. In

such a case, it can be argued, the speaker has essentially generated a new name type that is homonymous with an existing name, which is a common enough occurrence. But, so long as the speaker does not form a referential intention that contradicts the one she had when she borrowed the name, it's plausible that reference according to original use can be explained without the intention being present during every instance of use.

It is curious that, after presenting their objection to Devitt and Raatikainen, Kipper and Soysal mention in a footnote that their objection fails against this more plausible construal of Devitt's and Raatikainen's interpretation (2022, 659, fn.17). As a consequence, they shift to defending a weaker version of NI:

**NI\*** For any speaker, S, expression, e, and class, C, if there is a relation, E, between S, e, and C's members, because of which S refers to C with e, then there is no property,  $G \neq$  being E-related to e and S, such that S exclusively intends to refer to all and only Gs with e. (Kipper and Soysal 2022, 659)

With this adjustment, Kipper and Soysal's strategy is to concede that externalism is right that reference can be explained by external relations by default, although explicit speaker intentions can override these, as in the aardvark case. I shall first explain their argument before criticising it.

Kipper and Soysal argue for NI\* based on two thought experiments, which seek to show that it is implausible to hold that a speaker's expression refers to something if the speaker has no dispositions to conform their credences based on the information they get about the referent (which is how they understand referential intentions). The first thought experiment involves one Ella, of whom two things are stipulated: she is rational and that she refuses to update any of her belief-credences involving 'Gödel' based on information she gets about the person at the causal-historical origin of her term 'Gödel'. Kipper and Soysal then claim:

Assuming that Ella's second-order dispositions align with her dispositions to update her beliefs, Ella will also be disposed to say things such as "The fact that the person at the causal origin of my use of 'Gödel' won the Einstein award is irrelevant to whether Gödel won this award." Ella thus isn't disposed to conform her 'Gödel'-thoughts to information about the person that is causally related to her in this way. Assuming that Ella is rational, there seems to be no reason to think that in this case, Ella's use of the term is explained or determined by the relevant causal relations. (Kipper and Soysal 2022, 662)

How is this supposed to be problematic for the causal-historical account, or externalism at large? The key premise in this argument appears to be that if Ella is rational, then her dispositions to update credences based on information about the assumed referent of her term 'Gödel' are infallible, or at least very strong, evidence

about what the reference of 'Gödel' in her idiolect really is. But why should we think Ella's dispositions are infallible or strong evidence in this regard? It seems that a tacit assumption is at play here: if Ella is rational, she is supposed to *know* what her term 'Gödel' refers to, i.e. she is supposed to know if information about an object is relevant to whether she should update her credences concerning 'Gödel'. So, if she says that the person at the causal origin of her use of 'Gödel' isn't relevant to her credences, this is evidence that she does not refer to the person at the causal origin of her use of 'Gödel'. At least, if Kipper and Soysal do not make this assumption, it's unclear why they would think Ella's dispositions to update her credences are strong evidence of reference.

Since every relevant fact about Ella is stipulated, the weight of the argument rests on its assumptions. The problem is that Kipper and Soysal don't provide justifications for these assumptions, indeed do not even articulate them explicitly. Moreover, the externalist has arguments available for why the assumptions are wrong. In particular, the assumption that Ella, being rational, is supposed to know what her terms refer to is clearly an internalist notion, and an easy target to the classical arguments from ignorance and error. Very often, it strongly seems that people who we otherwise would count as rational do not know very much about the referents of their terms, for example proper names, or then all that they believe about them turns out to be false. Likewise, it seems plausible to say that speakers can refer with words even when they have little to no idea how the referential relation itself works – barring such more or less trivial statements as 'The name *N* refers, if it refers, to whoever is called that'. A separate account is then needed about the relation of 'calling' to make this version of descriptivism interesting, as Kripke already noted (NN, 70).

There is, of course, an obvious way in which the assumptions in Ella's case are justified. They are justified if Ella has stipulated that 'Gödel' in her use does not refer to whoever is at the causal origin of her use of the term. But then this is not a counter-example to externalism, which allows that we can stipulate the reference of any term in isolation (although *not* the reference of *all* terms). Again, this is surely not how most people refer to Gödel, however.

Is there any way in which an externalist might explain Ella's refusal to update her credences based on information about the causal-historical origin of her word 'Gödel'? Very likely, Ella is a stout descriptivist theorist and thinks that her best evidence simply speaks against the causal-historical account. Naturally, the externalist is not obliged to explain why some people continue to believe in descriptivism. Rather, it should be Ella's burden to explain to us why her evidence justifies the rejection of the causal-historical account. This, she fails to do.

The second thought experiment includes one Fritz and his pet aardvark called 'Napoleon':

An opponent of NI might try to argue that Fritz could later lose the intention to comply with his original naming ceremony and still continue to refer to his aardvark by 'Napoleon', as long as he doesn't acquire any conflicting

intentions. To illustrate why this view isn't tenable, let us assume that one day, Fritz learns that the aardvark he is currently taking for a walk isn't the one he once named 'Napoleon'. If Fritz then gives up his belief that he is currently walking Napoleon, this indicates that he still intends to comply with his original naming ceremony. If, on the other hand, he doesn't change his belief, this indicates that he treats information regarding the initial naming as irrelevant to the reference of his use of 'Napoleon'. In this case, the reference of 'Napoleon' in Fritz' idiolect has plausibly changed. (Kipper and Soysal 2022, 662)

Now, there's a simple way in which the externalist can accommodate the case of Fritz and his aardvark. Finding that there's been a change of animal, we have two basic options. In the first option, Fritz decides to stick with his original intention regarding the use of 'Napoleon'. In the second, he rather decides to name this other aardvark also as 'Napoleon'. But does this second option mean that the reference of 'Napoleon' has changed, or that a new, homonymous name type has been added to Fritz's vocabulary? One would think that, absent an intention to withdraw the name 'Napoleon' from the first aardvark, it still retains the name. In any case, all these options are perfectly viable for the causal-historical account, as I shall now explain.

The general problem with Kipper and Soysal's strategy for defending NI and NI\* is that it rests on a false dilemma. As explained above, in the dialogue as they understand it, the concession of NI\* to the externalist is that reference is by default explained by external relations, but the speaker's intentions can at will override these, with the argument following that this is in fact the case everywhere – speaker intentions are always necessary to explain reference. The false dilemma here is that reference is exclusively either explained by external relations or the speaker's intentions. But it was never part of Kripke's (or Burge's or Putnam's as far as I know) plan to deny that acts of reference (including reference borrowing) are intentional acts, or to claim that intentionality does not play an important role for reference. The key insight of externalism is that the referential intentions need not, at least everywhere, have descriptive content in order to explain reference, or then that this content can be very uninformative, even false. Moreover, even in cases where the speaker intention is said to 'override' the external relation, as in the aardvark case, this is only possible because one external relation (the chain of reference that links the name 'Napoleon' to Napoleon) is replaced by another external relation (a perceptual one to a certain pet aardvark). So, there is no escaping the external relation, nor the speaker's intention: both are needed to explain reference.

In contrast, the reason why Kipper and Soysal think that the examples of Ella and Fritz vindicate Descriptivism is that the referential intentions (i.e. dispositions to update credences) are assumed to always be able to override any external relation when it comes to explaining reference:

Generally speaking, the problem is this: If a speaker has a credence in a sentence and gets a piece of information, she will either adjust her credence in response to this information or she won't—there seems to be no middle ground here. This implies that if a speaker doesn't conform her credences to a particular property, then she has dispositions that conflict with this property, since there are cases in which she treats some piece of information about the property as irrelevant to her beliefs. It would seem misleading to say that a subject is indifferent regarding the relevance of this property in such cases. *In any case, we contend that reference cannot be explained by external relations if speakers have dispositions that are contrary to the relevance of these relations for reference.* (Kipper and Soysal 2022, 662, my italics)

Since the way that the speaker is disposed to update her credences in response to new information *determines* what she refers to, it is impossible for the speaker to find evidence about the referents of her words that would contradict her credences. In the case where contradictions between the speaker's initial credences and new information emerge, she has two options available. If she refuses to update her credences in view of the new information, this shows that she did not refer to whatever the new information is about, hence she has no false beliefs about it. On the other hand, if she does update her credences in response to the new information, this shows that she now *chooses* to refer to whatever the information is about. So, the only way in which the speaker could have a false belief about the referent is if she chose to hold some mistaken credentials about it, which she presumably will not do, being by hypothesis rational. But isn't it more credible that actual speakers often have false beliefs about the referents of their words regardless of their choosing to have them? And if so, does that really entail that such speakers must always be irrational, as opposed to merely ignorant? The true depth of the arguments from ignorance and error, of course, is to question the role of knowledge (and other epistemic notions) in determining reference.

To end this section, a word on the arguments from ignorance and error. Kipper (2012) defends the idea, originally made by Jackson (1998), that the primary intensions which determine a speaker's reference could include descriptions about the causal chains of borrowing by which the name has arrived to the speaker:

I think that a good case has been made that even where names are concerned or other uses of terms to which the arguments from Ignorance and Error can be applied, speakers do (implicitly) know something which can determine the term's reference: They know that a name 'N', if it refers, refers to the individual called 'N' by those from whom she acquired the name. (Kipper 2012, 92)

First of all, this response misapplies the arguments from ignorance and error by understanding them as objections to descriptivism as a theory of reference, whereas their proper target is descriptivism as a theory of meaning. But even so, it does not take much to see that the ignorance argument, at least, has weight against this kind of descriptivism as well, only in a different sense. The key point is that if the reference of a proper name in the speaker's use is fixed by the causal-historical chain of borrowing, it is redundant to require that the person also has to *know* that this is how the reference of her terms is fixed (Raatikainen 2020, 91).

One last point. How should the speaker's referential intentions be described, according to externalism, supposing that it is wrong to understand them (everywhere) in terms of descriptive content? Notably, Kripke (1980, 163) left this point open. In any case, the critical arguments against descriptivism are independent of what the right account will eventually turn out to be.

## Conclusions

This paper objected to a recent defence of descriptivism, understood as a theory of reference, made by Kipper and Soysal (2022). The main arguments on either side aren't especially new. The main clash point concerns what role epistemic notions such as belief and knowledge are to play in explaining reference. My conclusion echoes what has become the conventional wisdom: externalism prevails.

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