Roots, Naming, and Locality: The Structure of Name Predicates

Samuel Jambrović

1. Introduction

This paper analyzes the structure of names in a framework where lexical items decompose into category-free roots and categorizing heads (Marantz 1997; Arad 2003, 2005; Embick & Marantz 2008; Acquaviva 2009; Embick 2010; Harley 2014). The proposal is inspired by the semantic theory of predicativism, which claims that names, like nouns, denote properties (Sloat 1969, Burge 1973, Geurts 1997, Thomsen 1997, Elbourne 2005, Matushansky 2008, Ghomeshi & Massam 2009, Fara 2015, Matushansky 2015). Name predicates are argued to be more complex than nouns in that they involve two nominalizers, one that is responsible for namehood and another that converts the name into a predicate. Not only does this account predict the regularized inflection of names, but it also captures the intuition that any individual can bear any name, no matter the "content" that the name may express or its morphological form.

Since names may be homophonous with nouns and other lexical items in a given language, it is not trivial to ask whether they share roots (Faust 2019, Resende 2020, Saab & Lo Guercio 2020). For instance, many names have the same form as nouns that relate to nature, occupations, and physical traits, suggesting that they are not accidental homophones. If such name-noun pairings have the same roots, one would expect them to have the same inflectional behavior, yet all of the family names in (1–4a) have regularized plural forms in contrast to the irregular nouns in (1–4b).

(1) English (Kim et al. 1994: 184)
   a. Child → Childs
   b. child → children

(2) German (Marcus et al. 1995: 229)
   a. Wiese → Wieses
   b. Wiese → Wiesen 'meadow(s)'

(3) Hebrew (Berent et al. 2002: 459)
   a. Barak → Barakim
   b. barak → brakim 'lightning(s)'

(4) Hungarian (Pinker 1999: 233)
   a. Ló → Lók
   b. ló → lovak 'horse(s)'

In English and German, the family names *Child* and *Wiese* appear with the elsewhere form of the plural morpheme (*-s*), not with the form corresponding to the irregular noun. In Hebrew and Hungarian, the family names *Barak* and *Ló* do not display root allomorphy in their plural forms, unlike their noun counterparts. The generalization that emerges is that names regularize in their inflection. I propose that regularization stems from converting a name (a phonological string) into a predicate (the property of bearing this phonological string), a process that interrupts locality and thereby prevents contextual allomorphy (Arad 2003, 2005; Embick & Marantz 2008; Acquaviva 2009; Embick 2010; Harley 2014).

The path to the structure of name predicates is as follows. Section 2 introduces predicativism and the distinction between names and name predicates, and section 3 explores the various incongruities that exist between names and the individuals who bear them. Section 4 shows that previous syntactic accounts do not explain the regularization of name predicates, and section 5 presents a structure that addresses this shortcoming, one that also allows names that are grammatically feminine or masculine to be borne by any individual. Section 6 concludes and identifies areas for future work.

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2. Names and name predicates

This section briefly reviews the predicativist approach to the semantics of names (Sloat 1969, Burge 1973, Geurts 1997, Thomsen 1997, Elbourne 2005, Matushansky 2008, Ghomeshi & Massam 2009, Fara 2015, Matushansky 2015). In English, singular referential names can appear as bare arguments, unlike singular count nouns (Sloat 1969: 27).

(5) a. (*The) Smith stopped by.
b. *(The) man stopped by.

Otherwise, names and count nouns have the same distribution in English (Sloat 1969: 27).

(6) a. A Smith stopped by.
b. Some Smith stopped by.
c. Some Smiths stopped by.
d. Smiths must breathe.
e. The clever Smith stopped by.
f. The Smith who is clever stopped by.
g. A clever Smith stopped by.
h. The Smiths stopped by.

(7) a. A man stopped by.
b. Some man stopped by.
c. Some men stopped by.
d. Men must breathe.
e. The clever man stopped by.
f. The man who is clever stopped by.
g. A clever man stopped by.
h. The men stopped by.

There are, however, languages where names and count nouns have entirely overlapping distributions. In Austro-Bavarian and Greek, for example, the definite article obligatorily introduces names as arguments.

(8) Austro-Bavarian (Wiltschko 2013: 170)
*(Da) Hons is im Spitoi.
the Hons is in.the hospital
'Hons is in the hospital.'

(9) Greek (Lekakou & Szendrői 2012: 117)
*(O) Janis eftase stin ora tu.
the Janis arrived on.the time his
'Janis arrived on time.'

Based on these types of crosslinguistic data, predicativists argue that bare singular names in English are essentially count nouns that appear with a phonologically null determiner.

(10) $[_{DP}\ \varnothing\ [_{NP}$ Smith]] stopped by.

According to predicativism, singular referential names in English, Austro-Bavarian, and Greek are structurally identical in argument position.

Some opponents of predicativism maintain that the occurrences of *Smith* in (6) are fundamentally different from *Smith* as a singular referential name in (5a) because they can be readily substituted by expressions like *individual(s) named "Smith"* (Leckie 2013, Jeshion 2015). Limiting the discussion to the singular examples, (6e) complicates this view since it has an overt definite article and yet allows for a nonrestrictive reading. Interpreted nonrestrictively, (6e) is equivalent to (11), where it would be infelicitous to substitute *individual named "Smith"*.

(11) Clever Smith stopped by.

In short, the argument against a null determiner in (5a) is weakened by the compatibility of the definite article with nonrestrictive modification.

Formally, *Smith* as a name predicate has the semantic value in (12) before it combines with the null determiner to become an individual-denoting expression.[1]

(12) $[\![\text{Smith}]\!]^w = \lambda x_e\ .\ x$ bears /smɪθ/ in w

In prose, the name predicate *Smith* is a function that maps every individual x to the truth value 1 if and only if x bears the phonological string /smɪθ/ in world w. In the remainder of this paper, I use quotation marks to differentiate names as phonological strings (*"Smith"*) from name predicates (*Smith*), which is fundamental to the proposal. The next section considers the notion that names are phonological strings in greater detail.

[1] Sloat (1969) is, to my knowledge, the first to represent names as phonological strings.

3. Names and their bearers

Even if one accepts that names are phonological strings, their forms often suggest that they are derived from roots found elsewhere in a language or from phrases whose internal structure is still transparent to speakers. The following data exhibit some of these possibilities and motivate the account of name predicates in section 5.

First, name predicates do not result in contradictions, unlike nouns that have the same roots (Coates 2006, Idrissi et al. 2008).

(13) a. Jewel is not a jewel.

b. #The jewel is not a jewel.

Second, names may have forms that do not reflect the gender or number features of their bearers (Lyons 1977, Borer 2005, Coates 2006). In Spanish, for instance, the given names in (14) correspond to masculine nouns but are conventionally borne by women, and the given names in (15) are plural in form but are borne by individuals.

(14) a. "Amparo"
protection.M

b. "Consuelo"
consolation.M

c. "Rocío"
dew.M

(15) a. "Dolor-es"
pain-PL

b. "Merced-es"
mercy-PL

c. "Remedio-s"
remedy-PL

Third, names may contain case morphology that renders them indeclinable as predicates, which occurs in Greek with family names that are genitive in form. In (16), the name predicate *Papanikoláou* remains invariable in nominative and accusative environments, whereas in (17), all elements of the noun phrase *o papás Nikólaos* 'the priest Nikólaos' decline.

(16) a. O Papanikolá-ou ítan Éllin-as pathológ-os.
the.NOM Papanikoláou-GEN was Greek-NOM pathologist-NOM
'Papanikoláou was a Greek pathologist.'

b. Diávasa gia to-n Papanikolá-ou, to-n Éllin-a pathológ-o.
read.1SG about the-ACC Papanikoláou-GEN the-ACC Greek-ACC pathologist-ACC
'I read about Papanikoláou, the Greek pathologist.'

(17) a. O pap-ás Nikóla-os ítan Éllin-as theológ-os.
the.NOM priest-NOM Nikólaos-NOM was Greek-NOM theologian-NOM
'The priest Nikólaos was a Greek theologian.'

b. Diávasa gia to-n pap-á Nikóla-o, to-n Éllin-a theológ-o.
read.1SG about the-ACC priest-ACC Nikólaos-ACC the-ACC Greek-ACC theologian-ACC
'I read about the priest Nikólaos, the Greek theologian.'

Lastly, beyond inflectional morphology, names may include determiners that are not interpreted, such as the definite article in Dutch (Barend Beekhuizen and Sander Nederveen, p.c.).

(18) a. De De Ruiter-s zijn mijn vrienden.
the De Ruiter-PL are my friends
'The De Ruiters are my friends.'

b. Ik ken een De Ruiter.
I know a De Ruiter
'I know a De Ruiter.'

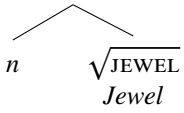
The source of the family name *"De Ruiter"* is the definite noun phrase *de ruiter* 'the rider'. Many Dutch family names are also derived from prepositional phrases, as exemplified by the pair *"Van den Berg"* and *van den berg* 'of the mountain'.

In summary, names have internal structure, as indicated by gender, number, and case morphology and the presence of determiners. At the same time, any feature values related to these elements can be overridden when an individual bears the name, suggesting that a second extended projection is involved. Previous syntactic approaches do not consider these types of data, especially the distinction between the grammatical gender of a name and the natural gender of its bearer.

4. Name predicates are complex

There is consensus in the literature that singular referential names are of the category N rather than D (Longobardi 1994, Thomsen 1997, Borer 2005, Longobardi 2005, Matushansky 2008, Ghomeshi & Massam 2009, Matushansky 2015, Faust 2019, Resende 2020, Saab & Lo Guercio 2020). However, representing name predicates as Ns leaves many kinds of data unexplained. These issues are evident in a framework where lexical items consist of roots and categorizers (Marantz 1997; Arad 2003, 2005; Embick & Marantz 2008; Acquaviva 2009; Embick 2010; Harley 2014). For instance, if the name predicate *Jewel* and the noun *jewel* both decompose into the same root categorized by *n*, it is unclear how the conceptual-intentional system distinguishes them (cf. Resende 2020, Saab & Lo Guercio 2020).[2]

(19) a.



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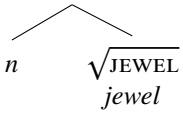


Even if one were to claim that *Jewel* as a singular referential name in (13a) and *the jewel* as a definite description in (13b) do not form a minimal pair, the Greek data in (20) still require explanation.

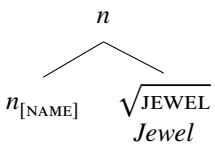
(20) a. O Apóstolos den eínai apóstolos.
the Apóstolos not is apostle
'Apóstolos is not an apostle.'

b. #O apóstolos den eínai apóstolos.
the apostle not is apostle
'The apostle is not an apostle.'

As a singular referential name, *Apóstolos* in (20a) does not give rise to a contradiction, but the noun *apóstolos* 'apostle' in (20b) does. These examples support the argument that names are phonological strings and confirm that the conceptual-intentional system differentiates between name predicates and nouns in languages where they have the same distribution.

If, as Acquaviva (2009) and Harley (2014) argue, roots are not phonologically or semantically identified, the categorizer is the first piece of structure that can distinguish name predicates from nouns. One option is a feature on *n*, such as Ghomeshi & Massam's (2009) [NAME] feature.

(21) a.



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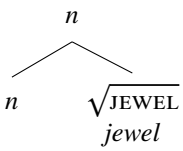


In their proposal, [NAME] alters the semantics of *n*: *n* identifies sets of individuals that have the same properties, and $n_{[\text{NAME}]}$ identifies sets of individuals that have the same name. The [NAME] feature addresses the question of how the conceptual-intentional system recognizes namehood but does not account for the regularization of name predicates.

Crucially, even singular referential names regularize in their infection, revealing that this phenomenon extends to the most canonical occurrences of names. In Hungarian, for example, the name predicates *Ló* and *Madár*, which correspond to the irregular nouns *ló* 'horse' and *madár* 'bird', have regularized declensions (Pinker 1999: 233; András Bárány and Angelika Kiss, p.c.).

[2] I subscribe to the view that roots are individuated by an abstract system of indices before insertion but use the notation $\sqrt{\text{JEWEL}}$ for clarity (Acquaviva 2009, Harley 2014).

(22) a. A ló követte Ló-t.
the horse.NOM followed Ló-ACC
'The horse followed Ló.'

b. Ló követte a lov-at.
Ló.NOM followed the horse-ACC
'Ló followed the horse.'

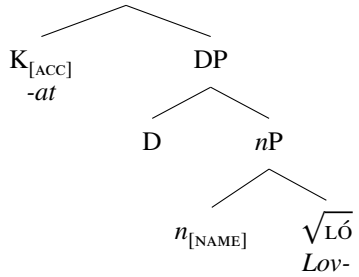
(23) a. A madár látta Madár-t.
the bird.NOM saw Madár-ACC
'The bird saw Madár.'

b. Madár látta a madar-at.
Madár.NOM saw the bird-ACC
'Madár saw the bird.'

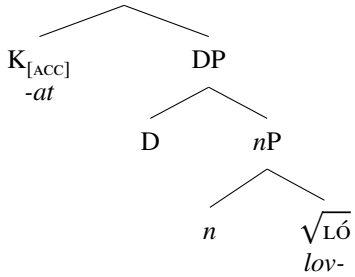
In both pairs of sentences, the singular referential names have the same nominative forms as the nouns, but the accusative forms of the names (*Lót* and *Madárt*) lack the root allomorphy that is found in the accusative forms of the nouns (*lovat* and *madarat*). Since even singular referential names regularize, there is reason to suspect that all name predicates have the same underlying structure.

To illustrate the problem for previous syntactic accounts, consider the architecture of the noun phrase in (24) and three arguments from the literature on contextual allomorphy. First, categorizers like *n* are phase heads (Arad 2003, 2005; Embick & Marantz 2008; Embick 2010). Second, K is the next phase head above *n*, not D (Richards 2010). Third, roots remain visible to higher functional heads through a single phase head (Embick 2010).

(24) a. *KP



b. KP

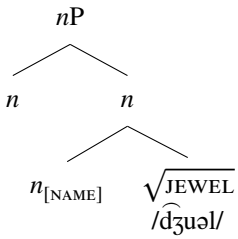


If the name predicate *Ló* were structurally identical to the noun *ló* 'horse', the root would be visible to K and therefore subject to contextual allomorphy. That is, the predicted accusative form of *Ló* would be **Lovat*, not *Lót*. The Hungarian data suggest that name predicates are more complex than nouns, echoing the observation at the end of section 3 that name predicates contain a second extended projection, one that disrupts locality between the root and any functional heads that merge above this projection.

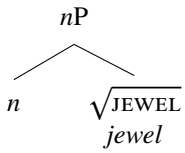
5. The structure of name predicates

Building on the approach in Jambrović 2021, I argue that name predicates comprise a lower naming layer and a higher predicativizing layer. The proposed structure captures the generalization that any individual can bear any name and predicts the regularization of name predicates as well as the possibility of featural mismatches between names and the individuals who bear them. I maintain Ghomeshi & Massam's (2009) use of a [NAME] feature to distinguish names from nouns, but the role of $n_{[\text{NAME}]}$ is to generate a name itself (*"Jewel"*), not the property of bearing the name (*Jewel*). To derive the name predicate, a second nominalizer is necessary, one that converts the name into a property-denoting expression.[3]

(25) a. Name predicate



b. Noun predicate



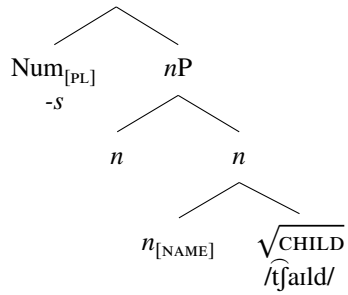
[3] Acquaviva (2009) provides a similar account of *ox* as an epithet, which has the regularized plural form *oxes* for some speakers of English.

In essence, the structure in (25a) is interpreted as the property of being a "Jewel" (i.e., bearing the phonological string /d͡ʒuəl/), while the structure in (25b) is interpreted as the property of being a jewel.

The fact that name predicates do not exhibit contextual allomorphy or allosemy is predicted by (25a). As phase heads, categorizers like *n* initiate spell-out of their complement domains (Arad 2003, 2005; Embick & Marantz 2008; Embick 2010). In (25a), the higher nominalizer, which converts the name into a predicate, triggers spell-out of the lower *n*P. At this point, the root is sent to the interfaces and is inaccessible to any functional heads that merge above the higher *n*P.

Regarding the lack of contextual allomorphy, (25a) accounts for both types of regularization in (1–4a): allomorphy of a higher functional head conditioned by the root, as in English and German, and allomorphy of the root conditioned by a higher functional head, as in Hebrew and Hungarian. The structures of English *Childs* (**Children*) and Hebrew *Barakim* (**Brakim*) in (26) illustrate the proposal.

(26) a.



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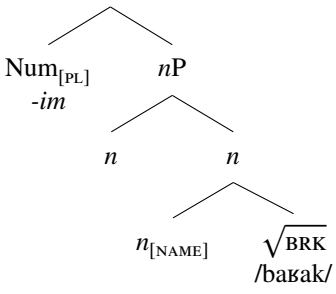


In (26a), the lower *n*P, which contains the root, undergoes spell-out when the higher *n* merges to convert the name into a predicate. At this point, the root is no longer visible to Num, and the elsewhere form of the plural morpheme (*-s*) is inserted. In (26b), the root cannot be conditioned by Num for the same reason: it is sent to the interfaces as part of the lower *n*P before Num merges. This argument extends to the regularization of singular referential names in Hungarian. Like Num in (26), K merges after the root has a phonological form, so it cannot play a role in the root's allomorphy.

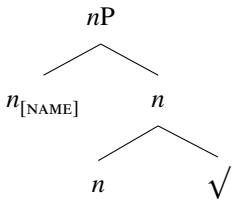
Turning to the lack of contextual allosemy, the semantic value of any name predicate corresponds to the template in (27), where the only element that varies is the phonological string.

(27) $[\![\text{Name}]\!]^w = \lambda x_e$. x is a /neɪm/ in w

In other words, the notion of predictable interpretation is built into predicativism.

It is now important to rule out an alternative analysis that would also result in regularization. If one were to posit that the family names in (1–4a) are noun-derived names, where *n* categorizes the root and $n_{[\text{NAME}]}$ converts the noun into a name, there would still be two nominalizers.

(28)

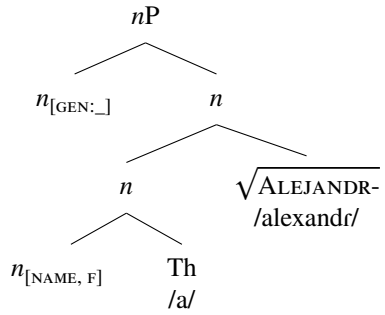


Like (25a), the inverted structure in (28) maintains two cyclic layers between the root and higher functional projections and thus predicts regularization. However, there are both intuitive and empirical reasons to reject this approach. First, speakers may not be aware that a name has a noun counterpart, or a name may be so ubiquitous that speakers do not draw a connection between it and the noun; possible examples include the given names *"Amber"*, *"Heather"*, and *"Victor"* and the family names *"Ford"*, *"Lane"*, and *"Smith"*. Second, many names contain roots that are not otherwise found in a language, such as *"Cameron"*, *"Jordan"*, and *"Quinn"*. In particular, name-only roots challenge the adequacy of the structure in (28) for languages with grammatical gender.

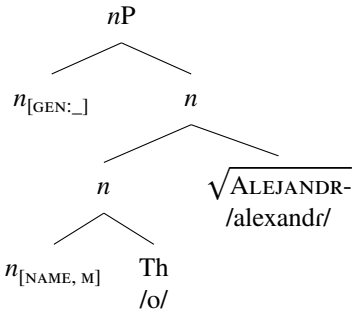
As Lyons (1977: 221) observes, "if a girl happened to be called 'John', we would have no hesitation in saying *John has just cut herself*". Similarly, a nonbinary or female individual could be named "Alejandro" in a Spanish-speaking community. The distinction between grammatical and natural gender further motivates the need for two nominalizers. In Spanish, many names come in "mated" pairs, to use Harris's (1991) term, and only the dual-layered structure in (25a) captures the fact that any individual can bear "Alejandra" or "Alejandro" regardless of their gender identity.

Assuming that roots are devoid of all features, $n_{[\text{NAME}]}$ is the first element that can differentiate *"Alejandra"* from *"Alejandro"*, which is consistent with the view that *n* is the locus of gender (Lowenstamm 2008, Acquaviva 2009, Kramer 2015).[4]

(29) a.



b.



Once the name is generated, the *n* that converts it into a predicate is still available to host its own gender feature, one that reflects the natural gender of the referent. Both structures in (29) indicate this possibility with the unvalued gender feature on the higher *n*. It is essential to keep in mind that *n* cannot be simultaneously valued with two gender features, hence an approach based on a single nominalizer, such as that in (21a), would incorrectly predict that the bearer of "Alejandra" is necessarily female and that the bearer of "Alejandro" is necessarily male.

Beyond gender, this proposal allows names like *"Dolores"*, which contain plural morphology, to be borne by singular individuals and name predicates like *Papanikoláou* and *De Ruiter*, which are genitive and definite in form, respectively, to appear in nongenitive and indefinite contexts. In each case, $n_{[\text{NAME}]}$ recategorizes an existing phrase as a name: the plural NumP *dolores* 'pains', the genitive KP *papa-Nikoláou* 'of the priest Nikólaos', and the definite DP *de ruiter* 'the rider'.

6. Conclusion

This paper sought to explain why names do not inflect like nouns that are built from the same roots and why names are not necessarily representative of their bearers in either "content" or form. In the proposed solution, one nominalizer derives a name from a root or phrase, and another coverts the name into a predicate that denotes the property of bearing that name. The regularization of name predicates results from the second nominalizer, which is a cyclic head that blocks higher functional projections from accessing the root. Since this nominalizer has its own extended projection, it can host features that differ from those that are internal to the name. Future research will examine the role of determiners in the interpretation of singular referential names, including the definite article, the proprial article, and pronominal forms.

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[4]Class markers like *-a* and *-o* are required for well-formedness in Spanish and are inserted into a theme node during the morphological component of the grammar (Harris 1996, Embick 2010, Kramer 2015). I leave open the question of whether gender is better represented by privative or binary features and whether the same system is sufficient for both grammatical and natural gender.

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