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*Edwin Williams*

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## **Naming and identity under coordination \***

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If two persons share a last name, their first names may be coordinated under it:

- (1) Robert and Ethel Kennedy arrived late.  
[Robert married Ethel]

They need not be still married, or ever married at all,

- (2) a. Bianca and Mick Jagger entered the rehab clinic at the same time.  
[Bianca Macias married and then divorced Mick Jagger but kept the name]  
b. John and Robert Kennedy entered government at the same time.  
[John and Robert were brothers]

or even siblings:

- (3) Robert and William Kennedy entered the courtroom late.  
[William is a nephew of Robert]

Nor must they form a pair insofar as the action of the sentence goes:

- (4) Robert and Ethel Kennedy died in different years.

Moreover, the claim to the name need not be the same:

- (5) Patrick and Rose Kennedy entered the court at the same time.  
[Patrick is a Kennedy by blood, Rose by marriage]

So far, there appears to be rather broad license to coordinate first names under a last name. However, the following restriction appears to be inviolable:

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\*MP and I spent an hour or so one evening laughing about cases like those in (7).

(6) The last name must be “the same name”.

(6) is best demonstrated by cases that violate it:

- (7) a. \*George and Ted Kennedy left the party at the same time.  
 b. \*Larry and Ellen Page entered the ballroom at the same time.  
 c. \*Edwin and Bernard Williams entered the lecture hall at the same time.  
 d. \*Rosa and Van Dyke Parks entered the bus at the same time.  
 e. \*Mamie and Charles van Doren entered the TV studio at the same time.  
 [In all these cases, as far as I know, the shared name is coincidental]

So we need to investigate a little what it means to have “the same last name”, a kind of identity condition on this kind of coordination. What is the condition exactly, and why does the condition hold?

Obviously, blood relation is not required—recall (1). But neither shared blood nor marriage is required, as the case of adoption shows:

- (8) a. Jessie and Charles Henry Jackson entered the church at the same time.  
 b. Truman and Joseph Capote entered the studio at the same time.

Of course we know that Charles Henry Jackson married Jessie’s mother, and that Joseph Capote married Truman’s mother, so there is a marriage+blood link underlying the adoption of the family name, but intuition says that neither marriage nor blood link is necessary, and the following supports that:

- (9) Ray and Alfred Liotta entered the courtroom at the same time.  
 [Alfred and his wife adopted Ray, who was not related to either of them]

Adoption by itself is sufficient.

So far, for a first name to be coordinated with another under a common last name, it must be linked to that other name by marriage or blood or adoption. Or, in fact, any chaining together of these—consider for example, Ray Liotta’s (hypothetical) son’s wife, let’s call her Carrie Liotta, who is related to Alfred by a chain of marriage, blood and adoption links, but appears to have the same claim to the name as Alfred, who is linked to the name by blood alone, and so the following is licensed:

- (10) Alfred and Carrie Liotta entered the ballroom at the same time.

The case of Richard Burton is of special interest—Philip Burton, Richard Jenkins’ teacher, was too young to legally adopt Jenkins, but Jenkins changed his name to Burton to honor his teacher’s role in his life. I think that is strong enough to support the following:

- (11) Richard and Philip Burton entered the bar at the same time.

So, none of blood marriage or adoption is necessary, as Jenkins-Burton renaming is

sufficient, and as before, these links can be chained together; still, as the examples in (7) show, the linkages must go to \*the same name\*. What exactly does that mean?

To address the question, let us consider the case of Ellen Page and Larry Page. Two famous people, who, for all we know, might be related, but no one seems to think so, or at least I never heard of it. Maybe they share a great-grandfather. Is that enough? No—in the case where their mothers share an ancestor not named Page, and each mother married a Page from different Page families, there is not enough to warrant “Ellen and Larry Page”. In other words, they may be closely related, and they may both be named Page, but they cannot be Ellen and Larry Page.

Next, suppose that Ellen and Larry share a great-grandfather named Page. Is that enough? No again. It is not enough that they share great-grandfather Page; their names must both link to him. Suppose that their mothers share grandfather Page as blood ancestor, but are named Smith and Jones until they marry unrelated Page men. Then “Ellen and Larry Page” does not work.

There is a further limitation, very hard to assess. Suppose Ellen and Larry each could in principle trace their own name Page to the shared great-grandfather named Page. If I am the only person who knows about this, even Ellen and Larry do not, then I cannot felicitously refer to “Ellen and Larry Page”. It seems that knowledge of the sameness of the name must be presupposable or at least easily accommodatable, as in “Oh, of course he is a Kennedy, I just never thought about it”, said of someone actually named Kennedy. Is Chris Kennedy a Kennedy? No, not coordinatable with Teddy, not as far as we know. The linkages have to be demonstrable, they cannot simply be presumed on the basis of a common name, but see footnote 2.

So, “X and Y LastName” is licensed only if X and Y can link their last names to a common “ancestor” bearing that LastName, and that linkage is widely known.

Now consider the hypothetical marriage of Ellen Page to Larry Page. Is the marriage enough to warrant “Ellen and Larry Page”? No, not if Ellen elects to keep her maiden name. So, putting this point together with the previous two, Ellen and Larry can be closely related with a common ancestor named Page, married to each other, and both be named Page, but that is not enough to license “Ellen and Larry Page”, if the two sources of “Page” cannot be joined together with a chain of marriage, blood, adoption or Jenkins-Burton renaming. Similar remarks apply to the case where Ellen does take Larry’s last name at marriage, then divorces him and reverts to her maiden name.

Of course a false linkage will be imputed in such a peculiar situation. If I am the only one that knows that Ellen kept her maiden name (that she checked that box on the marriage license) it will be commonly assumed that they share a last name, and “Ellen and Larry Page” would be an appropriate, if technically incorrect, usage. My intuition is that as it becomes more widely known that Ellen kept her maiden name, “Ellen and Larry Page” becomes less acceptable.

It is time to reflect on why the very particular condition on identity that we have uncovered holds for coordinating first names under a last name. I think the most promising path begins with observing the strong resemblance between the condition we have arrived at here and the “causal” theory of names as exposed in Kripke’s (1972) *Naming and Necessity*. What we are naming here is not an individual but a family, where a family can be extended by blood, marriage, adoption, and other means, but maybe Kripke’s considerations apply to family names as well.

Two families can have the same name without being the same family, or part of the same family. So, Ellen Page and Larry Page do not belong to the same family, as far as we know. That is, we cannot trace back to a historical ancestor (in the extended sense that includes marriages and adoptions) from which their family names both derive. It seems to me that much of what Kripke says about the names of individuals can be applied directly to family names as names of families.

For example, one can construct Gödel/Schmidt cases for family names (crucially, as names of families—Kripke of course himself constructed Gödel/Schmidt cases, but where “Gödel” and “Schmidt” were used as names of individuals, not as names of families). If it were discovered, for example, that the Babenbergs were not in fact the rulers of the Imperial Musgravate of Austria, but rather the Strobbs were, the family name “Babenberg” would not thereby come to refer to the Strobbs. A family name has a causal history, and individuals have a causal relation to that family name in that they are a part of that family.

If that is so, then to explain the restriction on coordinating first names under last names we must go further than to say that the last name is simply the second part of a two-part name; we must endow the last name with sufficient content that it is itself the name of something, namely a family—and not just part of a name of an individual—and the identity condition is then a condition on identity of families.

This is brought home by the fact that there is no such thing as coordinating last names under a first name:

(12) \*Edwin Williams and Hubble entered the observatory at the same time.<sup>1</sup>

At first blush this seems obvious, since first names don't have the kinds of sources (blood, marriage, adoption, etc.) that last names have, but it is not clear why (12) is not similar to the Burton-Jenkins case, if, for example, I had been named in honor of Edwin Hubble (I was not). But such honorific naming does not create or extend a family, because Edwin is not a family name, and so there is no family to extend. Since Edwin is not a family name, but an individual name, “sameness of individual” governs the possibility of coordination here, and of course that fails, because I am not the individual Edwin Hubble, and there is no way to extend that individual to include me. Although sometimes first names run in families (I am “III” after all) they are not family names, in the sense of names of families.

So the restriction illustrated by (7) is really a “cognitive” or “social” restriction, and turns on the question of how families are individuated.

How *are* families individuated? It is not easy to say, and I suspect that there is no coherent idea to be discovered here. Suppose, for example, that we accept the finding that the name “Page” had a unique origin in (I am making this up) the village of Lower Tunbridge Falls, UK, in the 12<sup>th</sup> century, and this can be demonstrated to anyone's

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<sup>1</sup>There is a variant of this which works,

(i) Edwins Williams and Hubble

but (i) is not really about names; witness “star-gazers Williams and Hubble”.

satisfaction. Are Ellen and Larry thereby made into the same family, thus licensing coordination? I don't think so.<sup>2</sup> The notion of family is not that broad, not as broad as, “x and y are in the same family if their family names can be linked in principle by blood, marriage, etc.”. In the other direction, family names are too narrow in that they do not bound families—I am related, by marriages of my siblings, to Merritts, Fishers, Riebens, Prices, Lipscombs, and Chadwicks, so these, at least the ones that are descended from or married to my sisters, are a part of my family. Of course I have no family name in common with them, so there is no possibility of coordinating with any of them.

The term “Williams”, even as a particular family name, does not refer to any real entity. It is too narrow as a family name in that it does not include many very close relatives who do not bear it and never have; but it does include very many distant Williams blood-marriage-adoption relatives that I have never met or even know of, but who happen to have the right linkage to the source of the name. Of course, one can use the term “Williams family” to refer narrowly to Ma and Pa Williams and their immediate descendants and adoptees (a “nuclear Williams family”) and it is commonly used this way; but that is too narrow to support the range of coordinations that we have looked at here (cf. (3) and (5)). Linguistically, Williams is a family name, but there is no such thing as a Williams family.

This is not to say that there is no such thing as families; “my family”, for example is a perfectly coherent notion: me plus anyone I can link to by blood, marriage and adoption, irrespective of their last name, with the strength of the linkages having to meet some threshold—this is a relational notion of family, and there is nothing wrong with it. It remains though there is no coherently definable real-world thing which a family name names, despite the fact that “family name” seems to be a linguistic concept needed to explain (7).

### References

Kripke, Saul. 1972. *Naming and Necessity*. Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press.

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<sup>2</sup>Jim Higginbotham on the other hand once told me that he was related to anyone named Higginbotham.