

DOES ““QUOTATION”” QUOTE “QUOTATION”?

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Herman Cappelen and Ernie Lepore. *Language Turned on Itself*.
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Getting a precise and accurate understanding of the mechanism of quotation is *broadly* important to contemporary philosophy, impacting on numerous research areas, and it's *deeply* important, being foundational to truth-theoretic semantics (Saka 1998, 1991). It is gratifying, therefore, to see an upsurge in quotation studies that includes at least nine doctoral dissertations in the past fifteen years, a recent volume of *Protosociology* devoted to the semantics of discourse reports (2002), multiple anthologies, and several monographs. It is particularly gratifying to have this lively compact monograph by Herman Cappelen and Ernie Lepore (henceforth C&L), and to have it available now in paperback. With their usual flair C&L explain why we should study quotation; they lay out the leading issues in the literature; they criticize prior theories, including the demonstrative theory they are so well known for; they introduce a new version of the identity-function theory; and they offer a valuable essay on an unduly neglected topic in philosophy of language, that of the metaphysics of signs. (The book thus repudiates C&L 2005a, brings together the material found in C&L 2005b and 2006, and foreshadows Hawthorne & Lepore 2011 and Johnson & Lepore 2011.)

It is C&L's positive theory, as developed in chapter 11, that I will focus on. Its centerpiece is the following disquotational quotation schema QS:

QS “e” quotes “e” (where “e” is replaceable by any quotable item). [p. 123]

The Q-schema, as I shall call it, tells us that the quotation in line (1) quotes the word in line (2):

- (1) “Kauai”
- (2) Kauai

The idea here can be compared to other versions of the identity-function theory (as held by Belnap & Grover, Botterell & Stainton, Gomez-Torrente, Haack, Ludwig & Ray, Mates, Parsons, Pietroski, Richard, Saka, Salmon, Smullyan,

and Wallace; see C&L, p. 124, and Saka 2011, p. 306). Haack, for instance, states: “the result of writing an expression in quotation marks has as value the quoted expression” (1974, p. 288). C&L, however, add their own spin to the identity-function theory. First, QS is homophonic. Second, QS is said to “serve as the full semantic treatment for quotation expressions”, a thesis that constitutes the *Minimal Theory* (p. 124).

The Q-schema and the minimalist thesis are original and elegant, and are worth discussing in detail.

I. Basic Semantics: the Q-schema

The Q-schema, characterized by C&L as “obviously correct” (pp. 26, 123), actually raises a number of doubts, questions, and quibbles. First: QS appears to equivocate between strict quotation and quasi-quotation. If we read the apostrophes as strict quotes, “e” would stand simply for the fifth letter of the alphabet, and QS would not be a *schema* at all. If we read the apostrophes as corner quotes, allowing “e” to function as a variable that schematizes or ranges over quotable items, then QS would appear to define quasi-quotation rather than strict quotation (the kind that ostensibly is at issue). Second: it’s not clear what “e” is supposed to quantify over; just what is a “quotable item”? C&L tackle this question in their very interesting last chapter, but the answer is non-trivial and so QS cannot be complete by itself or *obviously* correct.

Third: it’s not clear what “quotes” means. C&L say that when expression *x* quotes *y*, *x*’s semantic value is *y* (p. 25), yet C&L also emphasize that quoting is *not* a species of denoting and does not include scare-quoting (pp. 5, 16). This makes it hard for me to understand what quoting and semantic value are. Fourth: supposing that quoting *were* a species of denoting, QS would entail:

- (3) “e” denotes “e”.

Although (3) may look seductive, it isn’t precisely true if my speech-act theory of quotation (2011) is on the right track. For in that case quotational reference would emanate from *speakers* rather than *expressions*. In other words, QS should arguably be replaced by:

- (4) S can use “e” to quote “e”.

The prospect of (4) shows that QS is contentious.

Fifth: QS is variously characterized as an *axiom schema*, an *account*, and a *rule* (p. 124), but it's not clear that it is. (i) QS is not an axiom schema in the sense according to which every instance of the schema is an underivable axiom. By contrast, consider:

- (5) “Huey” refers to Huey, “Dewey” refers to Dewey, “Louie” refers to Louie...

These are genuine axioms for Davidsonians; instead of deriving from the general R-schema “*N*” refers to *N* they are empirical truths that need to be learned separately. Instances of the Q-schema, on the other hand, are analytic truths that are not primitive. When I say that the quotation in line (1) quotes the word in line (2), line (1) is not a semantic atom; the relation between (1) and (2) conforms to a general rule. (ii) Yet QS doesn't express a rule if rules are supposed to be *regulative*; QS doesn't govern our behavior and consequently it cannot *account* for our linguistic behavior. (iii) To be an account – of either behavior or of truth-conditions – QS must be explanatory. To be explanatory it must be comprehensible to those who have no prior understanding of it, yet no one can understand the explanans in QS without first understanding the explanandum. The homophonic nature of QS, in other words, would appear to make it circular or explanatorily vacuous. In sum, it's not clear to me that QS qualifies as an axiom-schema – whether that be a meta-theoretic abbreviation of axioms, a rule that generates lemmas, or an account that explains.

One consequence of the quotation schema QS, allegedly, is the *strong* quotational schema:

QS+ *Only* “e” quotes “e”. [p. 128]

C&L argue that QS+ follows from QS plus the following premise:

- (6) “e” can only quote “e” (i.e., “e” can quote only “e”).

This appears to be a mistake; the inference isn't valid and QS+ isn't even true. Aside from using a pair of single apostrophes for quotation, one can use a pair of double apostrophes, or use the words “quote... unquote”, or use italics. Perhaps what C&L have in mind is that only “e” or its notational variants can quote “e”. This hypothetical reply, however, is unsatisfactory. For one thing, if a notational variant is whatever preserves semantic value, QS would make “the first word in this review” quote “Does”. This is incorrect, for although the

six-word phrase “the first word of this paragraph” *refers* to “Does” it doesn’t do so by autonomous quoting. Second, apostrophe-pairs and italics are not exact notational variants, as the former can easily be used for iterated quotation whereas the latter cannot. In short, even if quotation be *functional*, it is not *one-to-one*. QS+ is untenable and therefore, by C&L’s lights, QS should be too.

To the extent that QS feels like a platitude, its exact import is unclear; to the extent that QS is meant precisely and without supplementation, it’s not obviously better than its non-homophonic and speech-act rivals.

2. Compositional Semantics: Syntax and Logical Form

Quotations participate in a variety of larger syntactic units. These include citations, direct discourse reports, and mixed discourse reports, although not indirect reports:

- (7) DIRECT DISCOURSE: Quine said, “quotation is anomalous”.
- (8) INDIRECT DISCOURSE: Quine said that quotation is anomalous.
- (9) MIXED DISCOURSE: Quine said that quotation “is anomalous”.
- (10) CITATION: “Is anomalous” is a VP (verb phrase).

The fact that discourse reports can be either direct or indirect suggests that the verb “say” is protean: in the case of direct discourse reports “say” is a relation to words, and in the case of indirect discourse reports it is a relation to propositions. As for mixed discourse, C&L propose that saying is a relation to an ordered sequence of propositional content and words:

- (11) “Quine said that quotation ‘is anomalous’” is true iff Quine said <quotation, “is anomalous”>.

This proposal is exciting; it is original, plausible so far as it goes, and worth developing. Nonetheless I have two concerns. First, it doesn’t apply to other cases of mixed use and mention, namely scare quoting:

- (12) Neil floated “above” the other astronaut.

Whereas the saying relation plausibly does apply to both words and propositional content, the floating relation clearly does not. My second concern is

that C&L's apparatus for understanding the logical form of mixed quotation (p. 139ff) is open to technical objections.

To begin with, C&L postulate the following phrase structure rule:

(PS₁) QXP → Q XP

With Q at once a category node and a function from expressions onto quotations, this rule is supposed to enable a VP, combined with quotation marks, to comprise a quotation-VP. The rule thus contravenes linguistic theory, whereby calling a node QXP is to claim that it's *not* XP (and where functors generally are phrasal heads). Don't let the nomenclature get in the way, therefore; what C&L actually intend, they make clear, is:

(PS₂) XP → Q XP

Yet this is mistaken. As Pafel 2011 demonstrates, quotations can be less than phrasal:

(13) The editor changed every “very” into a “somewhat”.

The spirit of C&L's proposal could be preserved by revising the rule –

(PS₃) X → Q X

– but this too would be a mistake, for quotations need not be a syntactic constituent at all (a possibility acknowledged by C&L, p. 143 footnote):

(14) Romeo said that Juliet “hit on” him.

Because of non-constituent quotation I believe that C&L's syntactically driven approach does not fare so well as pragmatic approaches (e.g. Saka 2005, Recanatì 2010).

Another problem for (PS₃) emerges in the case of citation:

(15) “Bill” has four letters.

(16) “Easy” has four letters.

If quotation marks projected in conformity with (PS₃), the noun phrase [Bill]_{NP} would yield the noun phrase [Q Bill]_{NP} and (15) would be fine; but the ad-

jective [easy]_A would yield [Q easy]_A, and (16) would have no subject NP. The alternative is to suppose that quotation marks *sometimes* project via (PS₃) and sometimes according to something like:

(PS₄) NP → N X (where the quotation function is now N)

This approach treats quotation as a lexical homonym, with one kind of quotation mark serving discourse reports and another kind serving non-NP citations such as (16). Furthermore, each NP citation such as (15) would be ambiguous, having two distinct derivations (one that inherits its NP status from inside of the quotation, via [PS₃], and another that converts any expression of arbitrary part of speech into a noun phrase, via [PS₄]).

In addition to proposing a new phrase structure rule, C&L say that quotation undergoes raising. To get an example of how this works, suppose that Mary refers to Kaiser Wilhelm hypocoristically. I then report:

(17) Mary said that “Bill” loves himself.

Focusing on just the complement clause, (17) can syntactically be represented as:

(18) [that [[Q Bill]_{NP} [loves himself]_{VP}]_S]_{CP}

At the level of logical form [Q Bill]_{NP} is then raised to the highest COMP position, leaving behind a coindexed trace:

(19) [[Q Bill]_{NP_i} [that [[t]_{NP_i} [loves himself]_{VP}]_S]_{CP}]_{CP}

This account faces a number of problems, however. Most fundamentally, the rationale behind quotation-raising is unclear to me. Raising is normally motivated by considerations of either s-structure or logical form, yet neither concern applies here. In (20) it makes sense to suppose that the accusative pronoun somehow does belong in object position, and so the trace is motivated –

(20) Whom_i did Mary see t_i?

– but (19) doesn't make sense insofar as we are *not* trying to generate the following s-structure:

(21) Mary said “Bill”_i that t_i loves himself.

As for logical form, raising is useful because it allows us to explain why logical terms may possess scope that is contra-indicated by surface syntax; for instance, quantifier-raising is standardly used to explain why (22) might be uttered meaning (23):

- (22) Everyone loves someone.
 (23) There is someone_i whom everyone loves t_i.

Mixed quotation, in contrast, does not display scope effects.

A more technical problem is that if C&L's example is to be grammatical, its reflexive pronoun needs to be c-commanded by its antecedent. According to C&L:

- (24) “Bill” leaves a trace *t* that c-commands “himself”. [p. 141]

Unfortunately, this commits a critical use-mention error. It is not the naked word “Bill”, i.e. [Bill]_{NP} that leaves a trace, it is the quotation-marked “Bill”, i.e. [Q Bill]_{NP} that does. If it's the quotation as a whole that provides the semantic value for the trace, then the corresponding reflexive pronoun should be “itself”. To get the pronoun to come out right, the grammar must look *inside* the source of the trace; but once it does that, the necessary c-command relation is lost.¹

Relatedly, if there is a rule of quantifier-raising then it should be subject to the usual island constraints. Yet mixed quotation appears to work just fine inside of syntactic islands:

- (25) Mary said that she has a friend who once met “Bill”.

Finally, raising-to-COMP can't apply to non-constituent quotations (like [14]) or to any quotations at all that lack complementizers (like [12]). In other words, C&L's account doesn't handle scare quotation. C&L deny that scare quotation “has any bearing whatsoever” on their project (p. 16), but to me this is a decisive objection to the project. For it looks to me like mixed quotation is a species of scare quotation.

In summary, C&L's proposed phrase structure rule (PS1), even when liberalized (PS3), cannot account for scare quotes, non-constituent quotations, or

1 Use-mention errors are easy to make, even for quotation experts. For instance, the whole argument of Tsohatzidis 2011, which would threaten a number of quotation theories including QS, equivocates between use and mention.

non-NP citations. In addition their raising rule lacks clear justification and is confuted by scare quotes, non-constituent quotations, pronominal agreement, and island constraints.

To be fair, C&L's syntactic proposals make up a small portion of the book; scare quotes and non-constituent quotations spell trouble for formalist theories of quotation generally; and this reviewer is partisan. The fact is, the Q-schema provides a competitive platform for future research, and C&L's book is informative, accessible, and a genuine pleasure to read.

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