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► **To cite this version:**

Philippe De Brabanter. On an alleged distinction between Mixed Quotation and Scare Quoting. 2005. <ijn\_00000609>

**HAL Id: ijn\_00000609**

**[http://jeannicod.ccsd.cnrs.fr/ijn\\_00000609](http://jeannicod.ccsd.cnrs.fr/ijn_00000609)**

Submitted on 13 Jun 2005

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# ON AN ALLEGED DISTINCTION BETWEEN MIXED QUOTATION AND SCARE QUOTING

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**Abstract:** Most writers working on *simultaneous use and mention* assume a distinction between *mixed quotation* (MQ) and *scare quoting* (ScQ). The consensus is that MQ affects truth-conditions. Hence, many writers regard MQ as a semantic phenomenon. There is no such consensus about ScQ. On the face of it, there is a clear difference between:

(1) Alice said that life “is difficult to understand”.

(2) Several ‘groupies’ followed the band on their tour.

The words quoted in (1) are attributed to Alice, and (1) would seem false if Alice had not uttered (something like) them. No such intuition is available for (2). This induces Cappelen & Lepore, leading writers in the field, to regard (1) as a blend of Direct and Indirect Discourse and to propose the following *semantic* analysis (logical form): there is an utterance *u* such that Alice said *u* and *u* samesays (+/- expresses the same content as) “Life is difficult to understand” and *u* sametokens (+/- is a token of the same contextual type as) “is difficult to understand”. As for (2), they regard the impact of the quotation in it as being entirely *pragmatic*.

I show, however, that there is no principled distinction between MQ and ScQ. The main points are: (i) speech attribution to Alice in (1) is defeasible; (ii) there are cases of simultaneous use and mention *without* “say” which are semantically relevant (the absence of “say” means they are not accounted for by Cappelen & Lepore’s logical form); (iii) there is apparent MQ with reporting verbs that pose a problem because they cannot govern Direct Speech reports. Hence, it is illegitimate to appeal to the sametokening predicate in logical form. These examples that ‘refuse’ to fall neatly under MQ or ScQ seal the fate of Cappelen & Lepore’s account.

To conclude, I discuss Benbaji’s fully semantic theory. Benbaji adopts Cappelen & Lepore’s views on MQ. But he also proposes a semantic account of ScQ (which he calls “using others’ words”). One option for him is to give up the Cappelen & Lepore story and extend his views on ScQ to all instances of simultaneous use and mention. I show, however, that this too fails. Therefore, in the end, only a pragmatic account of simultaneous use and mention remains as a viable option.

Over the past ten years or so, the phenomenon of *simultaneous use and mention* has attracted some attention from philosophers and linguists. A central issue appears to be to what extent, or in what respects, the impact of mention (on top of ordinary use) is semantic or pragmatic. Some say that the effect of mentioning a linguistic segment at the same time as using it is always pragmatic (e.g. Stainton, Recanati). Others, drawing a distinction between *Mixed quotation* (“MQ”) and *scare quoting* (“ScQ”) claim that simultaneous mention has a semantic effect in MQ, though not in ScQ (e.g. Cappelen & Lepore, henceforth “C&L”). A very few writers argue that the effect is semantic in both cases (e.g. Benbaji). Here are two basic examples of simultaneous use and mention:

- (1) Alice said that life “is difficult to understand”. (C&L 1997)
- (2) Several ‘groupies’ followed the band on their tour. (McArthur 1992: 839)

The intuition is strong in (1), which is a MQ, that the (part of an) utterance enclosed in quote marks is to be attributed to Alice, the speaker designated by the subject NP. Equally strong is the intuition that this speech attribution is part of the truth-conditions of the reporting utterance. If Alice did not actually say something closely resembling “is difficult to understand”, then (1) is false.

As regards (2), there is no such strong intuition. It seems that the utterer of (2) used quote marks to indicate that ‘there is something’ about the use of “groupie”. Perhaps the utterer does not like the word, or thinks it is unsuitable or belongs to a sociolect that the utterer does not approve of. In any case, it seems impossible to pin down a precise effect of the mention of “groupie” here.

This quick look at two examples suggests that the intermediate position described above (C&L’s) might be most in keeping with first-blush impressions. MQ seems to affect the semantics of the utterance in which it occurs, while ScQ does not.

In this paper I will first outline the intermediate position. Then I will bring up issues that threaten its cogency. The main thrust of my argument will consist in showing that no principled boundary can be drawn between mixed and ScQ. I then briefly discuss the implications of this for Benbaji’s entirely semantic approach. In the end, I conclude in favour of the pragmatic account of simultaneous use and mention.

## 1. The intermediate position: Cappelen & Lepore

In this section, I develop one version – probably the best-known and most influential – of the view that MQ is the business of semantics while ScQ is not. For example (1), C&L (1997: 443) offer the following logical form:

(LF-1)  $\exists u(\text{Said}(a, u) \ \& \ \text{SS}(u, \text{that}) \ \& \ \text{ST}(u, \text{these})).$  Life is difficult to understand

(LF-1) states that an utterance of (1) is true just in case there is an utterance  $u$  such that Alice said  $u$  and  $u$  samesays “Life is difficult to understand” and  $u$  sametokens “is difficult to understand”. (The demonstratives in the logical form have different scope.) The predicate “samesays” stands, roughly, for the relation between two utterances expressing the same

content. The predicate “sametokens” stands, roughly, for the relation between two tokens of a contextually specifiable type.<sup>1</sup> Occurrence of those two predicates in LF is justified on the basis that “say” can be used for introducing both Direct and Indirect Discourse. MQ, therefore, is a blend of these two forms of reported speech.

The logical form (LF-1) reflects C&L’s view that quote marks have conventional meaning and that this conventional meaning enters into the compositional content of the sentence. It also reflects the intuition that (1) is false if Alice has not used (something close to) the very words “is difficult to understand”.

C&L offer no such account for the sort of quoting that occurs in (2). They contend that scare quotes function as *speech-act heuristics*, i.e. they are like “various *non-semantic* features of an utterance *u* of a sentence *S*” that contribute not to the semantic but “to the speech-act content of *u*” or “help render certain parts of the speech-act content contextually salient” (forth. 55). In that respect, scare quotes behave just like an ironic tone of voice, a threatening demeanour, or mimicry: none of these enters into the semantic composition of the sentence and affects truth-conditions.

## 2. Challenging the reasonable view: argument one

As suggested above, this position looks reasonable. However, it faces two difficulties. The first is that some utterances of the sentences containing canonical examples of MQ can be interpreted as involving (what can be approximated as) ScQ. The second is that underlying C&L’s account is the assumption that simultaneous use and mention splits neatly into MQ and ScQ. But, I argue, that is not what emerges as soon as we start looking at more varied data.

Let me begin with the first issue, one that has received some attention in the literature (e.g. C&L, Benbaji, Reimer). Although it is true that an utterance of (1) would be readily construed as attributing the words “is difficult to understand” to Alice, this is not the only interpretation available. It is perfectly possible to continue (1) in the following fashion:

- (1’) Alice said that life “is difficult to understand”, to use Rupert’s favourite expression.
- (1’’) Alice said that life “is difficult to understand”, as some would say.

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<sup>1</sup> C&L are not ready to commit themselves to that much. They basically want to avoid stating *any* constraints on either relation. This, however, has no impact that I can see on the present discussion.

In both cases, the quoted words are attributed to someone else than the referent of the subject of the reporting verb: to Rupert in (1') and to indeterminate (perhaps just virtual) speakers in (1''). Defenders of semantic accounts of MQ accept these data and the above readings. They agree that an utterance of (1) can be construed as involving either MQ or ScQ. But how do they respond to this?

C&L would say that (1') and (1'') instantiate speech-act heuristics. This does not mean that they regard a sentence like (1) as ambiguous. Such a concession would entail considering quote marks themselves as ambiguous, a move which they strongly resist. Rather, they distinguish between *dual purpose* and *ambiguity*: “quote marks carry two distinct purposes: one semantic, the other a pragmatic contribution to speech-act content. Their semantic function is to refer to expressions, but they can also be *used* as a speech-act heuristic” (forth. 57). Hence, they say, it would be wrong to regard quote marks as ambiguous, for “we would like to reserve the term ‘ambiguous’ for expressions with more than one semantic function” (ibid.).

Appeal to dual purpose is how C&L deal with the following objection from the pragmaticists' camp: the fact that (1') and (1'') show that speech attribution cannot be part of the compositional meaning of (1), since speech attribution is cancellable. But C&L retort that this cancellability argument is invalid because “[f]or the cancellability test to work, you must ensure the expression is used in the same way in both cases” (ibid. 68), which is not the case of quote marks in (1), on its MQ reading, and (1')-(1'').

What is going on here? C&L begin by stating that quote marks have a dual usage. Then they say that in each sort of interpretation for (1) – MQ vs. ScQ – the quote marks are used with a different purpose. Then they add a constraint to cancellability tests according to which purpose must remain constant across contexts for the test to be valid. As far as I can see, this makes their account immune to any objection.<sup>2</sup> One may suspect that their motivation is this: accepting ambiguity would constrain them (given their views on ambiguity) to accept that ScQ is semantic too. This, in turn, would force them to provide a semantic account of ScQ.

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<sup>2</sup> Note that even if I am wrong here – and their account still stands fast – I will provide further evidence below that their overall theory is ultimately untenable.

### 3. Challenging the reasonable view: argument two

I now turn to the second challenge to the reasonable view. I first use some slightly marginal data to show that there are instances of simultaneous use and mention *without a reporting verb* that affect the proposition expressed by an utterance. I then use some more common data to show that there are instances of simultaneous use and mention *with a reporting verb* that nevertheless cannot be analysed à la C&L. Finally, I suggest extending my conclusions to an even wider body of data.

#### 3.1 Argument two: slightly marginal data

Let us start with the following example:

- (3) Writing that book, Doyle felt himself “a slave to reality. I was just dying to write a big book, and to have a bit of fun.” (*The Independent Arts & Book Review*, 17/09/2004)

In their defence of the semantic account of MQ, C&L appeal to examples very much like (3) – i.e. containing indexicals – to take on the pragmatic theories. The only difference is that these examples also contain a reporting verb:

- (4) Bush also said his administration would ‘achieve our objectives’ in Iraq. (C&L forth. 61)

Removal of the quote marks<sup>3</sup> in (4) yields a “mistaken rendering”. This, according to C&L, is “extremely strong evidence that quotation marks in mixed quotes have semantic significance” (forth. 62). The account offered by Recanati (2001) in terms of pre-semantic context-shifts is dismissed by C&L as a mere “snow-job” (ibid. 63).

I cannot go into this debate here, and for my present purposes, I need not do so. I only need to focus on C&L’s argument about the removal of the quote marks. If we try removing the quote marks in (3), we get:

- (3’) Writing that book, Doyle felt himself a slave to reality. I was just dying to write a big book, and to have a bit of fun.

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<sup>3</sup> I do not agree that removal of quote marks amounts to removal of the quotation. But I cannot go into that issue here.

I have no doubt that C&L would judge this a mistaken rendering of (3). Indeed, in (3'), "I" no longer refers to Doyle but to the journalist writing on Doyle. By parity of reasoning, the quote marks have "semantic significance" here too. The problem for C&L is that, on their definition, (3) is no MQ: it contains no reporting verb.

There are three possible responses that I can make out for C&L: they can

- (i) treat the quotation in (3) as neither MQ nor ScQ, but a sui generis category.
- (ii) say that (3) does after all involve MQ (given the observed semantic impact).
- (iii) say that, given the absence of a reporting verb, (3) is a case of ScQ, though one where the quote marks have a semantic impact.

As far as I can see, none of these options offers any hope: (i) is obviously ad hoc, a desperate attempt to rescue a scheme under threat; (ii) entails abandoning the one defining criterion for MQ (the presence of "say"), with the undesirable consequence that (at least) all cases of 'ScQ' involving speech attribution (like (3)) have now become MQs; (iii) jeopardises C&L's whole account of ScQ in terms of speech-act heuristics: the theory would become inconsistent because some instances of speech-act heuristics would now have semantic relevance, a consequence that is strictly incompatible with the views defended in C&L (2005).

A similar attack can be mounted on the basis of the following example:

- (5) When the first flush of Émilie's affair with Henry has passed, she becomes "plus absolue et plus dure même dans la tendresse. Henry de jour en jour se sentait dominé par elle." (*Times Literary Supplement*, 03/05/2002)

This is from an article on Gustave Flaubert and describes some stage in the plot of a novel. The possible oddness of (5) stems from the shift, in mid-sentence, from English to French. In their 1997 paper, C&L had dealt with a similar example (except, once again, for the presence of the verb "say"):

- (6) Nicola said that Alice is a "philtosopher". (1997: 436)

They argued that accounts of (6) in terms of the following logical form cannot be right:

- \*(6') Nicola said that Alice is a philtosopher and she said it using, in part, "philtosopher".

That is because "in uttering the first conjunct of [(6)] a normal English speaker fails to report anything at all" (1997: 437). Since C&L deem (6) perfectly acceptable, this failure to express

any proposition must be put down to the absence of quote marks (quote marks being the only feature of (6) that (6') lacks).

(6) is similar to (5) in that it involves a shift from standard English to another language. That this target language is little Nicola's idiolect rather than standard French makes no difference. Thus, by parity of reasoning, we can assume that (5) is an acceptable English sentence while its 'quoteless' counterpart (5') is not:

\*(5') When the first flush of Émilie's affair with Henry has passed, she becomes plus absolue et plus dure même dans la tendresse...

But this again poses a problem for C&L: the quote marks arguably play a semantic role in this sense that they enable (5) to express a proposition (just like (6)). This once again means that there are instances of ScQ with a semantic impact.

As far as I can see, (3) and (5) seal the fate of C&L's theory. But there is more.

### 3.2 Argument two: less marginal data

C&L's original motivation behind their account of MQ was that MQ was a blend of Direct and Indirect discourse. That is what authorised them to 'rewrite' the verb "say" as the two predicates "SS" and "ST" in the logical form. Now there are many ostensible MQs that are introduced by other verbs than "say":

- (7) She hinted that "everything is not necessarily as it seems." ([www.realitytvhallofshame.com/cgi-bin/ae.pl?mode=1&article=article1085.art&page=1](http://www.realitytvhallofshame.com/cgi-bin/ae.pl?mode=1&article=article1085.art&page=1))
- (8) Speaking of the Shah, her husband, she told that he was "a civilized man with a sense of justice, patient, always in control [...]". ([www.iranianvoice.org/article1531.html](http://www.iranianvoice.org/article1531.html))
- (9) In court papers, she intimated that Bush 'might have been the father of the child that was lost.' ([www.illuminati-news.com/more-on-schoedinger.htm](http://www.illuminati-news.com/more-on-schoedinger.htm))

Speech attribution here has truth-conditional impact just as it has in (1). It is tempting, therefore, to offer similar logical forms as for (1). Take (7):

(LF-7)  $\exists u(\text{Hinted}(\text{woman}, u) \ \& \ \text{SS}(u, \text{that}) \ \& \ \text{ST}(u, \text{these})).$  everything is not necessarily as it seems



I contend, however, that (LF-7) is not justified by the semantics of “hint”. “Hint”, like “tell”, “intimate” (and also “convey”, “indicate”, “imply”, etc.) can normally only be used to introduce *indirect* discourse. The following constructions are hardly acceptable:

- (7') ?? She hinted: “Everything is not necessarily as it seems.”
- (8') ?? She told: “He was a civilized man with a sense of justice”.
- (9) ?? She intimated: “Bush might have been the father of the child that was lost”.

The fact that utterances like

- (7'') “Everything is not necessarily as it seems”, she hinted

*are* grammatically acceptable is irrelevant, because the quoted part in (7'') is not governed by the reporting verb (which occurs in a parenthetical). At any rate, defending the relevance of (7'') would require long and complex arguments.

Once again, C&L’s theory lets them down. Given the truth-conditional impact of speech attribution in (7)-(9), it would be absurd for C&L to downgrade the quotations to semantically irrelevant ScQ. Yet, if (7)-(9) are MQs, they are of the sort that C&L cannot account for.

#### **4. Extending the data: no clear boundary between MQ and ScQ**

Here are some more data to strengthen the case that (1)-like-MQ and (2)-like-ScQ are just two poles at either end of a continuum:

- (10) [About a Mr Fonseca who has just been quoted in the previous sentence:] He proposes a support programme for people “who opt voluntarily to change from homosexuality to heterosexuality”. (*The Independent*, 08/12/2004)
- (11) Doyle “always knew that Henry was going to go to America”, as any archetypal Irishman should. (*The Independent Arts & Book Review*, 17/09/2004)

The quoted sequences in all of the above can readily be interpreted as being ascribed to some agent mentioned in the co-text, every bit as much as in C&L’s canonical example of MQ (1). Thus, in (10), the quoted sequence is understood to reproduce Mr Fonseca’s own words. Note that the quotation is a relative clause and that relative clauses are *never* given in illustration of ScQ (smaller segments are). As for (11), from the same article as (3), it forces the

interpretation that Doyle used the quoted words (which, once again, would be an unusual illustration of ScQ).

There are many more such examples. Some involve verbs of saying in parentheticals (“as Sue pointed out”), attitudinal disjuncts (“according to the notes”), or metalinguistic nouns (“her remark that”) and are perhaps amenable to a C&L-like analysis, though the logical forms thus obtained would mark a radical departure from syntactic structure. But many are like (10)-(11) in that they strongly invite speech attribution on the sole basis of contextual clues.

It is true that speech attribution in (10)-(11) does not affect truth-conditions the way it does in (1). At least, it must be conceded that intuitions are not clear-cut. It might therefore be argued that speech attribution plays a presuppositional rather than truth-conditional role here (though some informants report that they would judge (10)-(11) false in a context in which Fonseca and Doyle, respectively, had not uttered the words enclosed in quotation marks).

At this stage, however, I think that these uncertainties no longer matter much. Section 3 has brought out the inadequacy of C&L’s account. This account rested on the distinction between semantically relevant MQ and semantically irrelevant ScQ. Semantic relevance, in turn, rested on the presence vs. absence of the verb “say”. As we have seen, there is semantically relevant simultaneous use and mention *without* “say”, and there is MQ with reporting verbs that C&L’s analysis in terms of combined samesaying and sametokening cannot deal with. Now that the theory has all but collapsed, there is no obligation left to preserve its founding principles. That is why I think it more reasonable to regard simultaneous use and mention has a continuum of cases that are best explained in terms of a homogeneous account. In the last section, I give further hints that this account cannot be semantic.

## **5. Benbaji’s all-out semantic theory**

Benbaji defends a semantic account of simultaneous use and mention across the board. His theory of MQ is taken over from C&L, the only difference being that he does not agree that all the examples C&L regard as MQs *are* MQs (for instance, he thinks (6) is not).

Regarding ScQ, Benbaji interprets it as “using others’ words”: the quote marks in ScQ have a conventional meaning, which they contribute to the compositional meaning of the sentence uttered. This conventional meaning varies slightly with the sort of constituent quoted

– a singular term, a predicate, a proposition. For instance, I suppose the rule for predicates applies to (2):

- (E) The extension of “‘P’” in the formula “N is ‘P’” = {x: x has a property, which the echoed speaker expressed by ‘P’} = {x: x has a property, which the echoed speaker expressed by same-tokening this. P} (Benbaji 2004: 542)

This rule states that the expression that comes between scare quotes has to be ascribed the semantic value that another speaker, somehow salient in the context of utterance, would give it. With respect to (2), this means that “‘groupies’” expresses the property that some (unnamed, though echoed) speakers would attribute to the word. Depending on the context, this may mean the property of being a groupie (in which case the proposition expressed by (2) is not affected by the ScQ = Recanati’s *cumulative* cases) or that of, say, being a prostitute, if, in the context at hand, the echoed speaker was someone who used “groupie” as an understatement for “prostitute” (= Recanati’s *non-cumulative* cases).

Benbaji’s theory of using others’ words has a lot of merit. But, combined with C&L’s theory of MQ, it cannot account consistently for simultaneous use and mention in general. The only move available to Benbaji is to do away with C&L’s views and extend his own account of using others’ words to all cases I have classified as simultaneous use and mention. But even this is not enough because (i) the many examples like (1) do seem to involve *mention* of others’ words, not just *use* of them, and (ii), more damagingly, the rules that fix the conventional meaning of quote marks in various forms of using others’ words can only apply to quoted segments that are syntactic constituents. Yet, as we have seen with examples like (1), (3), (4) and (5), quoted sequences are often *not* constituents. Two more examples to prove the point, both from Abbott (forth.):

- (12) David said that he had donated “largish sums, to several benign institutions”.  
(13) Mary allowed as how her dog ate “odd things, when left to his own devices”.

## Conclusion

The odds against semantic accounts of simultaneous use and mention are steep. This is essentially because no neat subcategories can be defined, each of which would be governed by its own semantic rule, or, alternatively, because no strict line can be drawn between

‘semantic’ and ‘pragmatic’ subcategories. My conclusion, therefore, is that only pragmatic accounts stand a chance of succeeding.

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