

DISCUSSIONS

QUOTATION APPPOSITION

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Since Frege's first fussing over quotations, debate on their analysis has focused on three questions:

- I. What kind of referring expression is a quotation? Is it a name, a (definite) description, a demonstrative, or some *sui generis* singular term?
- II. What in a quotation does the referring? Is it the quotation marks (hereafter, the markers), or what they enquote (hereafter, the enquoted), or their combination, the quotation as a whole (hereafter, the enquotation)? (Hereafter, 'quotation' will refer to the enquotation or some proper part thereof.)
- III. What is the referent of a quotation? The possibilities are myriad. Is it something concrete such as a token or replica of a shape, expression or lexeme? Can it be something abstract like an expression-type, equivalence class, meaning or proposition?

All these questions presuppose that a quotation is a referring expression. The assumption is understandable, but unwarranted. There is no real need to construe quotations as referring, and good reasons not to. One reason is that after trying every imaginable answer to the three questions and finding each wanting, it is worth worrying about whether we have been snark-hunting. Perhaps quotations aid our referring to things identifiable with them without its being the case that the quotations themselves are referring expressions.

Before entering the debate, lest it be prejudiced by its terms, we had best be rid of the entrenched jargon of 'use' and 'mention'. Quine's gift for the *mot juste* here fails him and us. As oft noted, the (so-called) mentioning of words is a species of use of words, so the intended contrast is between (so-called) mentioning and other ways of using words. More, the so-called mentioning of words contrasts with using words to mention their denotations. Most mentioning is of the latter sort. Even when we say things like 'When you speak to so and so, please do mention my name to him

(but don't you tell him where I've been)', we rarely request a reference to our names rather than to ourselves.

Bad enough that the contrast with 'use' is useless. Worse, talk of mentioning an expression may here be misleading or flatly incorrect. Elsewhere, 'Lara mentioned Jasper' standardly says that Lara referred to Jasper, typically by uttering a name of Jasper (e.g., 'Jasper'). In saying that a quotation mentions an expression we imply that (a) the referent is the enquoted expression itself and not something identifiable with but distinct from it; and (b) the quotation is a name of the referent.

Implication (a) wrongly prejudices our question (III) above. Buckets of dust swirl round the assumption that in sentences of the form, "'*p*' is true' we refer to the enquoted sentence (type or token) and not its trans-linguistic content. Actually, while the referent may be the sentence, it need not be, and normally is not. As a matter of standard usage, 'The proposition (statement, belief, etc.) "*Neon is inert*" is true' is not in any way deviant or defective, and (in the absence of contextual counter-indicators) "'*Neon is inert*" is true' is standardly taken as an ellipsis of it. This is the default reading of "'*Neon is inert*" is true', because (among other things) that legitimizes the standard understanding of it as equivalent to 'It is true that neon is inert' and 'That neon is inert is true', which are ellipses of 'The proposition that neon is inert is true', and not of *'The sentence that neon is inert is true', which is ungrammatical.

The other unhappy implication of talk of mentioning the enquoted expression is (b) the suggestion that the quotation is a name of its referent. That may make us misconceive the whole matter from the word 'go' (not least if the enquoted is 'go').

For a less tendentious substitute, let us say that to enquote something is to *display* it, to produce it and put it on display so as to refer to something identifiable with it. This contrasts with using an enquoted expression to *mean* whatever the unenquoted expression (token or type) means in the speech or language being quoted. This contrast is inapplicable to some quotations, for virtually anything displayable on a page, however meaningless, can be enquoted in a meaningful sentence, as in

1. Jasper then wrote 'Kqxf'
2. 'Kqxf' is not a meaningful linguistic expression.

The quoted material may be even less linguistic than that, like a sentence-embedded colour patch. So the display/mean distinction applies to quotations of (linguistic) expressions in general, but not to quotations in general.

On the other hand, the display/mean distinction is not confined to enquoted expressions. People managed for millennia, in writing as well as speech, to display expressions without enquoting them. Quotation marks came in only after the printing press, and even today their use is sporadic outside the literature of logic and linguistics. Their main (but not sole) function, much stressed by logicians like Frege and Quine, is disambiguation, making it unmistakable that what they surround is on display. This being so, they have no semantic content themselves, nor are they implicit elements of sentences with displayed material. Quotation marks are not put around colour patches or other matter that may be displayed but not meant, for no ambiguity is precluded. They are needed around linguistic expressions only when

and because such matter could be meant instead of or in addition to being displayed. Absence of a disambiguator can only leave some unwanted and perhaps nonsensical reading unexcluded; it does not render a sentence incomplete, ungrammatical or meaningless.¹

Like their usage, the form of the markers is dictated by considerations of utility. ‘Quotation’ and its cognates are often used generically to cover italics, bold face, line spacing and other functional equivalents of quotation marks. Yet few alternatives are fully equivalent functionally. For example, iterated quotation is impossible with italicizing and many alternatives, or impractical, as with underlining, bold face and line spacing.

How much real confusion is precluded by quotation marks, and how much is perpetrated by them, is worth pondering. Not uncommonly, dubious philosophical theses get presented in the guise of what is alleged to be philosophically neutral notational necessity. A well known example is Quine’s asseveration (p. 38) of nominalist/extensionalist predilections that ‘when we say that one statement or schema implies another ... we are not to write “implies” between the statements or schemata concerned, but between their names’.

The facts of their history, usage and function are premises for powerful arguments that the markers are not themselves referential devices.² Positing some semantic content for these syntactic markers is unnecessary, for any impact on sentence meaning they might have may be explicable without it: for example, iterations of quotation, which enable us to track economically talk about talk about talk about talk, etc., something that is practically impossible for us to do otherwise. For this purpose (*pace* Saka) the markers need no semantic content. Enquoting is akin to framing a picture, setting it off from the wallpaper. Framing an already enframed picture may make the display be the enframed picture instead of the picture itself, and so altering the display may alter what is expressed or represented. The internal frame(s) may, but perhaps need not, take on a meaning by being in the display. In any case, the outer frame need not have a meaning or referential function.

Now why suppose that a quotation is a referring expression? The question is rarely asked, so suggested answers are in short supply. Presumably the basic idea is that grammar (somehow) demands it. In

3. ‘Buffalo’ has seven letters
4. Buffalo has seventy-seven laundromats

sentence (3) seems to have the same simple syntax as (4): a property is predicated of a referent. In (3) the referent is the enquoted inscription: *Buffalo*. Without a subject-term denoting that object, sentence (3) could not be a complete sentence or express a

¹ *Pace* W.V.O. Quine: ‘It would be not merely untrue but ungrammatical and meaningless to write: Dreary rhymes with weary’, *Methods of Logic* (New York: Henry Holt, 1959), p. 38.

² The positing of implicit markers suggested by Manuel Garcia-Carpintero in ‘Ostensive Signs’, *Journal of Philosophy*, 91 (1994), pp. 253–64, seems far-fetched and lacks supporting argument. For criticisms, cf. Corey Washington, ‘The Identity Theory of Quotation’, *Journal of Philosophy*, 89 (1992), pp. 582–605; and Paul Saka, ‘Quotation and the Use/Mention Distinction’, *Mind*, 107 (1998), pp. 113–35.

truth-evaluable proposition about that object. The only expression in sight for that role is the quotation.

All this seems reasonable, but the need for a distinction becomes evident by considering cases like

5. Buford said Buffalo ‘has seventeen of the world’s loveliest laundromats’.

Here the enquoted expression is both displayed and meant. As meant, the quotation grammatically cannot be a referring expression.³ Whether it must refer in order to fulfil its display function is a distinct issue. If it need not and does not in (5), presumably the quotation in (3) need not refer in order to display the enquoted. Then (3)’s need of a subject-term might be filled by something other than the quotation.

That the quotation is the only candidate in view for (3)’s subject-term might be reason enough to elect it, if it were really a viable candidate. But it is not.

First, while the apparent syntactic similarity of (3) and (4) is arguably illusory, (3) must surely have the syntax of (2), which has the syntax of unmarked

2d. Kqxf is not a meaningful linguistic expression.

If (2)’s quotation marks are nothing but disambiguators, (2d) is a meaningful sentence if (2) is, and (2) is if (3) is. But if the symbol heading (2d) is a meaningful linguistic expression, then (2d), and thus (2), must be false. If (2) is false, how can any putative denial of meaningfulness be true? More, we would have no way of denying a referential function to any referent, as in

6. ‘The’ is not a referring expression

6d. The is not a referring expression.

The Parmenidean puzzle of how we can meaningfully deny the existence of something we speak of has a parallel, the puzzle of how we can meaningfully deny the meaningfulness or referential function of anything uttered.

Although (2d) and (6d) here serve simply to vivify a point that should be plain with (2) and (6), a mulish sceptic might take their rhetorical utility as evidence that (a) the markers are or create a referring expression; and (b) implicit markers must be posited for displayed material which is not explicitly marked. The implausibility of this response was presented earlier. Moreover, it is incapable of coping with an allied conundrum. The one grammatical construction that absolutely requires a referring expression is that of a self-identity statement, like

7d. Buffalo is Buffalo.

I shall put aside the dubious claim that an identity statement cannot be meaningful and true unless the ostensible referent exists. However that may be, certainly the structure is not a sentence, let alone grammatical, meaningful or true, if the identity sign is flanked by something other than referring expressions, as in

8d. Kqxf is Kqxf

9d. The is the.

³ Cf. H. Cappellen and E. LePore, ‘Varieties of Quotation’, *Mind*, 106 (1997), pp. 429–50.

Now if we flank an identity sign with bare quotations as in

- 7. 'Buffalo' is 'Buffalo'
- 8. 'Kqxf' is 'Kqxf'
- 9. 'The' is 'The'

on any previously proposed analysis of quotation, all of which regard quotations as referring expressions, (7)–(9) should all be impeccably respectable tautologies like (7d); but, I take it, (7)–(9) are just as much gibberish as (8d) and (9d), or an 'is' flanked by identical colour patches.

(If, as I assume, only identity sentences do not allow elision of a quotation's referring expression, that may be evidence of and explained by the fact that '=' is a syntactic marker, like '&', not a relative term. The sign '=' signals a sentence with a non-predicative syntax formed from a pair of co-affirmed names or other pure referring expressions. The proposition expressed by the acceptable sentence

- gi. 'The' is one and the same expression as 'the'

is that of

- ga. The word 'the' is the word 'the'.

But (9i)'s syntax is predicative, unlike (9a). My suggestion is that (9) is unacceptable because the ' $b = c$ ' structure is nothing but a pair of co-affirmed pure referring expressions, so their elision eliminates an essential element without which the sequence lacks determinate sense.⁴)

If we are troubled by these puzzles, and we want a referring expression in (3) and perhaps (5), so that we seek an implicit one to posit, the obvious candidate is some noun phrase to which the quotation is in apposition, as in (9a) and

- 2da. The string of marks, Kqxf, is not a meaningful linguistic expression
- 6a. The English word, 'the', is not a referring expression.

Sentences (7)–(9) can look like genuine sentences only because interpretation so readily imports the required apposition.

This explicit appositional construction, shamefully neglected by previous theories, is altogether common and natural in every language (it is no modern typographical invention), so there is no strain in supposing it implicit when absent, as in (1)–(3). Nor is there much stretch in extending its presence to places where expressing it sounds somewhat awkward. Iterated quotation may be readable as something like: the name of ... the name of the expression '—'. That is cumbersome, but hardly unnatural. In cases like (5) where the quotation has a dual display/mean function, the underlying structure may be something like

- 5a. Buford said Buffalo has seventeen of the world's loveliest laundromats (and he did so) by saying of Buffalo the words 'has seventeen of the world's loveliest laundromats'.

⁴ Cf. my 'Identity: Logic, Ontology, Epistemology', *Philosophy*, 73 (1998), pp. 179–93, and 'Identity Syntax', *Proceedings of the 20th World Congress of Philosophy*, Vol. II, *Metaphysics* (Bowling Green: Philosophical Documentation Center, forthcoming).

The precise details of this need not detain us. The general idea of an appositional account of quotation is compatible with various specific proposals on such matters.

On this appositional theory of quotation, the enquoted (*qua* enquoted) is a sense-perceptible object, like a sentence-embedded colour patch, produced and put on display to facilitate reference to something identifiable by and with it, specified by the noun phrase to which the enquoted is in apposition. The markers are syntactic devices, without semantic content, signalling that the enquoted is being so displayed. Marked or unmarked, the enquoted may be a mere visible thing without meaning or membership in a grammatical category. But, unlike a colour patch, the enquoted can be more than that. Nothing here precludes our simultaneously using the enquoted to mean whatever, if anything, it means or meant extra-quotationally.

This modest mini-theory seems boringly obvious and crassly common sense, but it might none the less be true. Quite apart from our two new puzzles and their neat dissolution, my account has the advantage of avoiding all the familiar failings of its competitors, not the least of which is sheer artificiality. In the absence of Tarskian/Quinean ambitions, every Davidsonian motive for deporting the enquoted from the embedding sentence and making the markers demonstratives is better satisfied by including the enquoted appositionally, and letting the explicit noun phrases do what they manifestly must be doing on any account (any account that deigns to notice their presence).⁵ Inferring unexpressed noun phrases here is no riskier than with 'Great' and 'Go!'. Inferring implicit typographical devices foreign to most human speech is hardly comparable.

Moreover, only an appositional account says anything substantial and natural about the last of our initial three questions, the one regarding the nature of the quotational referent. A theory of quotation should help to explain how the quotational referent can be any manner of thing identifiable with the enquoted, anything from a particular phoneme to a trans-linguistic truth-evaluable proposition. Other theories are embarrassed by this diversity or helpless before it. Either they implausibly strain to explain how (or perversely delight in denying that) the referent could be something other than the enquoted concrete particular inscription, or they blandly assure us that the speaker's intentions can (somehow) make an expression represent all manner of things. My proposal says that a quotation is like a picture or colour patch used adjunctively with some (explicit or implicit) referring expression. That expression is normally a definite description made more definite by adverting to and through the quotation. The description specifies the category or kind, and the quotation is a display of (something identifiable with) an individual of that kind. By specifying the relevant category, the description implicitly indicates the internal structure (if any) of the referent and thus the possible relations (e.g., anaphora) between the components of the enquoted and those of the embedding sentence.

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⁵ Cf. D. Davidson, 'Quotation', in his *Inquiries into Truth and Interpretation* (Oxford UP, 1984), pp. 79–82. Davidson has no cause for complaint against an appositional theory other than its inhospitality towards his theory of indirect discourse.