Hybrid quotations of syntactic non-constituents[1]

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Abstract
This paper addresses a serious challenge for theories of quotation: the existence of 'non-constituent hybrid quotations'. A large part of the paper is devoted to an appraisal of proposals made by Emar Maier, the only semanticist to have consistently sought to account for the whole empirical range of quotational phenomena. In the end, I conclude that Maier's efforts are unlikely to be ultimately successful. I argue instead that a particular family of theories, 'Depiction' theories, are better equipped to deal with the issue under scrutiny, as with other thorny questions in the theory of quotation.

[1] I would like to thank Laura Devlesschouwer for useful comments and suggestions.

1. Introduction

The problem I wish to discuss is aptly illustrated by examples like the following.

(1) David said that he had donated **"largish sums, to several benign institutions"**. (Abbott 2005: 20)
(2) The musician did not name the film-maker, but said he had **"a staff of dozens who enabled ... and encouraged"** his behaviour. (*The Guardian*, 2017/10/16)

The quotations in (1) and (2) do not coincide with strings capable of occurring as syntactic constituents, a peculiarity that raises interesting difficulties for existing accounts of hybrid quotation. Because some background information is needed to understand the implications of this peculiarity, hybrid quotation and then Maier's theory of hybrid quotation are outlined in Sections 2 and 3. In Section 4, I state the problem that examples like (1) and (2) pose for his account. In Section 5, I review a first solution initially defended by Maier, the 'quote-breaking' procedure. In Section 6, I discuss Maier's current account, based on Shan's notion of 'unquotation'. In Section 7, I explain why unquotation is not (always) a satisfactory option. In Section 8, I argue that Depiction theory faces none of the issues that unquotation raises.

2. Hybrid quotations

Hybrid quotations can be usefully contrasted with more widely studied varieties of quotation, such as Direct Discourse (*DD*) and Metalinguistic Citation (*MC*). Prototypically, these quotations function as NPs in clause structure, as illustrated in (3) and (4).

(3) DD: And then Kim said, “Quite red, that one!”.
(4) MC: ‘In a minute’ is not an adverb.

Importantly, the internal syntactic and semantic structure of the quoted strings is segregated from their surroundings: never mind that the quoted string in (3) is a sequence of an AdjP and an NP. The complement of *said* is not generated via a phrase-structure rule like *VP -> V AdjP NP*. Semantically, the quotation is about words uttered by Kim, not (directly) about some object that is quite red. Likewise with (4), which is not generated by a rule that states that PPs can be subjects, and which is about a certain grammatical structure, not a particular time interval. Note further that strings instantiating just any syntactic structure (or no structure at all, e.g. *She the with me six*) can be placed between quotation marks in DD and MC.

Just the opposite can be observed with hybrid quotations, as they involve strings of words whose internal structure is part and parcel of the host structure. Consider example (5), in which the NP *an atheist* is quoted at the same time as it functions as the predicative complement of *was*: you could not substitute an AdvP or a VP or a clause for the NP *an atheist* and preserve grammaticality. Likewise with (6), in which the clause *new ideas need old buildings* is both quoted and the head of the clause introduced by *that*: again nothing but a declarative content clause fits in this slot.

(5) The Nice attacker was **“an atheist”,** according to his brother […]. (The Times, 2016/07/16)
(6) Her idea that **“new ideas need old buildings”** is essentially about affordability of working space […]. (www.nysun.com/blogs/culture-of-congestion/2008/08/are-internet-communities-cities-1.html)

3. Maier's theory of hybrid quotation

Maier, who himself talks of 'mixed quotation', defends what I take to be a *semantic* account, on which quotation marks transform the meaning of a hybridly quoted expression *'α'* into something like "what (contextually salient) speaker x means by *α*" (Geurts & Maier 2005).[2] Thus, the hybridly quoted strings in (5) and (6) would receive the following semantic interpretations:

[["an atheist"]] = what the attacker's brother means by *an atheist*
[["new ideas need old buildings"]] = what Jane Jacobs means by *new ideas need old buildings*

As Maier (2007) puts it, "the semantic type of what's expressed by a quotation is determined by the syntactic category of the quoted expression itself, which presupposes that the quoted expression has a category which in turn means that it must be a constituent." Informal scrutiny of a vast number of examples indeed shows that a hybridly quoted string is generally co-extensive with a constituent. Counterexamples, however, are not rare. It is to those I now turn.

4. The problem

Consider again the examples (1) and (2), which illustrate the two main ways in which hybrid quotations can fail to map onto a constituent:

(1) David said that he had donated **"largish sums, to several benign institutions"**. [repeated]

[2] Benbaji (2005) proposed a similar (though interestingly different) analysis. For an overview of theories of hybrid quotation, see De Brabanter (2010).

(2) The musician did not name the film-maker, but said he had **"a staff of dozens who enabled ... and encouraged"** his behaviour. [repeated]

In (1), the quotation spans two constituents which do not, together, form a larger constituent: *largish sums* is the direct object, and *several benign institutions* a prepositional complement of *donated*. Whatever syntactic analysis you defend (binary, with a VP *donated largish sums*, or ternary, with *donated*, *largish sums* and *to several benign institutions* the immediate constituents of *donated largish sums, to several benign institutions*) *largish sums* and *to several benign institutions* never form a constituent together.[3] In (2), we have something like the reverse problem, with the quoted string 'being too short' to form a full constituent. Constituency would require *his behaviour*, the direct object of the conjunction of verbs *enabled and encouraged*, to be quoted too.

The kind of semantic account defended by Maier and others cannot, initially at least, accommodate these examples, as no proper meaning can be attributed to the quoted strings:

[["largish sums, to several benign institutions"]] = what the contextually salient speaker means by *largish sums, to several benign institutions* = ø
[["a staff of dozens who enabled ... and encouraged"]] = what the contextually salient speaker means by *a staff of dozens who enabled ... and encouraged* = ø

Maier (2014) refers to the quotation in (1) as 'superconstituent' and that in (2) as 'subconstituent'. Some publications, notably English newspapers, are a goldmine of examples like the above. Here are two further illustrations, one a superconstituent hybrid

[3] So-called 'nonce-constituents' exist (Huddleston & Pullum 2002: 1341), but normally only as a result of a particular form of non-basic coordination. The context in (1) is not one that should generate non-constituents. So the acceptability of the example has to be explained otherwise.

quotation, the other a subconstituent hybrid quotation.

(7) A hospital source told Reuters that Mr Clinton was **"fine, he came through it OK"**. (*The Guardian*, 2004/09/07)
(8) Writing in his new autobiography, Substance, Hook said the years of abuse meant he **"couldn't in all good conscience"** join in the tributes to Aherne following her death. (*The Guardian*, 2016/10/03)

Since the phenomenon is not marginal, it seems reasonable to demand that any theory of quotation be able to account for it. But how can a theory like Maier's provide semantic values for strings that are not constituents?

5. A first solution

The answer to the above question is that it cannot unless it is amended. Something needs to be done to ensure that the semantic apparatus gets to deal with input that has the right format. It is with this in mind that Maier (2007) supplemented the theory devised jointly with Geurts with a 'quote-breaking procedure' that made constituents out of quoted strings that are not constituents. With respect to an example like (1), where a non-constituent made up of two constituents is quoted, the quote-breaking procedure yields the output in (1'), which now has two hybrid quotations, each of them a constituent:

(1') David said that he had donated "largish sums", "to several benign institutions".

A sentence like (1') can be fed into Maier's semantic machinery. However, the procedure comes across as an ad-hoc mechanism devised to rescue a theory that has a serious problem. It makes short shrift of the fact that all the quoted words were pronounced together as part of a single utterance (De Brabanter 2010a: 117f). Consider a comparable case, but with DD:

(9) She replied, **'I live alone. My son lives alone too. We both prefer it that way'**. (Huddleston & Pullum 2002: 1026)

It would seem consistent, within Maier's framework but in contrast to all standard accounts of DD, to analyse the quotation in (9) the same way as hybrid quotation, hence to break the DD report into three constituents: *I live alone / My son lives alone too / We both prefer it that way*. But this fails to do justice to the fact that these three elements together form a coherent sequence, since Maier's analysis also applies to a situation in which the utterer gave three separate replies.

Shan (2011: 433-434) made a similar objection, defending an account along the lines of 'unquotation' instead. Maier accepted the objection and undertook to develop the unquotation-based account.

6. A second solution

The notion of 'unquotation' has its roots in the practice, widespread in journalism and academic writing, of square-bracketing elements of a quotation that are modifications, by the quoter, of the words uttered in the reported context. The term *unquotation*, however, is not in common currency, with typesetters and editors seemingly preferring 'interpolation' (e.g. Bringhurst 2004: 317). In (10), *his* is bracketed to indicate a change in the letter of the reported utterance, which must have contained a *my*:

(10) Mr. Graham has resolutely ducked the issue, saying he won't play the game of rumormongering, even though he has **"learned from [his] mistakes."** (*Chicago Manual of Style*, 16th edition, p. 624)

Maier's (and Shan's) key idea is that, in examples containing sub- or superconstituent quotations, some words outside the

quotation marks are actually, in the underlying structure, part of the quotation but unquoted. Thus, in (1), *donated* represents a gloss by the reporter; and so does *his behaviour* in (2):

(1_{UNQ}) David said that he had **"[donated] largish sums, to several benign institutions"**.
(2_{UNQ}) The musician did not name the film-maker, but said he had **"a staff of dozens who enabled ... and encouraged [his behaviour]"**.

Similarly with (8):

(8_{UNQ}) […] Hook said the years of abuse meant he **"couldn't in all good conscience [join in the tributes to Aherne following her death]"**.

Note that (7) does not lend itself to this sort of treatment. I return to this problem in the next section.

As a result of the above analysis, no non-constituent quotations subsist: *[donated] largish sums, to several benign institutions* is a VP; *a staff of dozens who enabled ... and encouraged [his behaviour]* is an NP; *couldn't in all good conscience [join in the tributes to Aherne following her death]* is a VP.

So there is no doubt unquotation offers a solution in a large range of cases that would otherwise refuse to be handled by the theory. But is it a good enough solution? I do not think so, and provide several reasons why not in the next section.

7. Problems with unquotation

When Shan (2011: 432) introduces unquotation, he unsurprisingly glosses it as "including non-quoted material inside a quote", and "typically punctuated using square brackets". He then goes on to say that unquotation is prevalent in other types of language use, including examples like (1). However, he offers no other justifications than that "[w]e can

analyze these examples by postulating semantic[4] unquotes at the edge of constituent mixed-quotes" (2011: 433). The word *postulating* seems significant: maybe in cases like (1), unquotation is a suitable notational invention rather than an empirical phenomenon.

Maier (2012: 24) offers a more detailed justification of his recourse to the notion, arguing rightly that "unquotation is not just a typographical invention of modern day editors. It occurs unmarked in other registers of written and spoken language as well". To back up this claim, Maier provides an illustration similar to (11), in which the *them* is most probably the implicitly unquoted counterpart of an *us* in the source utterance, a change no doubt motivated stylistically.

(11) Perhaps the protesters should ask what would happen if we followed their advice and chose to **"leave them alone"**? (*The Independent*, 2004/09/17)

Now the fact that natural language use exhibits cases of implicit unquotation does not automatically warrant extending the notion to the examples discussed in Sections 4-5. My reasons for resisting this extension are not just that unquotation, as opposed to 'ordinary' interpolation, is implicit, but that it is implicit differently than in examples like (11). In (11), some recognition of unquotation is necessary for the correct interpretation of the sentence. This is probably not a cognitively demanding task for readers; after all, *them* is the pronoun they would expect to occur in indirect discourse. Still, readers must refrain from interpreting the pronoun from the perspective of the reported context, unlike what happens in an example like (12), where *my* refers to the utterer in the reported context (i.e. Trump), not to

[4] Shan makes a distinction between syntactic unquotation — the square-bracketed words are the reporter's metalinguistic description of a missing element — and semantic unquotation — the square-bracketed words are a denotative equivalent of the omitted element. Our concern is with semantic cases.

the reporter.

(12) He again attacked the media and said he would "take **my** message directly to the American people." (*New York Times*, 2016/10/15)

By contrast, unquotation in hybrid quotation as invoked by Shan and Maier is entirely clandestine. The only evidence for unquotation is the fact that otherwise the hybridly quoted string is not a constituent. This is suspicious. Besides, it is quite unclear how readers would work out that utterances like (1) and (2) involve unquotation. So unquotation seems a phenomenon that fulfils no clear function in language use; none, that is, other than enabling a theory to account for examples it cannot otherwise explain. Note that, as far as I have been able to find out, none of the theories that require hybrid quotations to be constituents ever provides empirical grounds for this very requirement. Hence, it may look as if the requirement is entirely generated by the needs of the theory the semanticist is developing.

But there are more problems for the unquotation account. The first is that unquotation does not relieve Maier from appealing to the cumbersome quote-breaking procedure. In (13), the quotation extends across a sentence boundary. No amount of unquoting will generate a constituent that coincides with the whole quotation; such constituents simply do not exist.

(13) 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*), 2004/09/17)

Example (7) was similar, in that the quotation there comprised an AdjP followed by a main clause, which is why I could not offer a satisfactory unquoted version of it. The numerous examples similar to (7) and (13) will necessitate recourse to quote-breaking.

The second problem has to do with the remarkably detailed formal syntactic and semantic analysis of hybrid quotation in Maier (2014). This account requires that the tree diagram that represents a sentence with a hybrid quotation should contain a node that dominates exactly the hybridly quoted string, because it is there in the structure that a 'mixed quotation rule', which transforms an ordinary constituent into a 'mixed-quoted' constituent of the same category, is inserted.

This places a severe constraint on hybrids.[5] Not only must they be 'potential constituents' — i.e. capable of occurring as a constituent in *some* syntactic structure — they must also be constituents in the very structure in which they appear as hybrids. Consider (14). The string *every effort* is a potential constituent because it can occur as an NP in a clause like *Every effort deserves a reward*. In this respect, it is different from the hybrids in (1), (2), (7) and (8), which could never be viable constituents. Even so, in (14), that string is not a constituent, and Maier's analysis requires that *to stop its adverts appearing next to inappropriate content* be unquoted, as shown in (14_{UNQ}). It is also striking that the second hybrid quotation requires double unquotation: the second complement of *categorised* — the PP *as sensitive* — has to be unquoted, and so does *had*, because the negator attaches to the verb on the left.

(14) Last night a Sandals spokeswoman said that it made **"every effort"** to stop its adverts appearing next to inappropriate content. It said that YouTube had **"not properly categorised the video"** as sensitive. (*The Times*, 2017/02/09)

(14_{UNQ}) Last night a Sandals spokeswoman said that it made **"every effort [to stop its adverts appearing next to inappropriate content]"**. It said that YouTube **"[had] not properly categorised the video [as sensitive]"**.

[5] The distinction between hybrids and hybrid quotations is briefly explained in Section 8. But it matters little in the present discussion.

Examples like those in (14) form the vast majority of my data. The fact that they too require unquotation results in an uncomfortable increase in the number of cases of unquotation.

The lesson from the various criticisms above is that (implicit) unquotation, as used by Maier (and Shan) (i) is not clearly a genuine linguistic phenomenon, as it makes no difference for utterance interpretation and is likely to go unnoticed by most language users, (ii) does not eliminate the need to resort to awkward quote-breaking, and (iii) has to be invoked in what seems an unnecessarily large number of instances. In the next section, I briefly outline why I think a version of the Depiction theories does better.

8. A Depiction theory

On the theory of quotation that I defend, quotation belongs with a different category of communicative acts than most linguistic acts. Prototypically, linguistic acts depend on conventions pairing forms with meanings. Quotations, on the other and, mean 'pictorially'; they are what Peirce called 'icons', viz. signs which signify through selective resemblance, not convention (see Clark & Gerrig 1990; Clark 1996: chapter 8; De Brabanter 2017).[6]

Quotations, like other iconic communicative acts (as realised e.g. through gesturing or prosodic features) can be concurrent or not with an ongoing convention-based communicative act. When they are not, as in DD and MC, they occupy the place of a convention-based communicative act, or of part of such an act. In (3) and (4), they function as NPs, and could be replaced by non-quotational NPs (underlined), as in (3') and (4'). In (15), the quotation, an instance of free direct speech (Quirk et al.

[6] In what follows, *convention-based* will be used to characterise prototypical linguistic communicative acts, in contrast to *iconic* acts.

1985: 1033; Huddleston & Pullum 2002: 1029), stands for a whole clause, which could have taken the non-quotational form in (15').

(3') And then Kim said something I'll always remember.
(4') That phrase is not an adverb.
(15) I sat on the grass staring at the passers-by. Everybody seemed in a hurry. **Why can't I have something to rush to?** (Quirk et al. 1985: 1034)
(15') I sat on the grass staring at the passers-by. Everybody seemed in a hurry. It crushed me to realise that I didn't have anything to rush to.

A quotation that is concurrent with an ongoing convention-based act is not a distinct 'variety of quotation'. Classifying hybrid quotation as another type of quotation, with its own semantics, is a mistake that has been made in most of the literature, including by me. In reality, hybrid quotation is not sui generis, and the labels used to designate it are misnomers. In so-called hybrid (or 'mixed', or 'double-duty') quotation, what happens is just this: a string that is part of a convention-based communicative act is simultaneously involved in the performance of an iconic act. The latter is an ordinary quotation, though superimposed upon part of a convention-based act. The quoted string is therefore *hybrid* (in the sense of functioning at once conventionally and iconically), but it is not a 'hybrid quotation' in the full sense of instantiating a distinct type of communicative act.

In hybrid cases, the quotation, being merely superimposed, does not segregate the internal syntactic structure of the quoted string from that of the host structure. Neither does it segregate the internal semantics of the quoted string from that of the host structure. This kind of segregation only occurs when a quotation (or other iconic act) is 'recruited' (Recanati 2001) to occupy a syntactic slot *on its own*, as in DD and MC.

What the quotation contributes in hybrid cases is an extra

layer of meaning, to the effect that the words occurring in the quotation instantiate some properties of other words and thereby suitably resemble those words. Two main 'quotational points' (Recanati 2001) can be distinguished, corresponding typically (but far from systematically) to the distinction between quotation affecting a string under the scope of a reporting verb, and quotation affecting a string outside the scope of a reporting verb. Thus, the quotation in (16) is very likely to be produced with the intention of communicating the fact that the words in quotation marks are to be ascribed to the justice ministers designated by the subject of *said*, while that in (17) is most likely intended to show to the reader that there is something about the word *bought* that the journalist has reservations about. (One often speaks of 'scare quotes' in this context.)

(16) Meanwhile, the justice ministers of 16 federal states have said that they will continue to prosecute anybody hawking the book for **"incitement of the people"**. (*The Economist*, 2015/12/19)

(17) In 2015 one head teacher was hacked to death and another was shot after they refused to make way for people who had **"bought"** their posts. (*The Economist*, 2015/12/19)

Separating the contributions of the convention-based and the iconic acts has the virtuous consequence that no a priori restriction is placed on the boundaries of the superimposed quotation. Here I can do no more than give two quick illustrations. But they are interesting if only because they pose major problems for the semantic accounts. Let's start with example (18). On Maier's account, it requires unquotation of *which is clearly targeting Wada*, which modifies *beat-up*.

(18) Ings believes the Fancy Bears hack is **"an extension of a political beat-up from disgruntled people in Russia"** which is clearly targeting Wada. (*The Guardian*, 2016/09/14)

It is quite conceivable that the sentence actually uttered by Ings ended right after *Russia*. That would still make the quotation in (18) totally acceptable. Unquotation, in contrast, suggests that something *like* the unquoted string (though not *that* string) was uttered in the source context after *Russia*. The unquotation analysis may therefore come across as misleading if Ings did not add anything after he said *Russia*. On the depictive account, it does not matter to the quoter whether the quoted words match with a constituent, and that is because the quotation does not interact with the syntax of the sentence. So the sort of difficulty I have just pointed out for the unquotation analysis simply does not arise.

To wrap up, let's finally see how the depictive theory handles example (13) from Section 7. We saw that Maier would be forced in this case to resort to quote-breaking, as shown in (13').

(13') 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."

Quote-breaking yields constituents, but, as was said earlier, with no guarantee of preserving textual connectedness.

What does the Depiction theory have to say? At first sight, it proposes a deceptively similar type of analysis: in (13), Depiction theory would say, only the first quoted part, *a slave to reality*, is hybrid. The second, after the full stop, is a non-hybrid instance of free direct speech. Thus, as on the quote-breaking analysis, two different objects are distinguished, with the first quoted string a hybrid while the second is not. However, in contrast to the quote-breaking account, there is no question of the quotation being split into several quotations: it is the same iconic act that spans across the end of the first sentence and the whole of the second, with nothing to disrupt connectedness. It just so happens that initially the quotation is concurrent with

part of a convention-based communicative act whereas it subsequently occurs on its own.

9. Conclusion

In this paper I have painted a mostly negative picture of the semanticists' attempts at explaining hybrid quotation, with special emphasis on hybridly quoted non-constituents. I have also briefly sketched how a Depiction theory is better equipped to handle the full variety of quotational phenomena. In so doing, I have not insisted enough on the quality and breadth of Maier's reflections on quotation. Maier is a semanticist with a pragmaticist's mindset, and his ability to identify and tackle thorny issues is remarkable. It is the strength of his formalisations that they force pragmatic theory to its utmost limits. In the present case, the pragmaticist is compelled to make two quite radical moves: (i) adopting a view of quotation as not inherently a linguistic phenomenon; and (ii) dismissing the widespread idea, even amongst pragmaticists, that hybrid quotation, by whatever name, is a distinct variety of quotation. As I have indicated, I think these are the right steps to take, but they might not have been taken had the pragmaticist not been challenged by such an astute semanticist as Maier.

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