

## Quotation for Dummies

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**Abstract:** Quotation marks in natural language that do not function straightforwardly as devices for securing reference to linguistic objects have generally been categorized as instances of either *mixed quotation* or *scare quotation*. I argue that certain uses of quotation marks in natural language resist assimilation to either of these two theoretical categories, as well as to the more familiar categories of pure and direct quotation. It follows that we must recognize a novel type of quotation in natural language, which I call *dummy quotation* because it involves the contribution of semantically minimal ‘dummy meanings’ to composition. I develop a semantic theory of dummy quotation and show that it is better able than rival proposals to account for the troublesome examples in question.

‘We ought to be far more puzzled than we are by quotation marks.’  
—Donald Davidson<sup>1</sup>

No item of punctuation is more protean than the quotation mark. Early work, which assumed quotation to function simply and uniformly as a device for securing reference to linguistic expressions, quickly gave way to an awareness that quotation in natural language is a considerably more complex phenomenon. As a result, there are now at least five commonly recognized varieties of quotation in natural language. Yet Davidson’s admonition to be more puzzled by quotation marks than we are remains apt even after six decades of subsequent theory — there is further semantic diversity in natural-language quotation still to be acknowledged. In particular, many cases which have been classified as either *mixed quotation* or *scare quotation* fit comfortably into neither category. I argue in what follows that adequately describing such cases requires recognizing a novel species of quotation in natural language: *dummy quotation*.

### 1 Dummies Introduced

Since Davidson first drew attention to sentences like

- (1) Quine says that quotation ‘...has a certain anomalous feature,’ (Davidson 1979, 81)<sup>2</sup>

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<sup>1</sup>Davidson 1965, p. 9.

<sup>2</sup>See also Davidson 2020, p. 53.

a growing body of work in semantics and the philosophy of language has focused on varieties of quotation which do not fit comfortably into the traditional trichotomy of *pure quotation*, as in (2), *direct quotation*, as in (3), and *indirect quotation*, as in (4).

- (2) ‘Absquatulate’ has twelve letters.
- (3) Arabella said, ‘My favorite word has twelve letters.’
- (4) Arabella said that her favorite word has twelve letters.

This work has led to the recognition of the two additional categories of quotation mentioned above: mixed quotation and scare quotation.

Mixed quotation, as in (1), is generally understood to be quotation in which quoted expressions are both mentioned (as in pure and direct quotation) and used, contributing their semantic values to some dimension of semantic composition. Scare quotation, as in (5) below, is a more contested phenomenon. Some have argued that, as in mixed quotation, scare-quoted expressions contribute their normal semantic values to composition.<sup>3</sup> Others have argued instead that a scare quoted expression contributes to composition something like the property of *resembling* the referent of the unquoted expression.<sup>4</sup>

- (5) The ‘debate’ resulted in three cracked heads and two broken noses.  
(Predelli 2003, 3)<sup>5</sup>

The introduction of mixed quotation and scare quotation as theoretical categories expands the taxonomy of types of quotation in natural language to five — a number which, it might be urged, must surely be adequate. Yet certain examples of quotation resist assimilation to any of the five categories just described. Consider:

- (6) ‘Human foot’ in Gateshead field turns out to be potato.<sup>6</sup>
- (7) National greed ultimately explains the colonial exploitation of ‘inferior’ races. (Adapted from Predelli 2003, 3)
- (8) A: Climate change is a contrived phony mess.  
B: Well, this ‘contrived phony mess’ is going to be the death of us! (Maier 2014, 36)

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<sup>3</sup>See, for example, Predelli (2003). Strictly speaking, Predelli does not acknowledge any important semantic distinction between mixed quotation and scare quotation; he holds that the two phenomena differ only in which not-at-issue propositional ‘attachments’ are introduced by the quoted material.

<sup>4</sup>See, for example, Saka (2003).

<sup>5</sup>Note that, on the scare-quotational reading of (5) Predelli has in mind, its felicity does not require anyone to have previously referred to the altercation in question using the word ‘debate’. Scare quotation is not an essentially reportative phenomenon.

<sup>6</sup>BBC News story, 8 January 2021.

- (9) A: *The Godfather II* is a total snooze.  
 B: Well, Pauline Kael said that this ‘total snooze’ is a defining moment in America cinema. (Potts 2007, 420)

Since they are clearly not instances of pure, direct, or indirect quotation, examples like (6)–(9) have generally been classified as cases of either mixed quotation or scare quotation. Yet (6)–(9) do not appear to be examples of mixed quotation. The editors who chose (6) as the headline of their news story did not thereby commit themselves to the proposition that a human foot was found in a Gateshead field, as they would have if the quoted expression semantically contributed the meaning of ‘human foot’ in either their idiolect or that of the dog walker who encountered the offending object. In (7), we must imagine that the quotation marks are meant to indicate that the races in question have been called inferior by some salient third parties with whom the speaker does not agree; on this reading, the same point applies. And given that there is no difference between A and B in the meanings they assign to ‘contrived phony mess’ and ‘total snooze’, the point applies again to (8) and (9).

Nor do (6)–(9) seem to be examples of scare quotation, at least as it has generally been understood. (6) does not semantically entail that there was a human foot in a Gateshead field, as it would if the normal meaning of ‘human foot’ were contributed to composition; (7) does not imply that the races in question instantiate a property resembling inferiority. To conjure Davidson, we ought to be far more puzzled by examples like (6)–(9) than we have been.

Intuitively, what is going on in (6)–(9) seems to be that the quoted expressions contribute *nothing* to the meaning of the sentence as a whole other than that some salient individual has uttered them verbatim. Thus (6) appears to express the proposition that something in a Gateshead field to which some salient individual has referred using ‘human foot’ is in fact a potato, (7) appears to express the proposition that national greed ultimately explains the colonial exploitation of races to which some salient individual or individuals have referred using ‘inferior’, and so forth.

In short, though the quotations in (6)–(9) cannot be pure or direct quotations for syntactic reasons, they differ from both mixed and scare quotation in failing to contribute to composition any content related to the meaning of the quoted material. Instead, the quoted expressions in (6)–(9) apparently contribute to composition *semantic dummies* — meanings which are of the right type to permit semantic composition, but which encode only the minimal truth-conditional content that the quoted expressions have been literally uttered in characterizing whatever entities are under discussion. My aim in what follows is to argue that examples like (6)–(9) demand the recognition of a distinct species of quotation — *dummy quotation* — and present a semantic theory which captures its behavior.

In what follows, I first expand on the argument sketched above that dummy quotation must be distinguished from mixed quotation (Section 2) and scare quotation (Section 3). I then present a semantic treatment which predicts intuitively correct truth-conditions for (6)–(9) (Section 4). My semantic proposal is similar in some respects to treatments of mixed

quotation defended by Potts (2007), Recanati (2001), and Cappelen and Lepore (2007), so I compare these three theories to my own and argue that mine is to be preferred (Section 5). Section 6 concludes.<sup>7</sup>

## 2 Dummy Quotation Is Not Mixed Quotation

Why think that dummy quotation is a phenomenon distinct from mixed quotation? I will offer three arguments.

First, almost all accounts of mixed quotation predict the wrong truth conditions for (6)–(9).<sup>8</sup> These theories hold that mixed-quoted expressions contribute their usual meanings (whether in the idiolect of the speaker or in the idiolect of the reported individual) to at-issue composition:

- Cappelen and Lepore (1997), following Davidson, hold that mixed-quoted material makes its normal semantic contribution to an indirect speech report.
- Recanati (2001) holds that the quotation marks in mixed quotation are semantically inert, so that mixed-quoted material is semantically just like material which is not quoted.<sup>9</sup>
- Geurts and Maier (2003), Shan (2010), Maier (2014), Richard (2015), and Kirk-Giannini (2024) have mixed-quoted material contribute to semantic

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<sup>7</sup>Throughout, I assume, following most others who have worked on the topic, that quotation is a semantic phenomenon. A notable alternative approach, advocated by Gutzmann and Stei (2011), is to treat quotation as a pragmatic phenomenon. On this sort of picture, quotation marks serve only to indicate that the speaker wishes the enclosed material to be interpreted in some nontypical way, and the apparent variety of semantically distinct forms of quotation is explained in terms of a corresponding variety of different background assumptions and conversational goals which can serve as the inputs to Gricean processes.

It is beyond the scope of this discussion to argue at length against pragmatic approaches to quotation. I will simply note that, as Potts (2007, 420) points out, pragmatic approaches struggle to explain how the quoted material in examples like (i) and (ii) manages to interact with the event quantifiers ‘When in Santa Cruz’ and ‘When in Amherst’ to generate readings on which Peter is only held to produce the relevant pronunciations when he is in the corresponding locations:

- (i) When in Santa Cruz, Peter orders ‘[e]pricots’ at the local market.
- (ii) When in Amherst, Peter orders ‘[æ]pricots’ at the local market.

Even if a pragmatic approach were ultimately vindicated, this fact would not undermine the interest of the theory presented in what follows. Dummy quotation constitutes an interesting subtype of quotation on either a semantic or a pragmatic story; the task of a pragmatic theory would be to identify the nonsemantic features of conversations which, through some identifiable pragmatic processes, give rise to interpretations of quoted items which treat them as though they had the meanings described in Section 4.

<sup>8</sup>The main exception to this generalization is the theory of mixed quotation defended in Cappelen and Lepore (2007), which can make the correct prediction about (9). I discuss Cappelen and Lepore’s theory in Section 5.

<sup>9</sup>At least, this is his account of regular cases of mixed quotation. See Section 5 for discussion of his account of what happens in cases like (6)–(9).

composition whatever the speaker who uttered it meant when she uttered it.<sup>10</sup>

This way of thinking about mixed quotation does indeed account neatly for a wide range of cases, including both (1) and cases, like (10), where the mixed-quoted expression appears unembedded:

(10) Bush is proud of his ‘eckullectic’ reading list. (Shan 2010, 418)

But it is a non-starter when it comes to (6)–(9). While the quoted expression in (10) appears to contribute to composition its normal meaning in Bush’s idiolect (i.e. *eclectic*), so that (10) expresses the at-issue proposition *Bush is proud of his eclectic reading list*, (6) does not express the at-issue proposition *A human foot in a Gateshead field turned out to be a potato*, and (7) does not express the at-issue proposition *National greed ultimately explains the colonial exploitation of inferior races*. (6) does not purport to record a counterinstance to the rule that human feet do not, in general, turn out to be potatoes, as it would if ‘human foot’ appeared in mixed quotation; nor does (7) entail that there are inferior races, as it would if ‘inferior’ appeared in mixed quotation. Similar points apply to (8) and (9). This suggests that it would be a mistake to try to account for (6)–(9) within a theory of mixed quotation.

Second, there are differences between (6)–(9) and canonical cases of mixed quotation when it comes to the relationship which must obtain between the quoted expression and the subject matter of the sentence. It is commonly observed that mixed-quoted items require that some salient individual has uttered quoted material verbatim, and this also seems true of (6)–(9). However, mixed quotation permits uses on which the mixed-quoted expression is applied to subject matters other than that of the original utterance. Thus one might follow up (10) with:

(11) Yet Cheney’s reading list is far more ‘eckullectic’, not to mention longer.  
(Shan 2010, 419)

(11) is felicitous even in a context where it is known that Bush has never characterized Cheney’s reading list as ‘eckullectic’. Indeed, it can be felicitous to mixed-quote Bush even when the subject is not reading lists:

(12) On the subject of things that are ‘eckullectic’, have you seen Cheney’s majolica collection?

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<sup>10</sup>Strictly speaking, Shan’s theory is slightly more complicated: Mixed-quoted material undergoes a process of semantic diagonalization before contributing to composition. This complexity is, however, irrelevant to the topic of discussion here.

(12) has the rhetorical effect of poking fun at Bush's pronunciation without thereby suggesting that he has ever used 'eckullectic' to describe a majolica collection.

Cases which intuitively pattern with (6)–(9) do not permit the same flexibility. For example, it is infelicitous to follow (7) with:

- (13) But at the moment our main concern must be this restaurant's 'inferior' service.

Unlike the mixed quotations in (11) and (12), the dummy quotation in (13) appears to lack a reading on which it does not require whoever is presupposed to have uttered 'inferior' to have used that expression in referring to the restaurant.

Let us call this property of mixed quotation *subject-matter detachability*, since it involves bringing a mixed-quoted expression into a linguistic context different from that in which it was used in the speaker's original utterance. Then we can say that cases like (6)–(9) appear to differ from canonical cases of mixed quotation in failing to exhibit subject-matter detachability. This again suggests that they should receive a separate theoretical treatment.

Third, (6)–(9) appear to differ from canonical cases of mixed quotation when it comes to their interaction with negation. The negation of a sentence containing a mixed-quoted expression can be justified on the grounds that the proposition determined by interpreting that mixed-quoted expression as semantically contributing to the sentence in the normal way is false. For example, one might reply to (10) by saying:

- (14) But Bush's reading list isn't 'eckullectic' at all — it's all just third-rate genre fiction.

This contrasts with the behavior of the quotation in (7) — it would be point-missing to reply to (7) by saying:

- (15) ? National greed doesn't explain the colonial exploitation of 'inferior' races — there are no inferior races!

Another way to make the same point is to notice that, apart from the entailment that Bush uttered 'eckullectic' rather than 'eclectic', (14) is equivalent to the sentence obtained by replacing the quoted expression with its translation in standard English — thus translating the quoted item does not affect the coherence of the denial–explanation pair — whereas the same is not true of (15):

- (14') But Bush's reading list isn't eclectic at all — it's all just third-rate genre fiction.

- (15') National greed doesn't explain the colonial exploitation of inferior races  
— there are no inferior races!

Unlike (14) and (14'), (15) and (15') are quite different: (15') expresses a cogent objection, whereas (15) does not.

Let us call this feature of cases like (6)–(9) *non-substitutability*, since it appears to arise because the quoted expressions they contain cannot be freely substituted for their translations in the speaker's language. Then we can say that (6)–(9) appear to differ from canonical cases of mixed quotation in that the quotations they contain are non-substitutable. Again, this suggests a separate semantic treatment for the two classes of quotations.

In sum, mixed quotations, but not cases like (6)–(9), permit subject-matter detachment, and cases like (6)–(9), but not mixed quotations, exhibit non-substitutability. Moreover, applying most semantic treatments of mixed quotation to (6)–(9) results in implausible predictions. The general picture that emerges is that mixed quotation involves borrowing an expression from another speaker and using it with the meaning it has as used by that speaker, whereas dummy quotation involves merely indicating that an expression has been employed by another speaker.

### 3 Dummy Quotation Is Not Scare Quotation

A preliminary issue in any discussion of scare quotation is that it is often not clearly distinguished from mixed quotation. Thus Predelli (2003), for example, presents a theory of scare quotation which is supposed to account for both (5), repeated below, and (16), which is a clear case of mixed quotation (the quoted source is John Lennon). (17) and (18), discussed as examples of scare quotation by Recanati (2001) and Saka (2003), respectively, are similarly amenable to straightforward treatments as mixed quotation.

- (5) The 'debate' resulted in three cracked heads and two broken noses.  
 (16) Life is 'what happens while you are making other plans.'  
 (17) [Context: Jones habitually mistakes Goodman for Quine, and Goodman wants to see us.] Jones says that 'Quine' wants to see us.  
 (18) Solids and liquids are 'condensed phases.'<sup>11</sup>

Since I have already argued against the identification of dummy quotation with mixed quotation, my focus in this section will be on examples which, like (5), are not easily assimilated to a theory of mixed quotation. For ease of exposition, in what follows I will

<sup>11</sup>Treating (18) as an example of mixed quotation requires allowing that the quoted source can be collective or generic (in this case, scientists as a group or the generic scientist). But this theoretical move is independently motivated. See Geurts and Maier (2003, 121) for discussion.

reserve the term ‘scare quotation’ for these cases, describing examples like (17) and (18) as mixed quotation.

I will consider two semantic treatments of these examples of scare quotation. The first treatment, due to Predelli, takes scare-quoted expressions to contribute their normal semantic values to composition, but holds that they also contribute a contextually supplied not-at-issue propositional ‘attachment,’ which, in the case of (5), carries something like the information that the word ‘debate’ has not been used in its normal sense. Predelli’s message–attachment theory avoids predicting that a speaker who produces (5) becomes assertorically committed to the proposition that a (genuine) debate resulted in three cracked heads and two broken noses by holding that, in such cases, the speaker is interpreted sarcastically, so that she undertakes no commitment to the literal content of the sentence produced. The second treatment, due to Saka, holds that ‘debate’ in (5) is interpreted as expressing the content *event-that-resembles-a-debate*.

Since my concern here is with dummy quotation rather than scare quotation, I set aside the question of whether Predelli and Saka’s accounts provide adequate explanations of the full range of cases like (5), focusing instead on the question of whether they might provide adequate explanations of cases like (6)–(9).<sup>12</sup>

A significant preliminary issue with any attempt to assimilate dummy quotation to scare quotation is that, as we have seen, dummy-quoted expressions are reportative in the sense that their felicitous use requires the availability of an anaphorically retrievable source to which the quoted material can be attributed. Scare quotations like (5) are not reportative — no one needs to have referred to the altercation described in (5) as a debate prior to the speaker’s utterance for that utterance to be felicitous. But there are also issues specific to each of Predelli and Saka’s proposals.

Turning first to Predelli, it should be acknowledged that he introduces a version of (7), reproduced below, as an example of a case in which ‘quotation marks serve the sole purpose of hinting that “the writer is repeating someone else’s words, is opposed to their use, takes not [sic] stock in the manner in which they have been used, and is about to offer his own opposing views.”’ (Predelli 2003, 2, citing Kierzek et al. 1977, 343).

- (7) National greed ultimately explains the colonial exploitation of ‘inferior’ races.

This description sounds much like our intuitive characterization of dummy quotation, and I think it is more or less correct. Yet it is not clear how the semantic theory Predelli offers is able to predict the availability of such an interpretation of (7). After all, Predelli holds that the word ‘inferior’ in (7) makes its normal semantic contribution to the sentence as a whole; the content that the speaker is opposed to its use is relegated to the not-at-issue attachment. There are two problems with this proposal. First, regardless of what illocutionary force the

<sup>12</sup>Note, however, that the problems presented below for a Predelli-style analysis of (7) seem to me to count just as strongly against his analysis of (5).



writer of (7) is thought to employ in producing that sentence, it predicts that the sentence itself semantically entails that there are inferior races. As was pointed out in Section 2, this does not seem correct. It is not just that someone who produces (7) wishes not to be interpreted as *asserting* that there are inferior races; the *sentence itself* does not entail that there are inferior races. Competent English speakers are able to make judgments about entailment which are independent of judgments about illocutionary force. Thus competent English speakers are able to recognize that, though the actor playing Paris in *Romeo and Juliet* is not sincerely asserting when he cries ‘O, I am slain!’, the sentence itself semantically entails that he is slain. No parallel intuition suggests that (7) semantically entails that there are inferior races.

Second, there is little reason to think that a speaker who produces (7) is performing any illocutionary act other than assertion. After all, such a person is certainly undertaking an assertion-like conversational commitment to the proposition that national greed ultimately explains the colonial exploitation of certain races. If we recognize dummy quotation as a species of quotation distinct from scare quotation, we can accommodate the intuition that a speaker who produces (7) is being perfectly serious by holding that ‘inferior’ contributes a semantic dummy. If we try to assimilate dummy quotation to scare quotation as Predelli understands it, on the other hand, we will have to say that a speaker who produces (7) must be being sarcastic or employing some other type of figurative language.

The idea that utterances of (7) must be sarcastic is not merely unintuitive: it is also incompatible with some recent work on sarcasm. According to Camp (2012), for example, all examples of sarcasm evoke some sort of normative scale and involve the speaker pretending to undertake a commitment regarding this scale, thereby communicating an inverted meaning. Thus in a sarcastic utterance of (19), the speaker evokes a normative scale of plan evaluations, engages in the pretense that she places the plan near the top of that scale, and thereby communicates that it should in fact be placed near the bottom.

(19) Your plan sounds *fantastic*. (Camp 2012, 590)

Importantly, the sarcastic meaning is not merely that the plan is not fantastic, but that it is positively dismal (sarcastic meaning inversion is not the same operation as negation). Applying this account of sarcasm to (7) predicts that a sarcastic speaker must intend to communicate that the races in question are *superior*. This is surely not correct. And a sarcasm-based analysis faces even more problems in the case of (6), where it is not clear how the expression ‘human foot’ might evoke a normative scale. It seems, then, that dummy quotation must be distinguished from scare quotation as Predelli understands it.

This leaves us with Saka’s proposal. Might the quotations in (6)–(9) pattern with scare quotation in contributing some content about resemblance? Again, the answer seems to be negative: (7) does not suggest that the races in question have a property resembling inferiority, (8) does not suggest that climate change is something like a contrived phony mess, and (9) does not characterize *The Godfather II* as approximating a total snooze. Once again, the attempt to assimilate dummy quotation to scare quotation turns out to be empirically

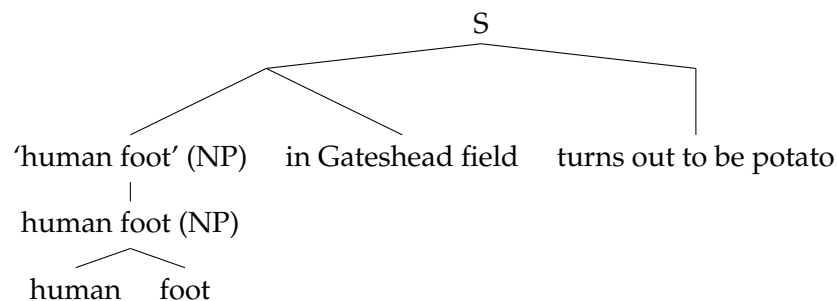
inadequate.

#### 4 Semantics for Dummies

If dummy quotation demands recognition as a distinct form of quotation, our next task is to develop a semantics which makes intuitively correct predictions about the meanings of sentences like (6)–(9).

Dummy quotation occurs most commonly around nouns or noun phrases, as in (6), (8), and (9), but adjectives may also be dummy quoted, as in (7). Correspondingly, I take dummy-quoted occurrences of noun phrases and adjectives to be the primary data for constructing a semantic theory of dummy quotation in what follows.

Syntactically, we can introduce a rule which forms dummy quotations for noun phrases and adjectives along the lines of the rule Maier (2014) proposes for mixed quotation: Any noun phrase or adjective can be dummy quoted, and dummy quoting a noun phrase or adjective creates a syntactic node which immediately dominates the node hosting the quoted expression and shares its syntactic type. Thus, suppressing irrelevant structure, (6) would be rendered:



Like mixed quotation, dummy quotation appears to require that some identifiable source has uttered the quoted material. Indeed, we have seen that the relationship between the source and the quoted material must be stronger in the case of dummy quotation than in the case of mixed quotation, since mixed quotation but not dummy quotation permits subject-matter detachment. In dummy quotation, not only must some identifiable source have uttered the quoted material, this source must also have uttered the quoted material *in characterizing the object under discussion* in the sentence containing the dummy quotation.

Standard accounts of mixed quotation explain the requirement that the quoted material have been uttered by some identifiable source by holding that a mixed-quoted expression contributes the proposition that some anaphorically retrievable individual produced that expression. The individual in question is generally represented using a variable which is flexibly resolved in discourse, taking as its value either some individual introduced prior

in the discourse or some contextually salient individual. Thus, if the expression  $\phi$  is mixed-quoted, the resulting mixed quotation  $\ulcorner \phi \urcorner$  is held to contribute the proposition that some individual  $s$  literally uttered  $\phi$ . Accounts of mixed quotation differ on how exactly this proposition is semantically encoded: Some hold that it is part of the at-issue content of a mixed-quoted expression (Geurts and Maier 2003), others that it is presupposed (Maier 2014), still others that it is encoded in a sui generis peripheral dimension of meaning (Potts 2007, Kirk-Giannini 2024).

On my view, dummy quotation both contributes to the at-issue dimension of semantic composition and carries a presupposition. The at-issue contribution of a dummy quotation is the property of *having been described using the quoted expression by the anaphorically retrievable individual*. Formally, my proposal is that a dummy-quoted expression  $\ulcorner \phi \urcorner$  introduces the type  $\langle e, t \rangle$  at-issue content  $\lambda x.R(s, x, \phi)$ , where  $R$  is the three-place relation which obtains between a speaker, an object, and an expression just in case that speaker describes that object using that expression.

It follows from this understanding of the at-issue contribution of dummy quotation that if anything satisfies the type  $\langle e, t \rangle$  meaning, the anaphorically retrieved source must have uttered the quoted expression. This is enough to account for the intuition that this proposition is entailed by (6)–(9). Why, then, hold in addition that dummy quotations are presuppositional? The reason is that embedding a dummy quotation under negation or in certain other environments does not appear to obviate the inference that the anaphorically retrieved source uttered the quoted expression. For example, if we are walking through the relevant Gateshead field, and I point to a rock half-buried in the mud and remark, ‘That isn’t a ‘human foot’,’ my utterance is infelicitous unless it is common ground between us that a certain dog walker referred to one or more things using the words ‘human foot’. Only if this condition is satisfied do I convey the proposition that the rock is not among the things to which he or she referred using those words.

For this reason, I propose that a dummy-quoted expression  $\ulcorner \phi \urcorner$  presupposes the proposition *that there is something which the anaphorically retrieved individual described by uttering  $\phi$* :  $\exists x.R(s, x, \phi)$ . Interpreting presuppositions as conditions for semantic definedness, we can formalize the proposed theory of dummy quotation as follows:<sup>13</sup>

[DUMMY QUOTATION] For any dummy quotation  $\ulcorner \phi \urcorner$ ,

$$\llbracket \ulcorner \phi \urcorner \rrbracket = \begin{cases} \lambda x.R(s, x, \phi) & \text{if } \exists x.R(s, x, \phi), \\ \emptyset & \text{otherwise.} \end{cases}$$

Applying this theory to (6), we predict that the sentence as a whole is true if (i) the

<sup>13</sup>For ease of exposition, I assume that the semantic metalanguage contains first-order logic with lambda abstraction. In this logical metalanguage,  $s$  is a free variable which discourse-anaphorically picks out the source of the quotation. When the context does not provide enough information to assign a denotation to  $s$ , the meaning of a dummy quotation is undefined (compare Heim and Kratzer’s (1998, 243) *Appropriateness Condition* on contexts).

anaphorically available speaker (here, a certain dog walker) described something using the expression ‘human foot’, and (ii) something in a Gateshead field which was described by that speaker using that expression turned out to be a potato. This is precisely what the sentence intuitively communicates.<sup>14</sup>

We observed in Section 2 that, unlike mixed quotations, dummy quotations exhibit non-substitutability but not subject-matter detachability. [DUMMY QUOTATION] explains this observation straightforwardly. The non-substitutability of dummy quotation is explained by the fact that a dummy quotation contributes something truth-conditionally quite different from what would have been contributed by the quoted expression in isolation. It is no surprise, then, that the two cannot be freely substituted for one another without changing the meanings of sentences in which they occur. Similarly, dummy quotation does not permit subject-matter detachment because the at-issue meaning of a dummy quotation requires that the anaphorically retrieved individual have used the quoted expression to refer specifically to the object under discussion. Thus in (13), reproduced below, the dummy quotation contributes the property of having been referred to using the expression ‘inferior’ by the anaphorically retrieved individual.

- (13) But at the moment our main concern must be this restaurant’s ‘inferior’ service.

The sentence as a whole then requires that the restaurant’s service instantiate this property, and thus that the anaphorically retrieved individual have referred to the restaurant’s service

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<sup>14</sup>How do dummy quotations behave in embedding environments other than negation? Assuming that the presupposition that something has been described as a human foot is satisfied, the idea that “human foot” means roughly *thing called a human foot* appears to make the right predictions in all of the following cases:

- (i) Every ‘human foot’ turned out to be a potato.
- (ii) That might/must be the ‘human foot’.
- (iii) Is that the ‘human foot’?
- (iv) If the ‘human foot’ is what I think it is, we should eat it for dinner.

Moreover, just as [DUMMY QUOTATION] predicts, all of (i)–(iv) become marked in contexts where it is not common ground that something has been described as a human foot.

Relatedly, [DUMMY QUOTATION] predicts that the presupposition carried by a dummy quotation can be locally accommodated in conditional constructions. This prediction is also borne out, as witnessed by the fact that (v) as a whole does not presuppose that anyone has referred to the relevant potato as a human foot:

- (v) If people have been describing that potato using the expression ‘human foot’, then it is the least foot-like ‘human foot’ I have ever seen.

Since [DUMMY QUOTATION] posits a free variable *s* which is assigned a value flexibly in discourse, it also predicts that this variable can be bound by a higher quantifier. This appears to be what is happening in examples like:

- (vi) Every year someone who walks in that field finds a ‘human foot,’ and every year it turns out to be a potato.

using the word ‘inferior.’<sup>15</sup>

## 5 Related Approaches

In this section, I discuss the relationship between my proposal and three others which have been defended in the literature: Potts’s (2007) account of mixed quotation, Recanati’s (2001) account of what he calls ‘non-cumulative’ occurrences of quotation, and Cappelen and Lepore’s (2007) account of mixed quotation.

### 5.1 Potts

Potts (2007) departs from most others who have worked on mixed quotation in noticing and explicitly addressing the problem posed by cases like (9), repeated below, for the central idea that mixed quotation involves quoted material contributing to composition its ordinary meaning in the idiolect of the quoted individual.

- (9) A: *The Godfather II* is a total snooze.  
 B: Well, Pauline Kael said that this ‘total snooze’ is a defining moment in America cinema.

In order to account for cases like (9), Potts introduces a covert lexical item *quote-shift*, which takes an expression and a quoted individual as arguments and, simplifying slightly, contributes to at-issue composition the thing which, according to what the quoted individual claims in uttering the expression, is identical to the semantic value of the quoted expression.

A simple example will help to clarify how this account is supposed to work. Potts’s discussion of *quote-shift* focuses on (20):

- (20) When in Santa Cruz, Peter orders ‘[eI]pricots’ at the local market. (Potts 2007, 420)

Potts assumes that the semantic type of common nouns like ‘apricots’ is *e*. The idea is then that *quote-shift*(‘[eI]pricots’) contributes to at-issue composition *the x such that Peter says that*

<sup>15</sup>It has sometimes been suggested to me that examples like (6)–(9) could be accommodated by positing extensive covert syntactic structure rather than by introducing a new lexical entry for quotation. On this sort of proposal, (6) would be assigned an underlying syntactic structure corresponding roughly to the sentence *Something referred to using the expression ‘human foot’ in a field turns out to be a potato*. I do not find this kind of approach promising, as it is subject to the rather serious objection that there is no syntactic evidence that (6)–(9) contain the required covert structure. In any case, in so far as the covert syntactic structure this sort of account posits in (6)–(9) must differ from the covert syntactic structure it would have to posit to account for mixed quotation and scare quotation (for the reasons detailed in Sections 2 and 3), it would simply be an alternative path to vindicating my central thesis that (6)–(9) demand the recognition of dummy quotation as a distinct quotative phenomenon.

$x = \text{the semantic value of 'eI]pricots'}$ . The notion of saying in play here involves quantification over Peter's 'utterance worlds,' which are the worlds in which what Peter utters is true. For Potts, Peter says a proposition  $p$  just in case  $p$  is true at each of Peter's utterance worlds.<sup>16</sup> Thus *quote-shift*('[eI]pricots') in (20) contributes to composition whatever entity  $x$  is such that, in all worlds where what Peter says is true,  $x$  is identical to the semantic value of '[eI]pricots' — that is, Potts suggests, it contributes the plural entity consisting of all and only the apricots.

Pott's *quote-shift* is not supposed to make much of a semantic difference in (20), since there is no disagreement between the speaker who produces (20) and Peter regarding which entities are apricots. But in the case of (9), *quote-shift* is supposed to play a crucial role. In particular, the expression *quote-shift*('total snooze') in the mouth of B is supposed to pick out whatever plural entity is such that 'total snooze' picks out that plural entity in all of A's utterance worlds — that is, "total snooze", as uttered by B, picks out the things which are total snoozes according to A. And this avoids the problematic prediction that B commits herself in (9) to the claim that *The Godfather II* is a total snooze.

Pott's account is similar to mine in that it recognizes the need to revise the standard account of mixed quotation in order to handle cases like (9). However, there are reasons to prefer my account to Potts's.

First, Potts treats the *quote-shift* operator as obligatory in cases of mixed quotation; this is why, for example, he analyzes (20) as containing the operator even though the speaker and Peter agree about which things in the world fall in the extension of 'apricot'. But positing *quote-shift* in cases like (14), repeated below, makes the wrong predictions:

- (14) But Bush's reading list isn't 'eckullectic' at all — it's all just third-rate genre fiction.

If (14) contained a covert *quote-shift* operator, we would interpret the mixed-quoted expression as picking out the things which fall in the extension of 'eckullectic' according to Bush. But the speaker of (14) is not disputing whether Bush regards his reading list as eclectic; she is disputing whether that list really is eclectic (while poking fun at Bush's pronunciation).

The obligatory nature of *quote-shift* is not easily dispensed with in Potts's semantics, since he holds that, in the absence of *quote-shift*, expressions in quotation marks refer to linguistic entities. Thus simply eliminating *quote-shift* from the analysis of (20) or (14) would result in composition failure. Still, we could imagine Potts introducing a second covert operation (call it *quote-non-shift*) which, as on most accounts of mixed quotation, simply retrieves the meaning of the quoted expression in the mouth of the quoted source. Potts could then posit

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<sup>16</sup>There is some interpretive difficulty surrounding Potts's notion of an utterance world. He never defines this notion; it must be reconstructed from the account of indirect quotation described above. This account would yield systematically incorrect predictions if  $s$ 's utterance worlds were taken, for example, to be simply those worlds at which  $s$  utters  $p$ : For any  $s$  and any contingent  $p$ , there will be worlds where  $s$  utters  $p$  but  $p$  is false, and so all indirect speech reports would come out false.

an ambiguity between mixed quotation and shifted quotation much like the ambiguity I have defended between mixed quotation and dummy quotation.

Such a move would vindicate my claim that we must acknowledge dummy quotation as a semantically distinct form of quotation, if not the particular semantic proposal described in Section 4. But there is a further, more serious problem with Potts's proposal.

Recall that the *quote-shift* operator quantifies over the quoted source's utterance worlds, where this is understood as the worlds where their utterance is true. Presumably, the utterance in question is the utterance of which the quoted material forms a part — this is, after all, exactly what we need in order to analyze (9). But problems quickly arise when we consider utterances which are not truth-apt. For example, we know nothing about the form of Peter's utterance in (20). Perhaps it took the form of a declarative ('Those [e]pricots look good — I'll take a dozen'), but perhaps it didn't ('Are those [e]pricots? Give me a dozen'). In the latter case, there is no recoverable set of utterance worlds against which we can check which plural object Peter holds to be identical to the plural object denoted by '[e]pricots'. A similar point can be made if we introduce a slight modification to (9):

- (9') A: *The Godfather II*? Don't waste your time on that total snooze.  
 B: Well, Pauline Kael said that that 'total snooze' is a defining moment in America cinema.

Here, again, A's utterance containing 'total snooze' is not declarative and thus not truth-apt. It follows that Potts's strategy for retrieving a suitable extension for "total snooze" in B's utterance does not succeed.

## 5.2 Recanati

One natural line of thought in response to the difficulties faced by Potts's proposal is that what ought to determine the extension of "total snooze" as B utters it is not what A *claims* is a total snooze, but rather what A *thinks* is a total snooze.<sup>17</sup> This approach is explored by Recanati (2001) in his discussion of sentences like (21):

- (21) Look! 'Your sister' is coming over. (Recanati 2001, 677)

We are to imagine that (21) is spoken by John to Recanati as Mary approaches, and that it is common knowledge between John and Recanati that a third party, Peter, wrongly believes that Mary is Recanati's sister.

<sup>17</sup>Of course, a second natural line of thought is that when theorizing about the meaning of "total snooze" as uttered by B, we should not focus primarily on any propositional content asserted or believed by A, but rather on the relation between A and the set of objects she uses the expression 'total snooze' to describe. This line of thought leads more or less directly to the proposal defended in Section 4.

Recanati identifies (21) as a ‘non-cumulative’ case of mixed quotation, by which he means that it fails to entail the proposition expressed by the corresponding sentence with the quotation marks removed: *‘Your sister’ is coming over* does not entail *Your sister is coming over*.<sup>18</sup> Some non-cumulative examples can be handled straightforwardly by ordinary theories of mixed quotation. If Peter habitually mischaracterizes oranges as apricots, for example, I might say:

(22) Look! Peter has brought ‘apricots’ again.

In (22), my intention is to convey that Peter has brought oranges, while poking fun at his botanical ignorance. This is the reading predicted by interpreting “apricots” as contributing to composition its normal semantic value in Peter’s idiolect. Recanati’s account of sentences like (22) is very much in the spirit of most analyses of mixed quotation: He suggests that in such cases the quotation marks induce a kind of *language-shift* from the speaker’s idiolect into the idiolect of another individual, relative to which the quoted expressions are then interpreted.<sup>19</sup>

As Recanati points out, this mixed-quotational story does not make the right predictions for cases like (21). In (21), Peter is not confused about the meaning of the phrase ‘your sister’ so much as he is confused about certain non-semantic facts pertaining to consanguinity. But Recanati still understands (21) as involving some kind of interpretive shift — he identifies it as a shift in the circumstance of evaluation relative to which the extension of the expression ‘your sister’ is determined. As a result, rather than picking out the set of actual sisters of Recanati, the phrase ‘your sister’ picks out the set of sisters of Recanati *in one of Peter’s belief-worlds*. Thus, since Peter believes that Mary is Recanati’s sister, ‘your sister’ (as uttered by John) picks out a set containing Mary.

Though Recanati does not acknowledge dummy quotation as a distinct variety of quotation, opting instead to group it together with cases like (22) in a class he calls *non-cumulative hybrid* quotation, there is much to appreciate about his account of (21) as a theory of dummy quotation. It makes the right predictions in (21), as well as (6)–(9), and it captures the intuition that dummy quotation records how things are according to the quoted source. Nevertheless, there are two issues facing Recanati’s proposal.

First, dummy quotation does not require that the person who is being quoted believe anything in particular. It may be most natural to imagine that the quoted individuals in (7), reproduced below, in fact believe that certain races are inferior. But we can also imagine that they do not, and have espoused the view that certain races are inferior solely as a means of legitimating their practices of colonial exploitation.

<sup>18</sup>In fact, Recanati draws a distinction between mixed quotation, which he takes to occur only in the context of indirect quotation, and ‘hybrid’ occurrences of quotation like (10). I follow Shan (2010), Maier (2014), and most others who have worked on mixed quotation in thinking that there is no interesting theoretical difference between the way quotation functions in examples like (1) and the way it functions in examples like (10).

<sup>19</sup>Unlike most who have written on mixed quotation, Recanati insists that this language-shift is a pragmatic process. There are some interpretive difficulties surrounding the sense in which the view he advocates might count as pragmatic; see Cappelen and Lepore (2007) for discussion.



- (7) National greed ultimately explains the colonial exploitation of ‘inferior’ races.

Indeed, it is not even necessary that the individual who produces (7) *takes* the sources to believe that certain races are inferior. It could be transparent to all parties involved that their claims concerning racial inferiority are motivated by purely pragmatic considerations. So, while (21) is a case in which we can look to the quoted source’s belief worlds, this strategy does not work in general.

Perhaps it will be replied that, while dummy-quoted sources might not have the right kind of beliefs to make Recanati’s proposal work, we can look at what they *make as if* to believe in determining the semantic contributions of dummy-quoted expressions. Thus, though the quoted sources in (7) might not believe that there are inferior races, they surely make as if to believe that there are inferior races. This proposal is an improvement on Recanati’s, but it is still subject to a serious problem.

Accounts which, like Recanati’s, determine the semantic contribution of dummy-quoted expressions by evaluating them relative to the propositional attitudes of the quoted source struggle to accommodate the datum that dummy-quoted expressions must have been used by the quoted source *to describe the individual under discussion* (that is, that dummy quotation does not exhibit subject-matter detachability). Problem cases arise when the quoted source regards two propositions as materially equivalent.

Imagine, for example, that Peter utters (23):

- (23) Freud was a paragon of academic excellence, and Lacan was a champion of intellectual rigor.

John might express his skepticism by employing dummy quotation, as follows:

- (24) Well, Freud was a ‘paragon of academic excellence’ who couldn’t operate without a healthy dose of cocaine, and Lacan was a ‘champion of intellectual rigor’ who bilked his patients by shortening their psychoanalysis sessions.

But it seems quite plausible (and in any case we are free to stipulate that) if Peter believes that Freud was a paragon of academic excellence and Lacan was a champion of intellectual rigor, he also believes that Freud was a champion of intellectual rigor and Lacan was a paragon of academic excellence. On Recanati’s view, then, we predict that John might as well have said:

- (25) # Well, Freud was a ‘champion of intellectual rigor’ who couldn’t operate without a healthy dose of cocaine, and Lacan was a ‘paragon of academic

excellence' who bilked his patients by shortening their psychoanalysis sessions.

There is a strong intuitive contrast in the acceptability of (24) and (25) as responses to (23). This contrast goes unexplained if, as on Recanti's proposal, a dummy quotation contributes to semantic composition the extension of the quoted expression in the belief-worlds of the source while also requiring that the source have literally uttered that expression. What is needed is the information that, for example, Peter *described* Freud — but not Lacan — as a paragon of academic excellence. But once we add this information into the semantics of dummy quotation, there is no longer any need to posit shiftiness in the worlds relative to which quoted expressions are evaluated: we arrive again at the account defended in Section 4.

### 5.3 Cappelen and Lepore

Cappelen and Lepore (2007) defend an account of mixed quotation which is guided by an intuitive picture similar to the one that motivates my account of dummy quotation.<sup>20</sup> They hold that in mixed quotation, it is *not* true that the quoted material is used in any normal way. Instead, they suggest that a mixed quotation semantically contributes only that the individual quoted uttered the quoted material in talking about the subject matter at issue in the sentence.

Yet Cappelen and Lepore's overall picture differs from mine in several important respects. First, they do not distinguish between mixed quotation and dummy quotation. Since any adequate theory of mixed quotation will have to account for the differences between mixed quotation and dummy quotation presented in Section 2, this strikes me as a mistake.

Second, Cappelen and Lepore endorse a semantics on which all quotations semantically refer to the items quoted in the manner of pure quotation (they call this the *Minimal Theory* of quotation). Thus the quotation in (1), repeated below, has the same semantic value as it does in (26):

- (1) Quine said that quotation '...has a certain anomalous feature.'  
 (26) '...has a certain anomalous feature' is an English predicate.

As a consequence, the meanings of mixed quotations are not in general of the right semantic type to compose with the meanings of the other expressions in the sentences in which they occur. Cappelen and Lepore solve this problem by adding complexity to the semantics

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<sup>20</sup>Cappelen and Lepore's account is a version of a proposal endorsed by Mark Richard in an early draft of his 2015 paper 'Did I Mention What He Said?'. In the published version of that paper, however, Richard rejects the proposal in question and instead defends a version of the traditional account of mixed quotation described in Section 2.

of ‘said that’ and related expressions: According to their proposal, ‘said that’ expresses a relation between a sequence of linguistic expressions and a propositional function — a function from semantic values of the types appropriate to those expressions to propositions. In the case of (1), the view is that

‘...the saying relation is between Quine and the ordered pair ⟨‘has a certain anomalous feature’, [quotation  $\delta$ ]⟩ (where ‘[quotation  $\delta$ ]’ corresponds to, say, a propositional function which has quotation as its subject matter).’ (Cappelen and Lepore 2007, 136)

It is not clear whether this proposal is supposed to extend to the semantics of non-quotative ‘said that’ constructions, in which case something would need to be said about how composition proceeds when the meaning of ‘said that’ is not provided its first (quotational) argument, or whether Cappelen and Lepore hold that ‘said that’ and related expressions are systematically ambiguous. Nor is it clear what it takes for the saying relation to obtain between a speaker and an expression/propositional function pair. Cappelen and Lepore hold that the relation obtains “when the speaker... applie[s] [the quoted item] to whatever [the non-quoted portions of the complementizer clause] discuss” (2007, 136). But in sentences like (27), it is not clear that anything in particular is discussed by the propositional function obtained by removing the quoted material ( *$\alpha$  should  $\beta$* ):

(27) Palin tweeted that ‘peaceful Muslims’ should ‘refudiate the mosque being built at Ground Zero.’ (Adapted from Maier (2014, 8))

This difficulty is avoided by my proposal in Section 4, since it appeals to the notion of a speaker using an expression to describe an object instead of the notion of the subject matter of an arbitrary segment of a sentence.

Most importantly, however, the fact that Cappelen and Lepore’s account rescues mixed quotations from compositional failure by adding complexity to the semantics of ‘said that’ and related expressions means that their account is not in principle able to accommodate cases of mixed quotation or dummy quotation which do not occur embedded under verbs of indirect speech, as in (6)–(8) and (10).

## 6 Conclusion

If my arguments above are sound, examples like (6)–(9) cannot be understood as either mixed quotations or scare quotations, and dummy quotation must be acknowledged as a distinct quotational phenomenon. This result is congenial: It means that theories of mixed and scare quotation can simply ignore examples of dummy quotation instead of introducing various distorting mechanisms meant to accommodate them, which, as we have seen in our discussions of Potts and Cappelen and Lepore, often result in failures to

account for the basic data to which those theories ought to be responsive. A division of theoretical labor between mixed quotation, scare quotation, and dummy quotation benefits all involved.

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