

Using, Mentioning and Quoting: A Reply to Saka

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Paul Saka (1995) declares that we can use, mention, or quote an expression. Whether a speaker is using or mentioning an expression, on a given occasion, depends on his intentions. An exhibited expression is used if the exhibiter intends to direct his audience's attention to the expression's extension. It is mentioned if he intends to draw his audience's attention to something associated with the exhibited token other than its extension. This includes, but is not limited to, an orthographic form, a phonic form, a lexical entry, and an intension.

Quotations can be used and mentioned. If a speaker uses the quotation in (1), then it refers to an extension.

(1) "Paul" has four letters.

According to Saka, quotations have "ambiguous" extensions. Potential referents include, but are not limited to, the quoted token, an orthographic or phonetic form, a linguistic structure, or a concept (p. 128). On any given occasion, what is referenced depends on the intentions of the speaker. If a speaker mentions the quotation in (1), then it refers not to its extension, but, *inter alia*, to either the quoted token as whole, the orthographic or phonetic type corresponding to that token, its noun phrase structure, or the concept expressed by the quoted expression. Again, what's referenced depends on the intentions of the speaker.

Two unorthodox claims are central to this theory:

- T1 There is a distinction between mentioning and quoting.
- T2 Both quoted and mentioned expressions are multiply ambiguous; they can be used to refer to different kinds of entities.

When Saka writes of the distinction between quoting and mentioning he sometimes characterizes it as purely pragmatic (with no direct semantic implications), and sometimes as semantic. For instance, he says that "distinguishing between use and mention in a language without quote marks is a purely pragmatic affair" (p. 128). This claim, however, is difficult to reconcile with others in his paper: when he introduces the phenomenon of mentioning in connection with (2), he says "mentioning occurs without quote marks" (p. 119):¹

¹ Our (re-)numbering throughout.

(2) Cats is a noun.

He goes on to say (2) is both “*true and grammatical*”. If mentioning were purely pragmatic, how could it effect grammaticality and truth?² It is also clear from the context in which the phenomenon of mentioning is introduced that Saka needs it to be semantic, since, he claims, it alone refutes theories of quotation such as Davidson’s (see pp. 118–9, and 129). Davidson’s theory is semantic, and so could not be refuted by appeal to “a purely pragmatic” phenomenon.³ Our interest in Saka’s theory is as a semantic theory (and as an alternative to competing semantic theories).⁴

Our discussion proceeds in two stages: first we show that claims (T1) and (T2) are false. We then discuss the implications of their falsity for Saka’s criticisms of other theories (in particular, of the demonstrative theory, a version of which we recently defended in this journal (Cappelen and Lepore 1997).

1. Saka’s evidence for distinguishing mentioning from quoting

Saka writes,

[3] is a grammatical and true sentence.

[3] Cats is a noun.

... [I]t is downright normal, outside of scholarly writing to exclude quote marks, especially in constructions like “The word cat is a noun”, and even in logical publications, where one might expect the greatest exactitude, it is common for quote marks to be omitted (p. 118).

As a matter of terminology, I would suggest that quotation tautologically requires quote marks. This is not to deny the existence of statements like [3], where mentioning occurs without quote marks, but only to insist that mentioning is not the same as quoting (p. 119).

² If “cats” is used in (2), it is clearly ungrammatical, and therefore, neither true nor false.

³ Maybe the way to reconcile these two aspects of Saka’s paper is to say that prior to introducing quotation, mentioning was a purely pragmatic phenomenon without semantic implications, but with the introduction of quotation it became semantic. But we are not sure Saka is committed to saying that prior to introducing quotation (2) was ungrammatical, and so without truth value. It’s hard to see the motivation for any such view.

⁴ A referee suggests another interpretation of the claim that the distinction is purely pragmatic: viz., that there are no morphological indicators of the use-mention distinction.

The alleged distinction between mentioning and quoting serves a dual purpose in Saka's paper. It motivates his positive theory (a theory that distinguishes mentioning from quoting), and it refutes demonstrative theories of quotation (e.g. Davidson 1980 and Cappelen and Lepore 1997).⁵

Let's run the alleged evidence through the sort of test devised for a related purpose by Kripke 1977. Consider a language E* like English in every respect with one (possible) exception: E* has no mention-quotation distinction, and so (3) is ungrammatical in E*. Ask yourself: could a speaker assertively utter a token of (3), and her audience still understand what she means by her token? Should we expect that speakers of E* might occasionally omit (to use Saka's term) quote marks? The answer is trivially "yes". E* speakers could omit quote marks whenever what's meant is obvious. To take one example (mentioned by Washington), when E* speakers introduce themselves in spoken language, they might always say, "My name is Paul" and leave out the "quote-unquote" part. They can do so because it is obvious what they mean. If E* speakers can omit quote marks and still get across what they mean, then the fact that we omit quote marks is no evidence we are not ourselves E* speakers. We agree with Grice that if you have two competing accounts of a linguistic phenomenon, one that requires stipulating a semantic ambiguity, and one that only appeals to general pragmatic principles, Modified Ockham's Razor requires choosing the latter.

2. Evidence against the mention-quote distinction

We conclude that the evidence Saka adduces does not favor the mention-quote distinction. In addition, the distinction has overwhelmingly counterintuitive consequences. Consider this passage from Saka's paper:

- (S) According to the identity theory "Kim" refers to itself, that is to "Kim". But we also know that "Kim" refers to Kim. Since "Kim" and Kim are not the same, we are forced into concluding that "Kim" possesses distinct senses or uses (p. 122).

No competent English speaker will have difficulty understanding (S). In particular, on the assumption that only one person named "Kim" is in question, a speaker will have little difficulty understanding what the various occurrences of "Kim" and "Kim" refer to. On Saka's view, however, this is no mean feat, since on his view the various occurrences of "Kim"

⁵ The claim that mentioning without quoting undermines Davidson's theory of quotation is also found in Washington (1992), and Reimer (1996), who writes that this is "a decisive argument against Davidson's theory" (p. 133).

and “Kim” in (S) can be either used or mentioned. These two possibilities alone dictate 128 possible interpretations of (S).

When Saka’s multiple ambiguity view (T2) is added to the picture, the number of interpretations explodes. If we assume that each occurrence of “Kim” and “‘Kim’” can be either used or mentioned, and that contingent on whether it is used or mentioned it is at least five ways ambiguous, we must conclude that (S) is at least 7^7 ways ambiguous (i.e., 823, 543 ways ambiguous).⁶ (This is assuming that only one person named “Kim” is being referred to.)

It is our view that in English “Kim” can be ambiguous only in the sense that different individuals may be named “Kim”, and that “Kim” does not refer to what “‘Kim’” refers to unless “Kim” names an expression, namely, “Kim”. At this point we appeal to your intuitions about English. (Later on we will remind you of a better theory about the semantics of quotation.) Our own intuition is that (S) is *not* 823,543 ways ambiguous.

3. Saka’s evidence for multiple ambiguity

The evidence for (T2) is no more convincing than the evidence for (T1). Saka appeals to the alleged truth and coherence of sentences like his (4)–(7) (we’ll discuss his alleged cases of reference to tokens separately).

- (4) “Run” is used in the third person plural but not singular.
- (5) “Run” refers to *run*, *runs*, *ran*, *running*.
- (6) “Run” consists of three letters.
- (7) The concept “premise” is the same as the concept “premiss”.

These, according to Saka, show that quoted tokens can refer not only to themselves but also to form-content pairings (as in (4)), to lexemes understood as words abstracted from their inflectional paradigms (as in (5)), to what he calls “spellings” (as in (6)), and to content (as in (7)) (p. 124).

Suppose, for the sake of argument, that (4)–(7) are well formed (something we doubt, particularly in connection with (5) and (7)). It simply doesn’t follow that quotations are ambiguous. No one would infer from the truth of (8)–(10) that “Jack Kennedy” has multiple references in (8)–(10).

- (8) Jack Kennedy lived in Washington D.C.
- (9) Jack Kennedy was famous.
- (10) Jack Kennedy was loved.

⁶Not 7^{10} because three potential referents are identical.

Why should it be any different for quotation? Why should the alleged truth of (4) and (6) show that their quotations have distinct sorts of reference? Saka doesn't tell us his reason for so concluding. Perhaps he reasoned as follows: (4) and (6) are both true, but the predicates "used in the third person plural but not singular" and "consists of three letters" cannot apply to the same sort of object. Hence, (4) and (6) can only be true, if "run" is ambiguous.

The claim that these two predicates cannot apply to the same object is not only unsubstantiated, but counterintuitive. Conjunction reduction on the conjunction of (4) and (6) issues in (11).

- (11) "Run" consists of three letters, and is used in the third-person plural, but not the singular.

If you share our intuition that an utterance of (11) can paraphrase an utterance of the conjunction of (4) and (6), and if you agree with Saka that "run" is a singular term, then the referent of "run" must be the same in both (4) and (6).⁷

4. Reference to tokens

Saka's data not only fail to establish that quotation is ambiguous; they are dubious. This is most striking in his attempt to show that quotation can be used to refer to tokens. In connection with (12) and (13) he writes, "you can stick quote marks around a token to refer to that very token [12]; [or] to refer to some other token of the same type [13]" (p. 124).

- (12) "I" refers to me.

- (13) "I", as said by you, refers to you.

We find these claims extraordinary for several reasons.

First, we would suggest that to the extent speakers find (12) and (13) intelligible, it is because they paraphrase them as (12*) and (13*) or maybe, in the appropriate context, as (12**) and (13**):

- (12*) Tokens of "I" said by me refer to me.

- (13*) Tokens of "I" said by you refer to you.

- (12**) The token of "I" in this sentence refers to me.

- (13**) The token of "I" you just produced referred to you.

None of this requires the quote marks to refer to a token. However, according to Saka, (12) and (13) are not elliptical (say, for either (12*)–(13*), or

⁷ Even if Saka had a metaphysical argument to the effect that the predicates in (4) and (6) cannot apply to the same object, it would not follow that the quotation is ambiguous. Maybe we would conclude in that case that either (4) or (6) is false.

(12**)–(13**)). He claims that the token of “I” in (12) manages to refer to the very token inside the quote marks and the token of “I” in (13) mysteriously manages to refer to a specific token of “I” uttered by the referent of “you”. On his reading, (14)–(15) should have true readings, and (16)–(17) should have false readings; but they do not.

(14) “I” doesn’t exist anymore, it was washed away at 2:03 yesterday.

(15) “I” tastes like peach/is going to Turkey tomorrow.

(16) “a” = “a”.

(17) “Red” begins with “R”.

We conclude that the Humpty Dumptyesque idea that users of quotation can refer to different sorts of entities (be it tokens, types, syntactic structures, or concepts) simply by intending to refer to them is unsubstantiated by the data.

5. *Objections to the demonstrative theory*

Saka raises two objections to demonstrative theories of quotation. The first is based on his claim that the demonstrative theory fails to account for mentioning without quote marks. This objection is impotent, until it is established that such mentioning without quote marks occurs.

According to Saka’s second objection, which he calls the “The Recursion Problem”, since the demonstrative theory assigns logical form (19) to (18), it cannot account for iterated quotation.

(18) “sit” is a noun phrase.

(19) Sit. That complex of shapes is a noun phrase.⁸

If a quotation contains a demonstrative element, we must, according to Saka, “translate the perfectly good [19] into [20], which in turn translates either into the uninterpretable [21] or else into [22]” (p. 119).

(19) ““sit”” is a noun phrase.

(20) “sit” That is a noun phrase.

(21) sit That that is a noun phrase.

(22) sit That. That is a noun phrase.

⁸ Saka takes Davidson’s view to be that the logical form of (18) is (19); however, in fact, according to Davidson, the logical form of (18) is (19’):

(19’) Sit. The expression instantiated by that is a noun phrase.

This paraphrase of (18) contains a definite description containing a demonstrative. This is left out of (19), the subject of which is a complex demonstrative. Also, nothing in Davidson’s semantics commits him to the denoted shape being complex. For a discussion of the semantics of complex demonstratives, see Lepore and Ludwig (1997).

For reasons already identified in Cappelen Lepore (1997), his claim is mistaken. To see why, first note that (23) and (24) are both true.

(23) “‘revehale’” is not a quoted expression in ancient Norwegian.

(24) “‘’” is a pair of quotation marks.

(23) and (24) indicate that whatever is placed between the outermost quote marks can be *semantically inert*, and so it cannot follow from the semantics of quote marks alone that we must reapply the demonstrative to the demonstratum in (20). Davidson’s theory does not lead to (21) or (22); instead, it stops at (20), exactly where it should.

Saka has two arguments against our sort of move. He first says that in English “the interior quote marks do not, intuitively, possess a sense distinct from the exterior marks”. His comment misconstrues the claim. It is not our claim that the inner quote marks in (23) and (24) take on new senses (we agree with Saka that this would be counterintuitive). Being *semantically inert* does not mean the same as “taking on a new sense”.

The second component of his response is that “this move is theoretically *ad hoc*, as there is no independent motivation for treating quotation as the sole exception to the rule that syntactically recursive constructions possess recursive semantics” (p. 120). We find this comment odd. Take the expression “Aristotle”. It refers to Aristotle. But now consider the recursive orthographic rule:

If α is a quotable item of English, then so is α concatenated with α .

For example, since “Aristotle” is a quotable item of English, so is “AristotleAristotle” and so is “AristotleAristotleAristotle” and so on *ad infinitum*. It would be a mistake to infer that there must be a semantic rule to determine what the referent of each complex is, based on the referent of its parts; each complex lacks a referent.

We are not contradicting Saka’s observation that this renders quotation a peculiar semantic device. But its peculiarity is motivated; it’s not an arbitrary difference we postulate to save our theory. If a natural language is to be able to say what (23) and (24) say, it needs quotation to be a device that renders the quoted material *semantically inert*.⁹

⁹ What we call the unboundedness of quotation is important in this context. There are no semantic constraints on what can be quoted, or on which feature of the quoted item is potentially relevant (on this point we are in strong disagreement with Bennett 1988). This is essential to the role of quote marks as a means for expanding language.

6. Saka on mixed quotation

An adequacy condition Saka endorses is that a theory of quote marks be able to account for what we have called “mixed quotes” (Cappelen and Lepore 1997: what he calls “simultaneous use and mention”). As examples, Saka offers (25) and (26).

(25) Giorgione was so-called because of his size.

(26) Quine says that quotation “... is weird”.

We have three comments.

First, though Saka treats (25) and (26) as examples of the same phenomenon, they aren't. “Giorgione” in (25) is just used. What refers to the expression “Giorgione” in (25) is the “so” in “so-called”. Here “so” functions as a demonstrative. A paraphrase of (25) is (27):

(27) Giorgione was called [by] *that* [name] because of his size.¹⁰

This demonstrative usage of “so” is found frequently in archaic English, for instance in:

“I told him so.” (I told him that.)

“He said so.” (He said that.)

Saka uses (25) as an illustration of simultaneous use and mention, but if (27) correctly paraphrase (25), then there is no mention (in Saka's sense of the term) of “Giorgione”. There is a demonstrative expression that can refer to a component of the very same sentence the demonstrative occurs in.

(26) differs from (25) in at least two respects. There are quote marks, and the material quoted is both used and quoted.¹¹ Is Saka's theory capable of dealing with dual use and quotation, as he claims it is? We think not. Saka is committed to all of the following: a used quotation is a referring expression (with, at least, five different possible referents). So, if the quotation in (26) is used, as it would be in most cases (on our view, in all cases, since we deny there is use-mention distinction in Saka's sense), then it functions as a referring expression. If the quotation in (26) functions as a referring expression, then the logical form of (26) is analogous to that of (28).

(28) *Quine says that quotation is Tom.

Since (28) is ungrammatical, Saka's theory implies (26) is as well. So, his theory fails to account for dual use and quotation. Or at least, so it seems.

¹⁰ The disagreement between Saka and us is not about whether “Giorgione” is referred to in (25), but about what's doing the referring. According to Saka, it's “Giorgione” itself, according to us it's the “so”.

¹¹ On his theory it is possible that the quotations be mentioned, but this is clearly not what he has in mind.

Part of the problem of interpreting Saka's theory of quotation is that it is developed in isolation from a theory of indirect speech. We have argued (Cappelen and Lepore 1997) that the lesson to learn from reflections on mixed quotation is that an adequate semantic theory of quotation must unify semantic theories of indirect, direct, pure, and mixed quotes. A myopically developed theory is bound to be unsatisfactory. For instance, any theory of pure quotation, as in (29), must be able to deal with quotes as they occur in (30).

(29) "Quotation is weird" is a sentence.

(30) Saka said, "Quotation is weird".

But theories of (29) and (30) must be able to deal with mixed quotes, as in (31).

(31) Saka said that quotation "is weird".

In order for a theory to account for (31), it cannot be developed independently of a theory of indirect reports, as in (32).

(32) Saka said that quotation is weird.

Saka (who shares this problem with Washington, Reimer, and Richard) attempts to develop a theory of quotation without saying how to deal with indirect reports. But it is not possible to account for quotation without accounting for mixed quotation; nor is it possible to account for mixed quotation without a theory of indirect speech. What is attractive about the demonstrative theory is that, whatever its other weaknesses, it is the only attempt to present the required unification.^{12,13}

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¹² We have elaborated on these points; see Cappelen and Lepore (1997).

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