Abstract
Intuitively, an utterance of:

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

would not be true unless Alice uttered the very words “difficult to understand.” However, several recent theories of “mixed quotation” contend that the intuition here is a misleading one. According to these theories, the truth conditions of (1) are identical to those of:

(2) Alice said that life is difficult to understand.

On such accounts, the quotation marks in (1) are of only pragmatic significance. That Alice uttered the quoted words is something the speaker might well convey in uttering (1); it is not something literally expressed by the utterance itself. Whatever its theoretical motivations, these contentions are undeniably counter-intuitive and the pragmaticist owes us an explanation of where they come from. This paper presents and evaluates various strategies that a pragmaticist with respect to mixed quotation might appeal to in an effort to explain the source of the counter-intuitive consequences of his theory.

1. Introduction

The following sentence appeared in a recent edition of the national tabloid USA Today:

(1) Defense Secretary Donald Rumsfeld said that the Abu Ghraib prisoner abuse was “over the edge.”

Suppose that Rumsfeld was misquoted; suppose that what he actually said (on the occasion in question) was that the abuse at Abu Ghraib was “beyond the pale.” Would it follow that (1), as it appeared in the USA Today article, was false? Intuitively, it would indeed follow. After all, someone who had been
present at Rumsfeld’s Baghdad speech (on May 13 of 2004) might respond to (1) with something like:

(2) No, that’s false. What Rumsfeld actually said was that the abuse was “beyond the pale.”

Our initial inclination might be to accuse such a speaker of splitting hairs. Does it really matter which of the two phrases Rumsfeld used? – the point is that he wanted to register his disapproval of the abuse at Abu Ghraib. The USA Today reporter realized this and managed to capture Rumsfeld’s communicative intent even while misquoting him. Agreed. Nevertheless, the report made by way of (1) just sounds false. Moreover, one could easily imagine a scenario in which challenging the truth of (1) on the grounds of misquotation would be perfectly appropriate. Suppose, for instance, that the setting is a sociolinguistics class focusing on recent political events. Suppose further that (1) is uttered in response to the following question: what specific metaphors have government officials used in characterizing the Abu Ghraib prison scandal? Here, (1) would surely be false – notwithstanding its success in capturing Rumsfeld’s communicative intent.

(1) and (2) are examples of what has come to be known as “mixed quotation,” a phenomenon characterized (in standard jargon) as involving the simultaneous “use” and “mention” of an expression. When the content clause of a speech report includes an expression that is both used and mentioned, one has a case of mixed quotation. In cases of this sort, words that are used with their standard semantic properties are simultaneously attributed to the agent whose speech is being reported.\(^2\) According to what I will call “pragmatic” accounts of mixed quotation, that the agent used the quoted words is not part of the literal (truth-conditional)\(^3\) content of a mixed-quotiation utterance. On any such account, the literal content expressed by (1) is identical to that expressed by (3):

(3) Defense Secretary Donald Rumsfeld said that the Abu Ghraib prisoner abuse was over the edge.

Yet (3) could presumably be true even if Rumsfeld never uttered the words “over the edge.” The same is true of (1), according to pragmatic accounts of mixed quotation. For neither (1) nor (3) entails that Rumsfeld used the words “over the edge.”\(^4\)

Such consequences are counter-intuitive. Intuitively, (1) could not be true unless Rumsfeld used the very words “over the edge” in saying what that report alleges him to have said. In fact, some might regard the predictions of pragmatic accounts on these matters as so counter-intuitive as to constitute
counter-examples to such accounts. Any account that claims that (1) could be true had Rumsfeld uttered “beyond the pale” rather than “over the edge” is surely false. (Some might think.)

However, many reputable theories, philosophical as well as scientific, have counter-intuitive consequences. As a result, strategies have been devised for accommodating such consequences. My focus in this paper will be on the assessment of a variety of such strategies, as applied to pragmatic accounts of mixed quotation. The results of the assessment will, I hope, lessen the tendency of theorists to reject without argument competing theories whose consequences they find “too counter-intuitive to believe.” This is an especially dangerous tendency with respect to pragmatic accounts of mixed quotation. For as pragmaticists like Recanati (2001) and Saka (1998, this volume) have clearly shown, semantic theories (according to which the truth of (1) would require that Rumsfeld uttered the quoted words) face serious difficulties of their own. Thus, the question as to which of type of account is superior remains a substantive and controversial one.

2. Pragmatic Accounts of Mixed Quotation: The Basics

Let’s return to the general characterization of pragmatic accounts of mixed quotation specified above. According to any such account, that the agent used the quoted words is not part of the proposition literally expressed by the utterance of a mixed-quotation sentence. It is true (on such accounts) that the utterance of a mixed-quotation sentence typically conveys that the agent used the quoted words. Nevertheless, this piece of information is not conveyed by the sentence’s literal meaning, but by the speaker’s utterance of the sentence in a particular context. It is thus conveyed pragmatically rather than semantically.

On this construal of pragmatic accounts of mixed quotation, Robert Stainton (1999), Francois Recanati (2001), and Paul Saka (1998, this volume) advocate such accounts. Despite their basic similarity, the three accounts differ in how they characterize the phenomenon of mixed quotation. Stainton understands it in terms of the truth/felicity distinction, Recanati in terms of his “c-content”/“i-content” distinction, and Saka in terms of the assertion/implication distinction. (More on the first two distinctions below.)

Pragmatic accounts such as these are in direct contrast to semantic accounts of the sort recently advocated by Herman Cappelen and Ernie Lepore (1997). “Semantic” accounts of mixed quotation (as I define them) affirm what pragmatic accounts deny: that the agent used the quoted words is (so says the semanticist) part of the compositionally determined truth-conditional meaning of a mixed-quotation sentence. On any such view, the truth of (1) would
require that Rumsfeld have used *the very words* “over the edge” in saying what (1) alleges him to have said.

### 3. Strategies for Accommodating Wayward Intuitions

Below I consider four strategies for defusing the counter-intuitive consequences associated with pragmatic accounts of mixed quotation. Two of these strategies have been explicitly invoked by advocates of pragmatic accounts of mixed quotation. No doubt other strategies are possible.

(a) truth vs. felicity

This strategy involves appealing to the distinction between truth and felicity. The basic idea is that the wayward intuitions result from confusing these two properties. To get an intuitive sense of the truth/felicity distinction it is enough to realize that a perfectly *true* statement can at the same time be *infelicitous*: that is, misleading or otherwise inappropriate. Suppose, for instance, that a student, eager to apply for admission to graduate school, asks a professor for a letter of reference. The professor, who thinks the student is without talent, responds with an utterance of “I would love to write you a letter of reference.” Suppose that the professor’s intention is to write an honest letter with the hope of keeping the student out of graduate school. Even though it may well be *true* that the professor would “love to” write the student a letter, his statement to that effect is not a *felicitous* one. For it is sure to mislead the naive student into believing that the professor intends to write a *favorable* letter of reference. To insist that the professor did not speak truly in such a case is to mistake felicity for truth.

Appeals to the felicity/truth distinction are not uncommon in the philosophical literature. Wilfrid Sellars (1954) employs it in defending Russell’s (1905) Theory of Descriptions against some of Strawson’s (1950) criticisms. Suppose that there is no present king of France and then consider an assertive utterance of (4):

(4) The present king of France is wise.

Russell claims (4) would be false; for there exists no unique present king of France (let alone one who is wise). Strawson counters that someone who knew there to be no such king would *not* respond with (5):

(5) That’s false.
True, says Sellars, but that would not be because (5) would be false – indeed, under the specified conditions, (5) would be true, just as Russell’s theory predicts. Why wouldn’t someone in the know respond with an utterance of (5)? Because, while such an utterance would be true, it would nevertheless be infelicitous, as it would suggest falsely that there exists a unique king of France who is not wise. As Sellars points out, we sometimes avoid saying what is true because doing so would be infelicitous. To reason with Strawson that (5) is not true simply because we would not utter it, is to mistake infelicity for falsehood.

Let’s now look at the case of mixed quotation, where the strategy in question has recently been invoked by Robert Stainton (1999). Consider an example from Cappelen & Lepore (1997):

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

In defense of the view that the quotation marks add nothing to the truth-conditional content of such a report, Stainton (1999: 273-274) writes:

A speaker could report parts of Alice’s conversation in a squeaky voice, or with a French accent, or with a stutter, or using great volume. In none of these cases would the speech reporter say, assert, or state that Alice spoke in these various ways. Speaking thus, the audience will naturally take the speech reporter to be imitating Alice – why else speak in these peculiar ways? And, if the reporter wasn’t accurately parroting Alice, the audience may rightly censure him. But this by no means establishes that anything false was said about Alice’s voice, accent, tone, etc.: In these cases, the truth conditions of the speech report are exhausted by the meaning of the words, and how the words are put together; as far as truth conditions are concerned, the tone, volume, accent, etc. add nothing whatever. Ditto, say I, for the quotation marks in mixed quotation. In which case, [(6)] isn’t false where Alice actually speaks the words ‘is tough to understand’. It may, of course, be infelicitous and misleading.

What is one to make of this sort of strategy? My response is two-fold. First, suppose that mixed quotations are indeed analogous to cases where the reporter purports to mimic the manner in which the agent said what he is alleged to have said. Let us conceptualize “manner” of speech so as to include such features as tone, volume, and accent. Stainton says that in cases where manner is mimicked, the reporter does not “say, assert, or state” that the agent spoke in the manner indicated. If mixed quotations are analogous to such cases, then the reporter does not “say, assert, or state” that the agent uttered the quoted words. All of this strikes me as plausible. The mistake is to conclude from these considerations that the manner in which the agent purportedly spoke is irrelevant to the truth conditions of the reporter’s utterance. Consider,
for instance, neo-Fregean accounts of belief reports. According to some such accounts, a belief report is true just in case the agent believes the linguistically specified proposition under some contextually specified mode of presentation. Yet when someone assertively utters (7):

(7) Alice believes that Superman can fly.

they do not thereby “say, assert, or state” (in any sense that is not highly theoretical) that Alice believes the proposition that Superman can fly under some contextually specified mode of presentation. Nevertheless, it would be a mistake to conclude without further ado that such is not truth-conditionally implied: that it is not entailed by the utterance of the sentence.

My second point concerns the claim (provisionally granted above) that mixed quotations are analogous to cases where reported speech is mimicked. The question here is the following. Where reported speech is mimicked, is the mimicry with or without truth-conditional effect? In some cases it appears to be, in other cases it appears not to be. The difficulty (for Stainton’s view) is that it is only in cases where the mimicry does seem to affect truth conditions that the analogy to mixed quotation appears plausible. Let me explain. If the context of utterance concerns only what Alice said and not how she said what she said, then any mimicry in the speech report would seem truth-conditionally irrelevant. This is just what Stainton supposes, and intuition supports his supposition. Suppose that what is at issue is what Alice said about life. Then, if the speaker utters (6)’s content clause in a deliberately squeaky voice, whereas Alice’s voice was deep and melodious, the utterance would be infelicitous, but not false — not if Alice uttered the quoted words. However, suppose that what is at issue is how Alice speaks, not what she has said about life. It is alleged (by some) that she speaks with a French accent. In such a context, suppose that someone says:

(8) Alice does indeed speak with a French accent. Just the other day she said that life “eez deefeecult to ernderstend.”

Now one could easily imagine someone coming to Alice’s defense and responding with:

(9) She said no such thing. I was there. She said that life “is difficult to understand” – not that it “eez deefeecult to ernderstend.”

My point is this. The intuition is strong that mixed quotation is analogous to some cases of mimicry, but arguably only to those cases where the mimicry is relevant to truth conditions. No wonder, then, that our inclination is to use
quotation marks in mimicry reports like (8) and (9). We wish to signal the importance of the manner of the reported speech to what we are saying. Perhaps the explanation of what is going on here is simple: in cases of mixed quotation, both what is said (by the agent) and how it is said are truth-conditionally relevant. At any rate, Stainton’s appeal to the truth/felicity distinction fails to explain the intuition that the truth of a mixed quotation requires that the agent uttered the quoted words. Nevertheless, the analogy that Stainton draws to mimicry in an effort to understand mixed quotation is a theoretically interesting one, as will become evident in the penultimate section of this paper.

(b) two levels of content

The strategy here is similar in some respects to Stainton’s truth vs. felicity strategy. One draws a distinction and then claims that the wayward intuitions result from unwittingly overlooking the distinction. François Recanati provides such a strategy in his “Open Quotation” (2001). There, he distinguishes between two levels of content: “c-content” and “i-content.” C-content is compositionally articulated content; i-content is intuitive content. It is the content reflected in our ordinary everyday truth-evaluations of utterances, and is obtained through the “pragmatic enrichment” of c-content.

Let’s consider an example from Donald Davidson (1979) that Recanati discusses at length. Consider the following two sentences:

(10) Quine said that quotation “has a certain anomalous feature.”
(11) Quine said that quotation has a certain anomalous feature.

Utterances of these sentences have the same c-content; so, with respect to c-content, they have the same truth conditions. But the i-contents of such utterances differ. In typical contexts, an utterance of (10) would convey that Quine used the very words “has a certain anomalous feature.” Not so for an utterance of (11). Thus, with respect to i-content, utterances of (10) and (11) differ truth-conditionally. The intuition that (10) literally expresses a proposition to the effect that Quine used the quoted words is the result of mistaking i-content for c-content.

This strategy has considerable appeal, as it preserves rather than explains away the intuition that the quoted words are relevant to truth, not mere felicity (as Stainton claims). Recanati’s strategy claims that the quoted words are indeed relevant to truth conditions – to the truth conditions determined by the i-content of an utterance of a mixed-quotation sentence. Because i-content is what we pre-theoretically judge to be true/false, the intuition that an utterance of (10) requires that Quine used the quoted words is easily accounted for.
Moreover, the c-content/i-content distinction invoked is (according to Recanati) not an ad hoc distinction, but an independently motivated distinction of enormous theoretical value in accounting for linguistic communication generally.

Recanati’s strategy here is reminiscent of Nathan Salmon’s (1986) strategy for handling the counter-intuitive consequences of Millian accounts of belief reports. According to such accounts, the mode of presentation under which an agent believes the specified proposition is irrelevant to the truth conditions of belief report sentences. Suppose that Superman is one and the same as Clark Kent. Then, for the Millian, if (7) is true, so is (12):

(7) Alice believes that Superman can fly.
(12) Alice believes that Clark Kent can fly.

But this is surely counter-intuitive and its counter-intuitiveness demands an explanation from the Millian. While Recanati appeals to c-content and i-content and claims we confuse the two, Salmon appeals to “semantically encoded” and “pragmatically imparted” information and claims we confuse the two. While an utterance of (12) pragmatically imparts (inter alia) the falsehood that Alice would sincerely assent to the sentence “Clark Kent can fly,” the proposition it semantically encodes is a true one to the effect that Alice believes of Clark Kent/Superman (under some mode of presentation or other), that he can fly. We mistake what is pragmatic for what is semantic and are thus led to believe that (12) is literally false. In both mixed quotation and belief reports, a confusion between different levels of content leads to counter-intuitive consequences. Once we are apprised of our confusion, the counter-intuitiveness is no longer seen as a mystery, but as an inevitable consequence of our natural failure to appreciate subtle but theoretically (if not practically) important linguistic distinctions.

But there remains a problem, a puzzle, for Recanati’s strategy. Suppose we have (or think we have) a grasp of the distinction between c-content and i-content. Even so, we might retain the intuition that the quoted words are relevant to c-content, not just to i-content. The intuition here finds expression in the cancelability test for Grice’s (1975) conventional implicatures: you can’t assertively utter (10) and then add, “However, he didn’t use those particular words.” Well, you can – but not without giving the distinct impression that you have just contradicted yourself. This at least suggests that the implication that Quine used the quoted words is relevant to c-content, not just to i-content. (I will return to this concern in the penultimate section of the paper.)
The strategy here is a simple one. It goes like this. Yes, my theory has some counter-intuitive consequences – but yours does as well, and so we are even on that score. A nice illustration of this general strategy can be found in Stephen Neale (1990). Neale is addressing Strawson’s (1950) insinuation that Russell’s (1905) theory is false as it predicts that an utterance of “The present king of France is wise” would be false in a context (such as the present) where there is no such king. Surely, says Strawson, the utterance would be neither true nor false. Neale, in response, draws attention to sentences like “The present king of France shot my cat last night,” utterances of which would intuitively be false in a context (like the present) where there is no such king. Yet Strawon’s (1950) theory would declare such utterances to be without truth-value. Should we then conclude without further ado that Strawson’s theory is false?

How might a pragmaticist about mixed quotation employ this sort of strategy? He might point out that semantic theories of mixed quotation have counter-intuitive consequences when applied to speech reports involving translation. Consider the following mixed quotations (all of which are from Tsohatzidis 1998):

(13) Descartes said that man “is a thinking substance.”
(14) Frege said that predicate expressions “are unsaturated.”
(15) Socrates said that an unexamined life “is not worth living for a human.”

Intuitively, these mixed quotations are all true – or at least they might be. But if the truth of their utterance requires that the quoted words were used by the agent, then utterances of (13)-(15) could only be false. For neither Descartes, Frege, nor Socrates wrote what they said in English. The cancelability test can seemingly be passed after all, as there would be nothing amiss with an utterance of (16):

(16) Descartes said that man “is a thinking substance,” but he didn’t use those very words, as he wrote only in French and Latin.

So, semantic accounts of mixed quotation – at least the version proposed by Cappelen & Lepore (1997) – appear to have counter-intuitive results, just as do their pragmatic competitors.

In fact, some might think that cases of mixed-quotation translation constitute counter-examples to the semantic account of Cappelen & Lepore. Indeed, this is Tsohatzidis’s claim. Cappelen & Lepore have an interesting response to this claim: they insist that they never said that their semantic
account worked for all cases of mixed quotation. Is that any different than insisting that they never claimed that their account had no counter-examples? I don’t see that it is. Perhaps the motivation behind their response is that cases involving translation are atypical and so probably derivative, and thus needn’t be explicitly dealt with by a theory designed to handle the central cases.

Cappelen & Lepore would need to employ a different strategy in responding to an observation made by Saka (this volume). Saka points out that empirical data show verbatim quotations to be extremely rare. Typically, quotations fail to capture the agent’s exact words. Saka mentions that the professional standard in journalism is for reporters to pare down and otherwise “clean up” quotations. He further observes that court recorders “commit, expect, and tolerate” far more departures from the original source than scholars do. For instance, scholars will often preserve typographical errors and add “sic” to indicate that the error is in the original source.

Saka’s observations suggest that a semantic account like Cappelen & Lepore’s would predict, counter-intuitively, that true mixed quotations are extremely rare. I suppose, however, that the semanticist might reply that the rarity of true mixed quotations shouldn’t be all that surprising. After all, when we mix-quote our fellow speakers, what generally matters is that we capture, as precisely as can reasonably be expected, the speaker’s words. This is true regardless of whether we are newspaper reporters, court reporters, or just ordinary folk. Perhaps, then, it is only to be expected that while we often approach complete accuracy, we rarely achieve it. But even where we fail to achieve it, there is generally no significant communicative loss. Deleting an “uh” or an “um” or correcting a misspelled word is generally of no consequence when we mix-quote our fellow speakers. In that case, that mixed quotations are rarely precisely right (i.e., true) is not so obviously a counter-intuitive consequence of the theory that entails it.

At any rate, although the tu quoque strategy has enormous rhetorical force, the extent of its logical force is less clear. That is why “tu quoque” often appears on a list of informal fallacies. You can’t get rid of a problem simply by pointing out that your critic has a similar problem. You might, however, succeed in showing that your critic’s theory is (in certain respects) no better than yours. On the other hand, it is arguable that any substantive theory will entail that appearance and reality diverge in certain respects, and so perhaps any such theory will inevitably have some counter-intuitive consequences. Nevertheless, these consequences need to be explained, rather than dismissed on the grounds that competing theories face similar problems. For only when such consequences are adequately explained can the theorist justifiably claim that they pose no threat to his theory. (This applies to the semanticist no less than to the pragmaticist.)
(d) fallibility of intuitions

The strategy here is to disregard the counter-intuitive consequences of one’s theory on the grounds that intuitions are notoriously fallible, and should therefore be given little, if any, credence. One sometimes hears theorists saying such things as: the job of a semantic theory is to account for semantic facts, not semantic intuitions.\textsuperscript{18} Thus, one might acknowledge the intuition that the truth of an utterance of sentence (10) requires that Quine have used the quoted words, but point out that this is only an intuition – not an incontrovertible fact. This dismissive attitude toward intuitions is reflected in Russell’s testy (1957) response to Strawson’s (1950) “On Referring.” The Theory of Descriptions solves logical puzzles that no other theory can – what does it matter that its predictions conflict with ordinary everyday intuitions about what is true/false!?

There is a serious problem with this strategy. Intuitions, \textit{qua} considered (though seemingly non-inferential) judgments as to what appears to be the case, are fallible in this sense: they can, and occasionally do, mislead us. This sometimes happens even when the intuitions are compelling and widely shared. Still, the intuitions have to be explained, even if they are not preserved. In other words, a theorist must explain why we have them, even if he claims that they are misleading. Or rather, the theorist must at least acknowledge that an explanation is in order, even if he does not deign to provide one himself. Indeed, Russelians like Neale (1990) have been trying for decades to explain away the counter-intuitive consequences of the Theory of Descriptions, an enterprise Russell might well view – wrongly, in my opinion – as a complete waste of time. Moreover, I know of no theory of quotation (or belief reports) that does not involve appealing to putatively “pre-theoretical” intuitions as to what is true/false. In fact, many semantic theories seem to get off the ground with considerations of the following form. Imagine that such-and-such is the case, and consider a sentence/utterance of the following sort: ______________. Surely, such a sentence/utterance would be true/false. Perhaps it is inevitable that semantic theories proceed in this way. \textit{Everyone} pumps intuitions, even if some might disagree with such a description of their tactics – recall Russell’s (1905) confident declaration that “The present king of France is bald” is “plainly false.”

So, although everyone agrees that intuitions are fallible, everyone uses them in motivating their respective linguistic theories, whether semantic or pragmatic. Yet no theorist can assert without argument that the intuitions are facts when a competing theory denies this. What can be asserted is that the intuitions, if compelling and widely shared, count as \textit{prima facie} evidence for the theory that treats them as accurate rather than misleading. Counter-intuitiveness \textit{by itself} is never sufficient to refute a theory. (Thus, the intuitions
I pumped in the introduction to this paper should not be viewed as counterexamples to pragmatic accounts of mixed quotation.

4. Re-evaluation of “two levels of content” Strategy

In section 3(b), I argued that Recanati’s strategy for defusing the counter-intuitiveness associated with pragmatic accounts of mixed quotation left a question unanswered. This is the question of how to account for the persistence of the intuition that the quotation marks in mixed quotations are relevant, not only to i-content, but to c-content as well. It is to this question that I now turn.

The issue here is a serious one, as there appear to be compelling reasons for taking the intuition in question to be accurate. Semanticist Herman Cappelen (personal communication) argues that the quotation marks in mixed quotations are indeed relevant to what Recanati calls “c-content.” His evidence: utterances of sentences like (10):

(10) Quine said that quotation “has a certain anomalous feature.”

could not possibly be true unless the agent uttered the quoted words.

Cappelen’s claim appears to receive further support (as Cappelen himself notes) from cancelability considerations. One cannot, without seeming inconsistency, utter (10) and then follow the utterance with “However, those were not the words he used.” The most plausible explanation for these data, according to Cappelen, is that the quotation marks in a mixed-quotational sentence contribute to the “compositionally determined truth-conditional meaning” of the sentence. (In Recanati’s terminology, the quotation marks are relevant to the “c-content” of a mixed-quotational utterance.) So, we have an argument to the best explanation (Cappelen’s compositional explanation) which is at the same time an argument against any alternative explanation (including any explanation that a pragmaticist might come up with).

Let’s now consider some possible responses to Cappelen’s argument. One response would be to accept the cancelability datum, but deny the truth-conditional datum. Yes, the proposition that the quoted words were spoken by the agent cannot be canceled, which shows only that the proposition is carried by the sentence’s conventional meaning. Nevertheless, the proposition is not part of the sentence’s truth-conditional meaning and is therefore irrelevant to c-content. Thus, an utterance of (1) would conventionally implicate that Rumsfeld uttered the quoted words; it would not, however, (truth-conditionally) entail that he did. Thus, the utterance could be true even if Rumsfeld never uttered the words “over the edge.” Intuitions to the contrary
are the result of mistaking conventional meaning for truth-conditional meaning.

This proposal¹⁹ has the minimal virtue of coherence – at least if one accepts Grice’s assumption that there are conventional implicatures.²⁰ Yet it is doubtful that the semanticist would accept divorcing sentence meaning from truth-conditional content in the manner proposed. Moreover, aside from having no clear independent motivation, the proposal is unintuitive. If I say, “Alice is smart but humble,” you cannot coherently challenge what I have said on the grounds that many smart people are humble. If I utter (10), you can coherently challenge what I have said on the grounds (which happen to be false) that Quine would never have used the word “anomalous.” So, while the implication associated with “but” is not obviously part of the sentence’s truth-conditional meaning, the implication associated with quotation marks certainly appears to be.

Another response would be to insist that the implication in question can be canceled – all you need is a bit of imagination to construct the relevant sort of scenarios. Here are two: you are under the impression that Quine wrote only in German and have just been asked about his views on quotation. So you utter (10) but then add,

(17) However, he didn’t use those words; I think he said it in German.

Alternatively, suppose you have no interest in, or knowledge of, mixed quotation, yet your colleagues keep talking about whether or not Quine said that quotation “has a certain anomalous feature.” You don’t even realize that the debate is about quotation, you think it is an historical debate about Quine’s philosophical views on quotation. Exasperated, you say, “Let me end this silly debate for you,” followed by:

(10) Quine said that quotation “has a certain anomalous feature.”

But suppose that your intention in displaying the quoted words is merely to mock, through mimicry, your colleagues’ philosophical obsessions.²¹ In such a case, the intuition (and it’s admittedly only that) is that the truth of the utterance would not require that Quine have used the quoted words when he said that quotation has a certain anomalous feature. Indeed, there would be nothing odd if an utterance of (10) were followed by one of (18):

(18) However, I doubt Quine ever used a pretentious word like “anomalous.” He was a concise writer and so probably said that quotation has an “odd” feature.”²²
In fact, that the quoted words were being attributed, not to Quine but to the hearer, could easily be made explicit, as in an utterance of (19):

(19) Quine said that quotation “has a certain anomalous feature” – as you are so fond of putting it.  

The data here suggest that propositions to the effect that the agent (as opposed to the audience) used the quoted words are not part of what is literally expressed by a mixed quotation. But if so, those propositions cannot (pace Cappelen) be part of the mixed-quotations sentence’s “compositionally determined truth-conditional meaning.” Any intuition to the effect that they are, is perhaps the result of a myopic view of the linguistic data: of a failure to consider seriously cases like (17)-(19).

Is this response any better? I believe so. Nevertheless, opinions would likely vary as to its ultimate success. Some semanticists would probably deny having the intuitions underpinning the argument. They would insist that, even if the speaker did not intend to attribute the quoted words to Quine, the utterance would still (intuitively) be false if Quine hadn’t used those very words. So my guess is that this particular response to Cappelen’s argument would only lead to fruitless intuition-mongering.

Are there any other options for responding to Cappelen’s “best explanation” argument? Here’s one final option, an option I am tentatively inclined to endorse. Let’s temporarily set aside examples like (17)-(19). Let’s then see if we can make sense of the intuitive data concerning truth conditions and cancelability to which Cappelen appeals – without assuming that quotation marks are relevant to “compositionally determined truth-conditional meaning.” I propose to accomplish this by describing a hypothetical case where (i) similar data exist, but where (ii) a compositional explanation of the data does not appear inevitable.

Let’s begin by imagining a (written) language in which variations in font size are regularly used for a variety of different purposes. One such purpose concerns volume of speech: font size is regularly used to indicate the volume of the agent of a speech report. Large font is used to indicate high volume, regular font to indicate normal volume, and small font to indicate low volume. (Publishers of children’s books occasionally vary font size for just such purposes.)

Consider now a context in which what is at issue is the volume of Alice’s voice, not what she has said about life (or about anything else). Perhaps she has just been interviewed for a telemarketing job. One of her (three) interviewers reports that Alice has a perfectly normal speaking voice, but the two others disagree reporting (respectively):
(20) She said that life is difficult to understand.
(21) She said that life is difficult to understand.

What can we say about (20) and (21)? We can say that, intuitively, the font size used to represent the volume of Alice’s voice is indeed relevant to the truth/falsity of assertions/statements made by utterances of those sentences. The assertions/statements made are true or false depending on (inter alia) the volume of Alice’s voice. The utterer of (21) might well precede his utterance by saying “No, she didn’t” in response to an utterance of (20). We can also say that, intuitively, font size is not part of the sentence’s compositionally determined meaning: (20) and (21) appear to have exactly the same compositionally determined meanings. In claiming this to be “intuitive,” I mean to suggest only that, given a notion of “composition” with at least some connection to its ordinary non-technical sense, font size does not enter into the “composition” of the meanings of sentences (20) and (21). For those sentences contain precisely the same words and precisely the same (surface) grammatical form. Their “parts” appear to be “put together” in the same way. Someone who is neither a philosopher nor a linguist might describe the similarities/differences between (20) and (21) by saying that the sentences mean the exact same thing – namely, that she (Alice) said that life is difficult to understand. It’s just that anyone using (20) to express this proposition would be indicating simultaneously that Alice said what she said with considerable volume. Similarly, anyone using (21) to express that very same proposition would be indicating simultaneously that Alice said what she said with minimal volume. The intuitive point is simply that the two sentences share a level of meaning naturally thought of in terms of the notion of composition.

What else can we say about (20) and (21)? The indicated volume appears non-cancelable, despite its seeming irrelevance to compositionally determined sentence meaning. It appears non-cancelable in the sense that denying it immediately upon uttering (20)/(21) just sounds contradictory. For suppose that utterances of either of these sentences were to be followed by (22):

(22) However, she didn’t say it with that volume.

To my ears, that would sound just as contradictory as would an utterance of:

(23) Alice said that life “is difficult to understand.” However, she didn’t use those words.

The point here is simply this. It doesn’t seem as though font size contributes to compositionally determined meaning. There a clear (if only intuitive) sense in which the meanings of (20) and (21) are the result of the very same
compositional process. However, that the agent used the indicated volume appears to be non-cancelable. These intuitive considerations at least suggest that such non-cancelability is not to be explained by the hypothesis that font size contributes to compositionally determined meaning. Perhaps, then, the same is true of the non-cancelability to which Cappelen refers in his “best explanation” argument: it is not to be explained by the hypothesis that quotation marks contribute to compositionally determined meaning.

The obvious question then becomes: how is it to be explained? Here’s one possibility. There are aspects of sentence meaning that are not compositional in nature. If so, it is possible that quotation marks and font size are relevant to the meanings of the sentences in which they occur. (Even Recanati admits this.) Yet we could deny that they contribute to sentence meaning in the same compositional ways that the words and syntax of the sentence do. Once this move is made, there is some logical space to argue that the non-compositional aspects of sentence meaning are not relevant to, do not contribute to, compositionally determined content: Recanati’s c-content. Nevertheless, these non-compositional meanings inevitably make their presence known in the assertions/statements made by utterances of sentences containing them. Hence, the non-cancelability data to which Cappelen appeals. The resultant account would be semantic insofar as it linked quotation marks to sentence meaning, but pragmatic insofar as it claimed that such devices (like variable font size) are relevant only to the truth/falsity of the assertion made by the utterance of a mixed-quotation sentence. Insofar as one can talk meaningfully of the “compositionally determined truth conditions of mixed-quotation sentences,” quotation marks do not enter into the picture.

The foregoing is merely suggestive, and leaves a number of questions unanswered. First, it is unclear how to handle the crucial issue of cancelability – the very datum to be explained. Different theorists respond differently when asked about cases like (17)-(19). More needs to be said about how to determine whether an implication can or cannot be “canceled.”

Until more is said, perhaps we can talk only about “apparent” cancelability/non-cancelability, remaining neutral on the question of whether the appearance here reflects reality. Second, I do think the intuitive data concerning variations in font size at least suggest that not all cases of non-cancelability – whether real or merely apparent – require the positing of compositional meanings. However, more would need to be said about just what “compositional” meanings are before deciding whether this possibility even makes sense. It is not impossible that the “compositionally determined meaning” to which semanticists like Cappelen & Lepore refer is not one and the same as the “compositionally articulated content” to which Recanati refers. The two camps may have importantly different views as to the role compositionality should play in a linguistic theory. This is suggested by the fact that Recanati ties compositionality to the
psychological processes underpinning linguistic comprehension, whereas Cappelen & Lepore appear not to. For Recanati, the idea that quotation marks are processed differently than other sentential phenomena may provide some grounds for a distinct level of meaning. Third, it seems possible that quotation marks are analogous to font size insofar as the ultimate explanation of the (apparent) non-cancelability to which Cappelen appeals will not be a compositional one. However, the relevant analogies would have to be spelled out before this possibility could be assessed. For instance, quotation marks are used to do far more than just attribute words to the agent of a speech report. (See Recanati 2001.) For the analogy to hold, we would have to stipulate that variations in font size are likewise used for a variety of purposes – not only to indicate the volume of an agent’s voice. However, perhaps this would not be enough to conclude that the devices are semantically of a piece; perhaps there are important differences between quotation marks and font size that would militate against any sort of theoretically-based assimilation. Clearly much more needs to be said.

5. Concluding Remarks

The central aim of this paper was to assess various strategies for defusing the counter-intuitive consequences associated with pragmatic accounts of mixed quotation. The most promising of the four strategies considered seems to be Recanati’s: admit that quotation marks are relevant to one level of content, the pre-theoretically accessible level, but deny that they are relevant to another, more basic (“pre-enriched”) level. There remains a non-cancelability-based intuition that the quoted words are relevant to even this more basic level. However, I have suggested that either the intuition is misguided (because of a myopic view of the data) or if accurate, may be amenable to a non-compositional explanation. In the latter case, the idea would be to distinguish between levels of sentence meaning, one compositional, one non-compositional. Both aspects are relevant to assertion/statement meaning, while only the former is relevant to truth-conditional sentence meaning.

Whether the best account of mixed quotation is pragmatic or semantic (or somewhere in between) remains to be seen. All that I hope to have established is that dismissing accounts of the former sort on the grounds of “counter-intuitiveness” is a misguided, if initially tempting, strategy.

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Notes

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2 As will become evident below, there appear to be theoretically important exceptions to this blanket characterization of mixed quotation.

3 Here and elsewhere, “content” is (by definition) truth-conditional in cases where the uttered sentence is a declarative.

4 I do not want to suggest that, for the pragmaticist, the literal content of a mixed-quotation utterance is invariably unaffected by the presence of quotation marks. The pragmaticist might want to allow that quotation marks can contribute indirectly to literal content. This certainly appears to be what happens in cases where the quoted material contains an indexical expression. Compare the following two sentences:

   (i) Alice said that Donald “loves me.”
   (ii) Alice said that Donald loves me.

In the first, “me” refers to the agent, in the second to the speaker. Presumably the pragmaticist can explain this by saying that the quotation marks in (i) affect the context of utterance in ways that affect what that sentence literally expresses. As I conceptualize the pragmaticist position in this paper, its defining claim is the following. The literal content of a mixed-quotation utterance does not contain a proposition to the effect that the agent used the quoted words. For an interesting discussion of how the Davidsonian might handle the phenomenon illustrated by the contrast between (i) and (ii), see Mark McCullagh’s (2004) “Understanding Mixed Quotation.”

5 Or at least relevantly similar words. See Saka (this volume).

6 While Recanati talks in terms of utterance “content,” and eschews talk of sentential truth conditions, Cappelen & Lepore talk in terms of compositionally determined meaning, a property they ascribe to sentences, to which they also ascribe truth conditions. To avoid question-begging in either direction, I do my best to formulate the various views I discuss in the language of their advocates.

7 For technical developments of the truth/felicity distinction, see the work of speech-act theorists, especially Austin (1961) and Searle (1969).

8 For further details, see Recanati (2001).

9 Atypical contexts, including those involving translation of the agent’s utterance, are discussed below.

10 Thus, there is a substantive sense in which, for Recanati, quotation marks in mixed quotations are semantically (i.e., truth-conditionally) significant. His pragmaticism consists in his denial that such devices are relevant to c-content.

11 For details, see Salmon (1986).

12 But see section (c) below for some apparent exceptions.
Although cancelability considerations have traditionally been invoked to distinguish conventional implicatures from conversational ones, they might also be used to distinguish literal content from “pragmatically enriched” content. Strawson later clarified his theory (Strawson 1964) so as to avoid such consequences. I think Cappelen & Lepore could have given a better response: they could have claimed that mixed-quotatio translations are strictly false, although they can communicate truths. This is suggested by the fact that one might utter the following upon hearing (13):

Strictly speaking, what he said was that man is a “res cogitans.”

This sort of approach would allow them to treat translation cases as semantically of a piece with cases of synonym substitution within mixed quotation. In both cases, the mixed quotations would be strictly false. However, Cappelen & Lepore (1998) suggest that the problem can be solved by adopting a notion of “same-tokening” flexible enough to allow words to same-token different (though appropriately related) words. My suspicion is that this sort of move has the effect of artificially insulating the theory against counter-examples. Thanks to Uriah Kriegel for inspiring the reflections in this paragraph. Bach (2002) talks this way. However, Bach’s point is not that intuitive data are irrelevant to the generation of a semantic theory, but only that there should be no prima facie assumption that a theory that “respects” (pre-theoretical) intuitions is ipso facto more credible than one that does not. Here, I agree with Bach but would disagree were “ceteris paribus” to be substituted for “ipso facto.” Recanati (2001) considers and rejects this proposal. But see Bach (1999).

Both the example and the point it is intended to make are inspired by Saka’s discussion of the same phenomenon (this volume). Note that it would seem more difficult to cancel the proposition that Quine used the word “odd.” Initially at least, such apparent differences in degree of cancelability would seem to favor a pragmatic account. Thanks to Philippe De Brabanter for drawing my attention to such examples.

I am deliberately avoiding talk in terms of “convention.” It seems unnecessary for present purposes and may carry theoretical commitments I don’t wish to adopt. As Philippe De Brabanter has pointed out to me, this discussion raises the question whether some aspects of prosody (such as intonation, pitch and volume) ought to be regarded as having conventional linguistic meaning. If they do, then those aspects of language might have to be considered as compositional. Whether this is so strikes me as a substantive and controversial issue worthy of serious consideration.

Philippe De Brabanter has pointed out to me that, given that nature of cancelability, perhaps it is inevitable that cancelability judgements will continue to be unstable. In that case, the question whether a given implicature is cancelable is unlikely to be the sort of issue that we can ever expect complete agreement on.
References


Saka, P. this volume. “Quotational constructions”.


