

## **Ironic name reference as echoic mention – A pragmatic analysis based on empirical data**

Pure quotation, as in “*Paris*” has five letters, is a device used to point to linguistic shapes; see, among others, Cappelen & Lepore (1997), Ginzburg & Cooper (2014), Recanati (2001) for analyses. Instances are constructions involving a name-mentioning predicate like *call* as in *Blood poisoning is also called “sepsis”* or the prenominal modifier *so-called* as in *The doctor diagnosed a so-called “tennis elbow”*. Constructions of this type inform the addressee about the name of a lexical concept as well as its status as a term used conventionally in a certain speech community. Observe, however, that name-mentioning constructions can also adopt an ironic, modalizing interpretation instead of a name-informing one:

- (1) a. *We had to get up early every morning. And that’s what you call a “vacation”!*
- b. *Guess what, the so-called “hotel” turned out to be a run-down dump.*

In our paper, we focus on prenominal *so-called* and propose a pragmatic analysis to account for its different interpretations. Specifically, we argue that the modalizing interpretation illustrated in (1) results from an echoic use of the mentioned name, which, in turn, produces a comment reflecting the speaker’s attitude towards the quoted content. Furthermore, to determine the exact nature of the contents involved in ironic name-mentioning, we report on results from two experimental studies.

The verbal root *call-* of *so-called* involves three thematic arguments, an agent *x*, a theme *y* as well as the name *z* of the theme *y*.

- (2)  $x \text{ call- } y z$   
 $\exists e [\text{CALL}(e) \ \& \ \text{AGENT}(x, e) \ \& \ \text{THEME}(y, e) \ \& \ \text{NAME}(z, y, e)]$

The function of the *so* in *so-called* is to bind the name argument *z* of the predicate, analogously to the *so* in *One calls this so*. *So* is a demonstrative anaphor and, here, operates as a pointer to a name’s lexical shape – which, in a *so-called*-construction, is provided by the head nominal. In this respect, *so* fulfills the same function as quotation marks that often accompany the name in a name-mentioning context, as both are means to display a linguistic form through demonstration. A demonstration-based analysis of quotational *so* has a natural fit with Davidson’s (somewhat unpopular) Demonstrative Theory of quotation (Davidson 1979), whose central claim is that quotation is an operation through which a linguistic shape is referred to by pointing to something that has this shape.

Viewed from the speaker’s perspective, the use of a name-mentioning construction in its default function indicates that the mentioned name is believed not to be established in the addressee’s lexicon. With this in mind, we claim a relevance-based implicature (e.g., Horn 1984) to be effective in name-mentioning constructions with nominals that are commonly conventionalized. For example, with a highly conventionalized noun like *hotel* as used in (1b) above, a name-informing *so-called* is in fact irrelevant and, in avoidance of a relevance-maxim violation, an ironic interpretation emerges. The degree of conventionalization of a name can be couched as a function of the corresponding nominal’s lexical frequency, which, in turn, can be implemented as a factor determining the different readings. This assumption is corroborated by results from a corpus study we conducted using German data. The results indicate that the interpretation of constructions ( $n = 600$ ) involving *sogenannt* (‘so-called’) as either name-informing or modalizing indeed interacts systematically with the head’s lexical frequency: The higher the lexical frequency of the head nominal, the higher is the probability for the construction to adopt a modalizing function. From a compositional angle, the two interpretations are coupled with different bindings of the agent-argument variable as well as the event variable of the predicate. While both variables can be assumed to be bound generically with the name-informing use, we claim them to be non-generic in nature in the modalizing use.

With a modalizing *so-called*-construction, (i) a non-literal interpretation of the mentioned name is evoked as the speaker asserts himself/herself to oppose its semantic appropriateness. At the same time, (ii) the speaker expresses a (standardly negative) evaluation of the respective denotatum. We will argue these two contents to result from an echoic use of the mentioned name used in some previous utterance

(e.g., by a travel agent in the case of (1b) above). By explicitly marking the utterance as an echo through the use of *so-called*, the speaker produces a comment, which implicates that he/she says something contrary to what he/she means, and that he/she evaluates the denotatum in a certain way, as reflected in the speaker's attitude. Our approach is in line with echo approaches towards verbal irony (see Jorgensen et al. 1984, Wilson 2006), which implement a (negative) evaluation bias as a characteristic feature of ironic language (Kreuz & Glucksberg 1989), and we propose to analyze the evaluative component to be rooted in the "mockery effect" outlined above.

For a detailed classification of the contents involved in modalizing *so-called*-constructions, we conducted two experimental studies in German. Study 1 (SoSci Survey) tested the pragmatic status of the contents and whether these figure as presuppositions or implicatures. We used a pattern as demonstrated in (3) below, for which participants (n = 37) were asked to rate (5-point scale) the coherence of small dialogues and, specifically, the suitability of dissents that follow discourse-interrupting utterances like *Wait a second!* [...] targeting the different content types:

- (3) A: *We had booked our accommodation before the trip. When we finally arrived at the so-called hotel, we flopped dead tired into bed.*  
 B: *Wait a second! Are you saying that ...*  
 (a) *your accommodation wasn't a real hotel / (b) you didn't like the hotel / (c) somebody had referred to your accommodation as a hotel?*  
 A: *I haven't said that!*

The results indicate that the non-literalness of the name's meaning (= (a) in example (3)) as well as the denotatum's evaluation (= (b)) can be dissented with more easily as compared to the previous use of the name (= (c)); which we take to reflect the latter's status as a presupposition, in contrast to the former two, which we conclude to be implicatures. Study 2 aimed at determining the at-issueness (see, e.g., Gutzmann 2015, Tonhauser 2012, Potts 2015) of the different contents. Crucially, because of the nature of attributive modification, we assume all three contents to represent not-at-issue information, but to different degrees. Participants (n = 56) were asked to choose (5-point scaled choice) between two responses to modalizing constructions of the type in (3), targeting the different contents: an at-issue rejection form (e.g., *That is not true, it is a real hotel*) vs. a not-at-issue rejection (*Wait a second, it is a real hotel*). The results indicate graded at-issueness for the construction's contents such that the negative evaluation component exhibits the lowest degree of at-issueness, followed by the previous name use and then non-literalness, which shows the highest degree of at-issueness. We interpret this result to reflect a central property of verbal irony, i.e., to give rise to non-literal meanings of expressions (see, e.g., Wilson & Sperber 1992).

To conclude, we assume ironic name reference to involve mentioning a name echoically, which produces a non-literal interpretation of the name and signals the speaker's evaluation of the denotatum. Our analysis uses a single underspecified semantic format for *so-called*, with pragmatic factors determining the different interpretations. Viewed globally, our findings contribute to the demarcation between primary and secondary content as well as to a classification of verbal irony in this continuum.

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