

Rain starts with a consonant – Is quotation part of
compositional grammar?

Holden Härtl

Chair of English Linguistics

Faculty of Humanities and Cultural Studies

Universität Kassel

Talking about words

- (1) a. *“Rain” starts with a consonant.*
b. *“Cats” is a noun.*
c. *“Failure” is just another word for “experience”.*

- (2) a. *Rain starts with a consonant.*
b. *Cats is a noun.*
c. *Failure is just another word for experience.*

⇒ **Are quotations / quotes part of compositional grammar?**

Road Map

- 1 Characteristics of quotation
- 2 Accounts of pure quotation
- 3 Experimental studies
- 4 Conclusion

Characteristics of quotation

Types

Quotation (as an act) is a metalinguistic device used to talk about language

- (1) a. *“Something is wrong,” Alan whispered softly to his dolls.* → **direct** quotation
- b. *The coach declared that his team would “kick arse” today.* → **mixed** quotation
- (2) a. *The so-called “hotel” was just an old shed.* → **scare** quotation
- b. *“Rain” starts with a consonant.* → **pure** quotation

Pure quotation

Denotational use

(1) *Rain starts with a single drop.*

[[*rain*]]



Mentioning use

(2) *“Rain” starts with a consonant.*

[[*“rain”*]]

/'reɪn /

- display linguistic shapes in a rule-like fashion
- demonstrate a property of a word type by displaying a word token

Accounts of pure quotation

Debate

What the accounts debate

A Does a quotational interpretation emerge as part of the **compositional derivation** of quotational constructions?

Is “*rain*” **syntactically** derived from *rain*?

Are quotes part of syntax (quote morpheme etc.)?

B Or are quotational meanings construed **pragmatically**?

Camp A: Compositional

Claim: Quotation is part of the compositional derivation

➤ Quotation produces truth-conditionally relevant content

(1) a. *Kim asked if I was happy.*

I = speaker

b. *Kim asked, “Am I happy?”.*

I = Kim

➤ Quotes are (covertly) present in the underlying syntax

➤ There cannot be quotation without (covert) quotes

Camp A: Compositional

Rabern (2023), for example:

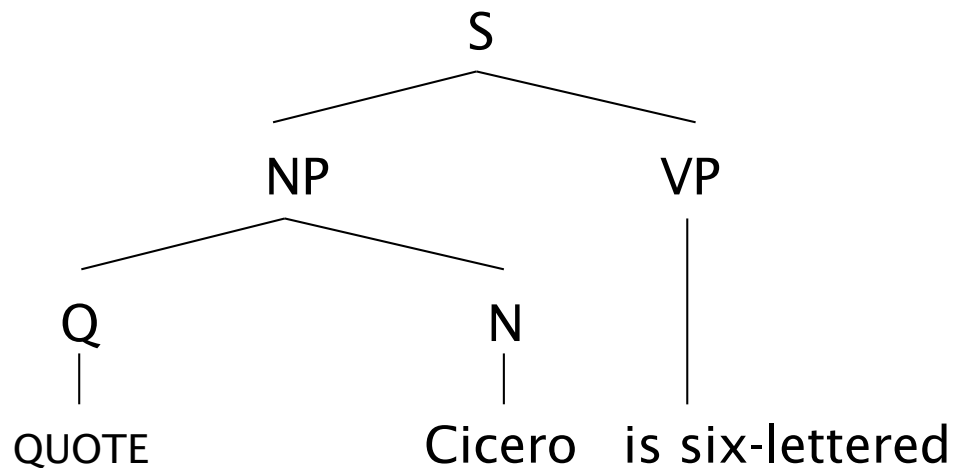
(1) *Cicero is human.*

$[_S[_{NP} \text{Cicero}] [_{VP} \text{is human}]]$

(2) *“Cicero” is six-lettered.*

$[_S[_{NP}[_Q \text{QUOTE}][_N \text{Cicero}]] [_{VP} \text{is six-lettered}]]$

$[[[_Q \text{QUOTE}]]] = \lambda c_s. \lambda m_i.$ the expression at $c \Rightarrow$ (for any type i)



Camp B: Pragmatic

Claim: Quotations are discourse-generated as communicative acts

➤ Unmarked quotations are not false / ungrammatical

(1) a. *Rain starts with a consonant.*

b. *Cats is a noun.*

c. *Failure is just another word for experience.*

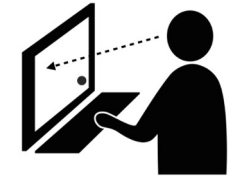
Quotes

➤ disambiguate between denotational use and mentioning an expression

➤ provide optional ways of signaling a quotation

Experimental studies

Study 1: Eye tracking



(1) *One calls this phenomenon a “Sun halo”.*

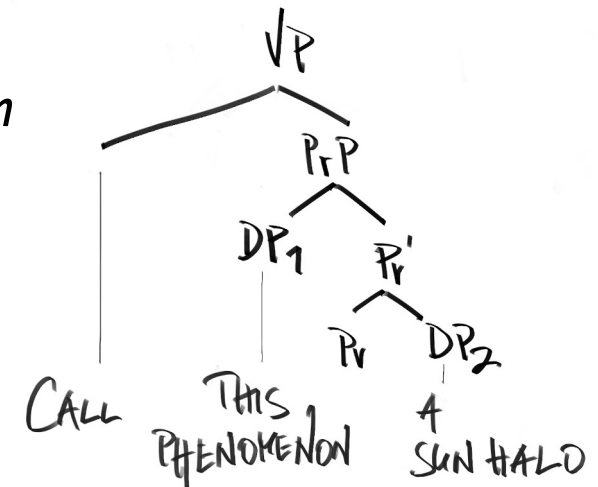
$x \text{ call } y \text{ “}n\text{”} \rightarrow y \text{ is an } n$

$\lambda P \lambda n \lambda y \lambda x [\text{CALL}(x, y, \text{NAME}(\text{“}n\text{”, } y)) \wedge \mathbf{P}(y, n)]$

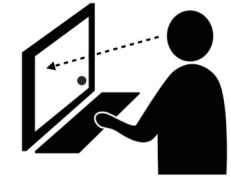
Small clause: $[_{VP} \text{ call}_{sc} [\text{this phenomenon}] [\text{a “Sun halo”}]]$

Object predicative:

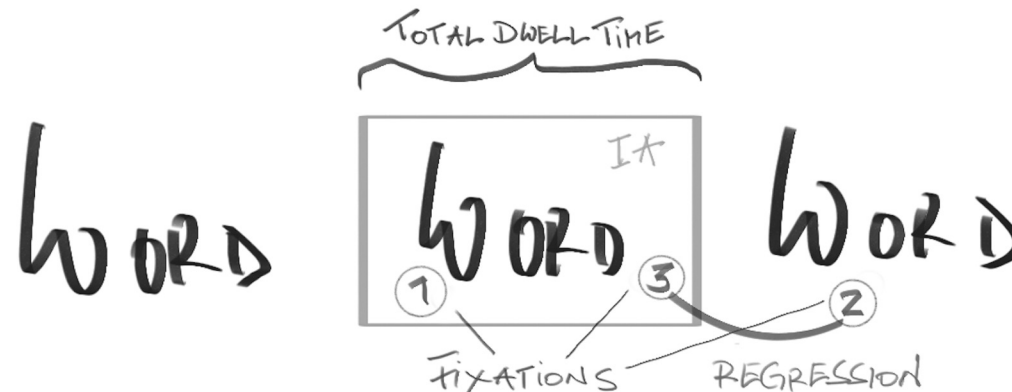
*dieses Phänomen*_{ACC} *einen „Sonnenring“*_{ACC} *nennen*



Study 1: Eye tracking



- (1) a. ... dass man dieses Phänomen „Sonnenring“ nennt ...
b. ... dass man dieses Phänomen Sonnenring nennt ...



Results

- No effects for early fixations (1st/2nd fixations) in Interest Area
- Effect for total dwell time & regressions (longer/more for words in quotes)
- Related to higher, top-down processes → “pragmatic”, discourse-based

Studies 2a/b: Acoustics

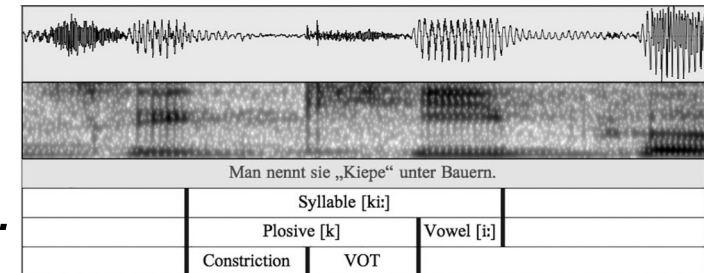
Quotes × Quotational construction



[Pretext]

2a a. ... *Man nennt sie „Kiepe“ unter Bauern.*

b. ... *Man kennt die „Kiepe“ unter Bauern.*



2b a. *Viele Mönche tragen die sogenannte „Kutte“ täglich.*

b. *Viele Mönche tragen die wohlbekannte „Kutte“ täglich.*

Results

- Lengthening effect for initial plosive of words in quotes (constriction, VOT)
- No interaction between QUOTES and QUOTATIONAL CONSTRUCTION
- Quotes pronounced only when present → pragmatic account of quotes

Study 3: Acoustics



Pure quotation in English

Quotes × Quotational construction

- (1) a. *Most students recognize that “peace” is a **noun**.*
b. *Most students recognize that “peace” is a **must**.*

Results

- Lengthening effect for syllable-initial plosive of words in quotes
- No interaction between QUOTES and QUOTATIONAL CONSTRUCTION
- Quotes pronounced only when present → pragmatic account of quotes

Conclusion

Summary

➤ Quotes are articulated regardless of the context type

➤ No articulation of “covert” quotes

➤ No quotational operator in syntax

➤ Quotational meanings emerge pragmatically via discourse (Camp B 🤔)

Conclusion

Application

- Prescriptive rules for quotation (looser or stricter)
- Quotational meanings may be “hard to get” → chatbots, neurodivergent interlocutors
- Quoted expressions may be ambiguous → legal & contractual interpretation

Thank you.

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