Mixed Quotations and the Pragmatic Introduction of Multiple Propositions

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1 Introduction

Uses of quotation marks fall into three broad categories, illustrated with sentences (1)-(3) below.

(1) “Red” is a three letter word.

(2) She only “tapped” him with her handbag.

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

In (1), the material inside the quotation marks is not used in its normal way (to denote a color), and is instead referred to as a linguistic object, as a word. This reference makes it appropriate to use a linguistic property (having three letters) as the sentences predicate. By contrast, the quoted material in (2) is used in its normal way, as a verb. If it were not used that way, the sentence would be ill-formed because it would have a subject and nothing else. Sentences like (2) are commonly classed as instances of scare quotation.

The chief interest of this paper, however, is sentences like (3) – often termed mixed quotations – in which the quoted material is both referred to as a linguistic object and also used in its normal way. How do quote marks make these sentences possible?

To answer this question, I explicate a novel type of linguistic phenomenon that I call semantic stacking. I then argue that treating mixed quotations as instances of semantic stacking is superior to treating them as instances of pragmatic enrichment, as Francois Recanti does. ¹

2 A Theory of Semantic Stacking

In this section, I introduce a theory of an under-appreciated linguistic phenomenon that I call semantic stacking. My claim is that in certain situations, the utterance of a single, simple sentence expresses two propositions.

Before being more precise about my view, its worth briefly reviewing the relevant portions of a paper by Stephen Neale, in which he also discusses sentences that express

¹As elaborated and defended in his (2001) and (2008).
multiple propositions. My position is similar to his in one way, but different in several important respects.

Neale uses appositives and sentence connectives like ‘but, ‘therefore, and ‘furthermore’ as his main examples for the claim that sentences can express multiple propositions. Look at (4).

(4) The current mayor, Albert Smith, is a Republican.

In (4), Neale claims that two propositions are being expressed – that the current mayor is Albert Smith and that the current mayor is a Republican. Immediately, one might wonder why multiple propositions are needed. Why not just theorize a single conjunctive proposition, viz. the current Mayor is Albert Smith and the current mayor is a Republican?

There are two reasons, according to Neale, to resist interpreting (4) as expressing a single, conjunctive proposition. For one thing, a conjunction is not present in the sentence, making it mysterious why the expressed proposition must contain one. Furthermore, the conditions under which appositive sentences are true are not always conjunctive. In some contexts, the fact that the current mayor is not Albert Smith will falsify (4), but in some contexts – like when the mayor’s party affiliation and not his identity is under discussion – (4) will be judged true despite having a false appositive (or in some cases, one may be hesitant to render a judgment on the truth value of the utterance as a whole). If Neale is right, then the relationship between an utterance’s truth and the truth of the propositions that it expresses may be complex and depend on how the context allocates importance to the different propositions.

Neale thinks that (5) works in a similar way.

(5) Bill is a philosopher; therefore he is brave.

Again, his argument is that the sentence expresses two propositions, but in (5) the word ‘therefore’ is the source of the dual propositions and not apposition.

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2(1999).
3(1999, 9, 16-17).
4See Neale (1999, 28).
5Two small clarifications are needed. First, Neale claims that “Bill is a philosopher; therefore he is brave” expresses three propositions – the two conjuncts and then the proposition that the
of the expressed propositions is a conjunction: Bill is a philosopher and Bill is brave.

The other proposition is a higher level proposition that relates the two conjuncts, something like: Bill’s bravery follows from the fact that he is a philosopher. Again, Neale points out that depending on context, the falsity of the ‘extra’ proposition generated by the ‘therefore’ in (5) may falsify the entire utterance, or it might not.

I do not mean to endorse Neale’s specific accounts of sentence connectives and appositives, but rather to give an example of someone who has motivated and clarified the idea of multiple propositions.

Now I want to contrast Neale’s examples of utterances that express multiple propositions with others that I believe support semantic stacking. The most powerful examples of stacking involve punning and wordplay.

(6) Two cargo ships, one carrying drums of red paint and the other carrying drums of blue paint, crash into each other on the high seas. The paints blend together in the water and cover the surviving crew members, who swim to a nearby island. The accident marooned the crew.

(7) A pirate who buries his gold by the river is putting it into the bank.

(6) involves a pun on ‘marooned,’ which can mean ‘stranded on an island’ or ‘colored maroon,’ and (7) plays on the multiple meanings of ‘bank.’ In both of these sentences, two propositions are being expressed. (7), for example, is funny because it cleverly forces the word ‘bank’ to do double duty: ‘bank’ figures in the claim that the pirate is putting his gold in a financial bank and in the claim that he is putting it into the river bank.

The features of (6) and (7) that are responsible for the expression of multiple propositions is very different from the mechanisms posited by Neale. For Neale, an second conjunct follows from the first. I think there’s no harm in saying that the sentence expresses two propositions: a single conjunctive proposition and then the additional one about the second conjunct following from the first. Second, it seems at times that Neale thinks ‘therefore’ expresses the ‘extra’ proposition due to a conversational implicature. However, I take the following quote to be his definitive position on the matter, “The semantics of therefore’ encodes the instructions that a first and a second proposition are to be seen as standing in some sort of consequence relation...” (22).
utterance can express multiple propositions as a consequence of an utterance’s syntax (apposition) or semantics (‘therefore’), but (7) relies on neither. There is no apposition in (7) and it contains no syntactical feature that mark the introduction of multiple propositions. The same goes for (7)’s semantics. It does not contain a conjunction and none of the words in it characteristically introduce subordinate clauses or express additional propositions. Rather, the multiple propositions expressed by (7) stem from the ambiguity of the word ‘bank.’

These considerations lead me to theorize semantic stacking as a pragmatic phenomenon that relies on the interaction between the words of a sentence with the context in which it is uttered. Ambiguity is involved, and so are the hearer/reader’s expectations as induced by the context. Before saying more, I’ll state my theory explicitly. An utterance (U) displays semantic stacking iff

(i) (U) contains an ambiguity.

(ii) Both possible disambiguations are acceptable in the sentence.

(iii) (U) and the context of its utterance contain two sets of features, each set of which would be sufficient to disambiguate (U) in the absence of the other.

These conditions could be summarized by saying that semantic stacking takes place when the context permits (ii), and in fact encourages (iii), both readings of an ambiguity (i).

(ii) and (iii) need the most explanation.

(ii) is needed because stacking can’t take place when one of the ambiguous readings is prohibited on physical, grammatical, probabilistic, conceptual, or logical grounds.

Despite that lengthy list, the general idea is simple: stacking is fragile and disappears when one of the meanings of the ambiguous term fits awkwardly into the sentence. The sentence below does not display stacking as a result of a conceptual obstacle; reading ‘funny’ as ‘humorous’ is prohibited on the grounds that a food cannot actually taste humorous.

- Two cannibals are eating a clown. One says to the other, “this tastes funny.”

The joke succeeds, but the sentence only expresses the proposition that the clown tastes strange and not the proposition that he tastes humorous, because the latter is not conceptually sensible.
Grammar can be another obstacle. ‘Wind’ is orthographically ambiguous between a weather event and the act of torquing something, yet it could not be the basis for semantic stacking in most sentences because the former is a noun and the latter is a verb.

(iii) is included because semantic stacking requires that the context and the utterance conspire to encourage both readings of the ambiguity that is present.

Example (6) makes this point. If the story were altered so that the paint mixed in a swimming pool, and references to an island and a shipwreck were removed, then the reading of ‘marooned’ as ‘stranded’ would become unattractive and the last sentence would not exhibit stacking. The same holds in the other direction. If references to ‘paint’ were taken out of the paragraph so that it only described a shipwreck, then ‘marooned’ would have its nautical meaning. The last sentence of that example would then be read as stating, exclusively, that the crew members were forced onto a remote island.

Most of the time, we don’t notice ambiguities because the situation decisively resolves them. If I say, “I got to the store and found out that I didn’t have any money, so I had to go to the bank,” there is no hesitation in understanding the sentence. The mention of money makes the financial reading of ‘bank’ obvious.

Sometimes though, an ambiguity is not immediately resolved and becomes the source of puzzlement. If I say, “I was halfway to the river when I ran out of money, so I went to the bank,” it’s natural to ask, “which ‘bank’ do you mean?” Crucially, in such situations, the meanings that are possible (financial versus river ‘bank’) are seen as rivals to each other, so that one or the other must be selected before the sentence can be assessed for truth or falsity. A reader/listener cannot understand the sentence until it is disambiguated.

By contrast, instances of stacking do not involve rivalry between meanings. Rather, both meanings enter the sentence simultaneously. An ambiguity is not resolved in favor of one meaning or another, but rather, embraced. The resulting utterance expresses two propositions built from the multiple meanings that are in use.

Evidence from cognitive psychology supports this observation. The humor of a pun for example, is theorized to result from the collision of two incompatible ‘schemas’ – cognitive models – relating to the meanings that are being played on. As Michael
Apter puts it, there is a “cognitive synergy” that combines the schemas for the different meanings involved. 6 For instance, in (7), the schema for a financial institution is activated side-by-side with the schema for the side of a river. The joke works by providing cues that reinforce both meanings of ‘bank’ as well as creating a possible situation where both meanings are relevant and attractive, given the context.

Most sentences fall short of semantic stacking because they lack the right confluence of disambiguating clues. In the sentence I gave above – “I was halfway to the river when I ran out of money, so I went to the bank.” – the default assumption is that the bank and the river are at different places, and so there is a felt need for disambiguation, not stacking. There is an urge to ask, “what type of bank do you mean?”

However, if one thought that the financial bank was on the riverbank, then that sentence would result in stacking and both meanings would be included in the sentence simultaneously rather than jockeying for a place in a singular interpretation of what the sentence says.

To summarize, semantic stacking takes place when a sentence expresses two propositions at once by exploiting an ambiguity. In most ambiguous sentences, a reader tries to understand which of two possible propositions is being expressed. “Sam went to the bank,” when seen as ambiguous, is exclusively disjunctive: it says either that Sam went to the river’s edge or to a financial institution. The reader doesn’t know which. On the other hand, when semantic stacking takes place, “Sam went to the bank” can express two propositions: that Sam went to the river’s edge and that he went to a financial institution. However, these two propositions are not necessarily conjuncts. Their truth or falsity may be related to the truth of the sentence in a complex, contextually sensitive way. 7

In what follows, I claim that mixed quotations instantiate semantic stacking, thus explaining their unique character. To show that, I argue that quotation marks must be treated as having ambiguous semantic content, and not as grounding an implicature, as Recanati argues. 8

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6(1982).
7This was Neale’s point about (4) above.
8See his (2008) and (2001).
3 Recanati’s Pragmatic Theory of Mixed Quotation

Recanati is right that a theory of quotation must deal with sentences like (1) above – what Recanati calls closed quotation – differently from sentences like (2) – what Recanati calls open quotation. But what about (3)?

I think that (3) is explained by stacking. The two different meanings of quotation marks that are used in (1) and (2) stack and so combine in a unique way in (3). Recanati on the other hand assimilates uses like (3) to uses like (2). I don’t think this is right. To see why, we need to see how he understands sentences like (2).

For Recanati, quotation marks as they are used in open quotations like (2) signal that the quoted material is echoing some prior utterance of those same words. For example, Kennedy said (8), and a writer can use those words in the same way Kennedy used them by just writing them out (without quotation marks). But further, a writer can use those words in the same way as Kennedy and signal that he is echoing Kennedy’s specific use of them in the 1961 inaugural address by putting them in quotes, as in (9) below.

(8) ...we shall pay any price, bear any burden, meet any hardship, support any friend, oppose any foe, to assure the survival and the success of liberty.

(9) I will “pay any price, bear any burden, meet any hardship” to find your lost dog.

(9’) I will pay any price, bear any burden, meet any hardship to find your lost dog.

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9 For convenience: (1) “Red” is a three letter word. (2) She only “tapped” him with her handbag. (3) Quine said that quotation “has a certain anomalous feature.”

10 In Recanati’s vocabulary, closed quotation is an open quotation that is recruited to act as a singular term in the sentence in which it is used. See his (2001, 647-656) and (2008, 443-444).

11 See his (2001, 638, 656-663) and (2008, 444).

12 Recanati spends some time explaining how echoing functions as a unique type of use. The easiest way to understand his conception is to think of mocking someone. If I walk in the door and say “it’s dreadfully hot outside” you could mock me by echoing those same words. You would be using those words, but in a tone of voice that indicates that someone (me) used them first. The difference between using the same words as me and echoing my words is the difference between using the words and using-them-in-the-same-way-as-me. See Recanati (2001, 648) and (2008, 444).
Critically, quote marks only signal and do not say that the enclosed words are echoing some other person. According to Recanati, (9) does not say that Kennedy originally said the words in quotes, or even that someone or other said them. All the writer says in (9) is that she will go to great lengths to find the lost dog. In fact, on Recanati’s view, (9) says the same thing as (9’), with the difference being that only the former signals to the reader that the words in quotes are being used echoically; that they have been used before (by Kennedy).

Recanati claims that (3) works in a similar way to the Kennedy sentence. It does not say that anyone said the quoted words. Rather, the sentence says the exact same thing as (3’), but signals that “has a certain anomalous feature” is echoing a previous use of those words.

(3’) Quine said that quotation has a certain anomalous feature.

But here there is a problem. Intuition says that for (3) to be true, Quine must have said the exact words “has an anomalous feature.” But if (3’) and (3) say the same thing, and (3’) does not attribute any words to Quine, then neither does (3). Recanati’s theory appears to have a serious flaw: it claims that mixed quotations do not say that the named speaker said the words in quotes.

To remedy the problem, Recanati appeals to pragmatic enrichment – a mechanism by which an implicature can be heard as part of the truth conditions for a sentence. In cases of enrichment, pragmatics is heard as semantics. Recanati’s (10) is a powerful example of enrichment at work.

(10) She took out her key and opened the door.

As a matter of semantics, (10) only says that a key was produced and that the door was opened. For all the semantics encodes, the door could have already been unlocked or a second, unmentioned, key could have been used to open it, but the average listener hears a connection between the key that was pulled out and the opening of the door. In other words, the average listener hears (10) as if it were

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13For convenience: (3) Quine said that quotation “has a certain anomalous feature.”

14See Recanati (2001, 671) and (2008, 450). As a side note, the (2001) phrasing of this example involved a man, and the (2008) example is about a woman.
saying the same thing as (10'), with italics indicating the content of the sentence that is supplied by enrichment.

(10’) She took out her key and opened the door with that very same key.

If Recanati is right about the power of enrichment, and I believe he is, then there seems to be an explanation for how (3) has truth conditions that go beyond its semantics. Continuing to use italics to represent the enriched content of a sentence, we can see that Recanati’s theory claims that (3) is heard as (3’). The quote marks in (3) serve as the basis for an implicature about Quine’s verbatim words. This implicature enters into what the sentence is perceived as saying via enrichment.

(3’’) Quine said that quotation has a certain anomalous feature with the following words: has a certain anomalous feature.

Applying the enrichment strategy gives a happy result to Recanati. He can maintain that Quine’s saying the exact words “has an anomalous feature” is an implicature of (3), but nevertheless one that a hearer experiences as being part of the truth conditions for the sentence, thus accommodating intuitions.

In spite of its attractive features, I don’t think a pragmatic theory of mixed quotation can withstand the following argument. 15

P1 If mixed quotation sentences implicate that the speaker said the exact words in quotes, then it should be possible to cancel that implicature without contradiction.

P2 It is not possible to cancel the implicature that the speaker in a mixed quotation sentence said the exact words in quotes.

C Mixed quotations do not implicate that the speaker said the exact words in quotes.

I dwell on this argument for two reasons. First, in the literature, Recanati has the last word on this argument, giving me an opportunity to address his most recent defense. Second, in the course of arguing against Recanati, I will establish that quotation marks are ambiguous, thus satisfying one requirement for semantic stacking.

15This argument is from Capellan and Lepore (2003, 66-67).
Premise 1 is a standard assumption about implicatures that Recanati accepts, so I won’t defend it. Instead, I’ll focus on premise 2, which Recanati rejects.

The support for premise 2 is strong. For instance, (11) feels like a contradiction.

(11) Alice said that Bill Clinton is “smooth,” but she never used “smooth.”

However, Recanati insists that (11) can sometimes be sensible, because context could change the implicature that the reader reaches on the basis of the quote marks. In most cases, a sentence like (11) will seem contradictory because it is nearly irresistible to reach the conclusion that ‘smooth’ is in quotes in order to signal that Alice said it. In some situations though, according to Recanati, the set of quotes around the first ‘smooth’ will signal something else, thus preventing a contradiction.

One such situation might involve a reader of (11) who uses ‘smooth’ all the time and knows that Alice almost never does. In such a situation, she might interpret ‘smooth’ as echoing herself rather than Alice. She would hear (11) as if it were something like (11’).

(11’) Alice said that Bill Clinton is “smooth,” as you would put it but she never used “smooth.”

In this situation, the automatic attribution of quoted words to the named speaker can be interrupted and the quote can be understood as being attributed to someone else, either to the reader or to some third party.

Another scenario in which (11) could be sensibly written involves scares quotes. In conversation, we sometimes use a sarcastic tone in reporting the speech of others. I might say, “Alice said the concert was really cool” in order to convey her low opinion of the show. Recanati claims that quotation marks can perform that same function in written speech. Ordinary speakers know these uses as scare-quotting.

When scare quotes are used, cancellation seems possible. I could write (12), to negate the implicature that Alice said the word ‘cool’ without contradiction. Here again, ‘cool’ is not being referred to, but rather used non-standardly (sarcastically)

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16This example is from Recanati (2008, 461).
to describe Alice’s statement about the concert. At the time, she might have used the word ‘lame.’

(12) Alice said the concert was really “cool,” but she didn’t use the word “cool.”

Do these two examples (third-party attribution and scare quotation) show that mixed quotations only implicate that someone said the quoted words, and that this implicature can be canceled after all? I don’t think so. They do show that contradictory-looking sentences involving quotation marks can be sensibly written in some contexts, but that by itself does not show that an implicature is being canceled because such data could be explained by the presence of an ambiguity. For example, it’s sometimes acceptable to write, “she went to the bank, but she didn’t go to the bank,” but when that sentence is acceptable, its acceptability stems from the ambiguity of ‘bank’ and not any type of cancellation. 19

In fact, a closer look at Recanati’s examples as well as a few others supports the conclusion that interpretations of quote marks change in ways that are characteristic of ambiguities and not implicatures. This is why ordinary speakers distinguish between normal quotes and scare quotes. Just as the average hearer automatically draws on context to disambiguate the sentence, “I went to the bank,” readers of sentences containing quotation marks are automatically reaching the meaning of the quote marks on the basis of situational and sentential clues.

To support this point, I want to compare Recanati’s cancellation scenarios with the cancellation of a garden variety implicature. Suppose someone asks if I want a beer and I respond by saying that I’m driving tonight. Though my response is not, as a semantic matter, a refusal, the implicature it generates is that of a refusal. I can however, easily cancel my refusal-implicature by saying, “but I’ll have a drink anyway.” Recanti’s scenarios diverge from this paradigm case of cancellation in two problematic ways.

The first problem has to do with Recanati’s posited mechanism for why (11) can be uttered sensibly in some contexts. He claims that a reader of (11) can read ‘smooth’ as echoing someone other than Alice if she knows that Alice never says

19Cappelen and Lepore note this alternate explanation in their criticism of Recanati. See (2003, 68-69).
‘smooth’ and that some other relevant party often does. 20 If this is correct, then the reader’s background beliefs are guiding interpretation, supporting the view that an implicature is at work.

This doesn’t work in most cases though, because a ‘said’ followed by an open quote and then a cancellation is stubbornly taken to be attributed to the named speaker, even in the face of knowledge about the original source of the quoted material. 21 (13) demonstrates this.

(13) In 1998, Newt Gingrich said that he “did not have sexual relations with that woman,” but he never said those words.

Many people will likely accept this sentence, and to agree with the negation clause (perhaps saying something like “that’s right, Gingrich didn’t say those words, Clinton did”), but they will not be able to articulate what the initial clause is actually claiming. They will not take (13) to be a contradiction but rather a misstatement followed by a subsequent correction. This reaction is in sharp contrast to someone who hears my refusal of a beer and then my subsequent cancellation. A hearer of those two utterances will realize that the cancellation of my implicated-refusal leaves the ‘literal’ meaning of my words intact, which was only that I was driving that night. There is no corresponding comprehension of the first clause of (13). Most hearers of (13) do not know what it claims once stripped of the supposed implicature that Gingrich said the words in quotes.

Second, Recanati’s claims about (11) 22 do not go far enough. In order to show that (11) behaves in a way that indicates an implicature, we need to imagine a case in which someone reads the first clause and does take it to be making a claim about Alice’s words, and then reads the negation clause and finds it unobjectionable. This is much harder to do since ordinary people will, once they take the first clause to be reporting Alice’s words, just throw up their hands after reading the negation clause and say “well then I don’t know what you’re trying to say!” rather than preserving the coherence of the sentence by switching the interpretation of ‘smooth’ to be echoing the words of a third party. Recanati is free to hypothesize that someone

20 See Recanati (2008, 461-462)
21 If it does work in (11), it is, I think, only because a single word is in quotes.
22 For convenience: (11) Alice said that Bill Clinton is “smooth,” but she never used “smooth.”
who knows that a third party commonly uses “smooth” would not be flummoxed by
the negation clause, but again, this is very different from the cancellation of most
implicatures. Most cancellations of implicatures don’t need special knowledge on the
part of the hearer to be comprehensible.

Up to this point I’ve been playing defense by arguing that Recanati’s (11) does
not support his pragmatic view. Now, I want to give an argument that tells against
it.

(12) Quine did not say that quotation has a certain anomalous feature, but he did
say that quotation has a certain anomalous feature.

(12’ ) Quine did not say that quotation “has a certain anomalous feature,” but he did
say that quotation has a certain anomalous feature.

Recanati claims that the semantics of (12) and (12’) are the same and that the
quotes in (12’) only add a pragmatic element, but that cannot be right because (12)
is a contradiction and (12’) is not.

The reason (12’) is not a contradiction is because there is a scope ambiguity in-
volving the ‘not.’ It can be understood as negating the following proposition: Quine
said that quotation has a certain anomalous feature. But the ‘not’ can also be inter-
preted as negating this proposition instead: Quine said the exact words “has a certain
anomalous feature.” If the ‘not’ is interpreted as performing the latter negation, then
(12’) is acceptable, because the reader interprets the sentence as saying that Quine
did not say the words “has a certain anomalous feature” but that he did express that
same thought with some other words. 23 Perhaps he said quotation “has a certain
weird feature.”

I think the combination of (12) and (12’) are a reason to be skeptical of Recanati’s
pragmatic theory. Below, I suggest a different account of mixed quotation based on
semantic stacking.

23I asked more than twenty ordinary speakers about this sentence: At the meeting James did not
say that we “should fire her immediately,” but he did say we should fire her immediately. A large
number responded in the way I predicted, by claiming that the sentence was acceptable and that it
claimed that James expressed the need to fire the person in question, but used different words to
express that thought.
Recall the necessary and sufficient conditions for an utterance to exhibit semantic stacking. 24 The first requirement (i) was that the utterance must contain an ambiguity, and mixed quotational sentences satisfy this by containing quotation marks which, I’ve been arguing, harbor two sets of semantic instructions. Normal quotes refer to the quoted material as a singular term. This type of semantic function is on display in sentences like: “Red” is a three letter word. Scare quotes however, do not refer to the quoted material and do not alter the semantic content of what they contain. This is the use of quote marks that is on display in a sentence like: She only “tapped” him with her handbag. 25 Ordinary thinking marks this distinction by distinguishing scare quotes from ordinary quotes.

The second requirement for a sentence to exhibit stacking is that both meanings of its ambiguous component must fit acceptably into the sentence (ii). This condition is satisfied by mixed quotations because both readings of the quotation marks can find their way into an expressed proposition. The non-referential (scare) use of quotation marks fits easily into the sentence since they don’t interfere with its ordinary semantic content. When the quotes marks are read as not referring to the material inside, the sentence reads as if no quote marks are present. (3) would read as: Quine said that quotation has a certain anomalous feature.

Things are little more complicated for the referential use of quote marks. Since referring to the quoted material precludes its ability to function in its normal semantic role, the sentence would be ill-formed if the referential use were just put directly into the syntax as written. The result would be: Quine said that quotation “[linguistic object].” The quote marks though function like the appositive commas in (4) to relate different portions of the sentence to the main verb. 26 The commas around ‘Albert Smith’ allow the sentence to communicate that the current mayor is Albert Smith without putting Albert Smith in the correct syntactic placement vis-a-vis the ‘is.’ The quote marks, on their referential reading, function the same way, connecting the

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24 For convenience: (i) (U) contains an ambiguity. (ii) Both possible disambiguations are acceptable in the sentence. (iii) (U) and the context of its utterance contain two sets of features, each set of which would be sufficient to disambiguate (U) in the absence of the other.

25 I think that the non-referential (scare) type of quote mark works very closely to how Recanati claims: as the grounds for a variety of implicatures. I disagree though that scare quotes are enough to account for mixed quotation by themselves.

26 For convenience: (4) The current mayor, Albert Smith, is a Republican.
quoted material to the verb ‘said’ while bypassing the rest of the sentence. Reading the quotes referentially results in the proposition: Quine said “has an anomalous feature.”

Last, a sentence, to display stacking, must encourage both readings of the ambiguous terms (iii). This happens in mixed quotations, which have features that encourage the reader to treat the quote marks as referential and some features that encourage the reader to treat the quote marks as non-referential.

Mixed quotations meet this requirement in virtue of having a report verb like ‘says’ followed by a quotation in which the quoted material plays its ordinary semantic role. Both of these features contribute to stacking. On the one hand, the use of the word ‘says’ followed by a quotation creates a strong presumption that someone’s words are being recounted verbatim (the exception that proves the rule is scare quoting, which only works when one or at most a few words are contained in quotes). Without a report verb, the attractiveness of reading quotes as referential is sharply reduced. On the other hand, the fact that the sentence would be ill-formed without the quoted material playing its ordinary semantic role encourages the reading that the quote marks are scare quotes. Both readings of the quote marks are encouraged by structural components of mixed quotations.

So mixed quotations, by and large, have features that prime expectations for both of the possible uses for quotation marks, just as the ‘maroon’ sentence makes both of the uses of that word attractive. The result — again, like the ‘maroon’ sentence — is that two things are said, not implicated, at once. The Quine sentence I’ve been using expresses, on my theory, the following two propositions simultaneously: (1) Quine said that quotation has a certain anomalous feature, and (2) Quine said, “has an anomalous feature.”

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

- Quine said that quotation has a certain anomalous feature
- Quine said “has a certain anomalous feature.”

Recall (9) for an example of this. (9) I will “pay any price, bear any burden, meet any hardship” to find your lost dog. The quote is unattached to a verb claiming that it was said and since it is not a direct object for any verb, it does not get perceived as referring to the quoted material.
A stacking account of mixed quotation is attractive for two reasons. First, it accounts for the belief that mixed quotational sentences, in most cases, are saying and not implicating that the named speaker said the quoted words. Cancellation feels like a contradiction because when stacking takes place, two sentences are being said simultaneously, thus making appended cancellation clauses into contradictions. If the Quine sentence says, in part, that Quine used the exact words “has an anomalous feature,” then claiming that he didn’t use those words takes back what was just said and creates a contradiction.

Second, just as ordinary disambiguation responds to the wider environment, so does stacking. This is why in some situations – when the contextual and semantic factors are just right – open quotations can appear to be cancelable in the ways Recanati elaborates. For example, (11) \(^{28}\) can be heard as non-contradictory when the contextual factors aren’t sufficient to induce stacking. I hypothesize that in (11), the combination of the hearer’s esoteric lexicon combined with the brevity of the quoted material eliminates the temptation to stack the two uses of quotation marks and instead triggers the reading of the quotation marks as being used exclusively in their non-referential (scare) way.

4 Conclusion

In this paper I argued for the existence of a linguistic phenomenon that I labeled semantic stacking, in which an ambiguity is not resolved in order to fit one meaning of the ambiguous term into a single proposition. Instead, both ambiguous meanings become components of two separate propositions. The result is that a single utterance pragmatically expresses multiple propositions.

I then showed how this phenomenon can be used profitably in a theory of mixed quotation. Recanati’s theory goes wrong in supposing that mixed quotations have a primary, semantic level, and then a secondary pragmatic level that is responsible for the belief that the named speaker in such sentences actually said the words in quotes. Instead, the resistance of mixed quotations to cancellation as well as their behavior under negation shows that rather than saying one thing and implicating something

\(^{28}\)For convenience: Alice said that Bill Clinton is “smooth,” but she never used “smooth.”
further, they say two things. Such sentences say that the named speaker made a claim, but also that he or she used certain words to make that claim. At first, it’s puzzling how quotation marks could allow a sentence to say two things with the same word tokens, especially since use and mention usually exclude each other. Semantic stacking though shows how mixed quotations can use and mention the quoted material by exploiting the ambiguous nature of quote marks, an ambiguity ordinary speakers implicitly recognize by distinguishing scare quotes from ordinary quotes.

References


