Quotation, Demonstration, and Attraction in Sign Language Role Shift[*]

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Abstract

Schlenker defends an analysis of sign language role shift as 'visible context shift'. I argue that we should abandon this approach in favor of a more traditional quotation-based one. The key ingredient needed to make this traditional approach into a viable formal semantic alternative is a semantics of quotation that is flexible enough to handle both attitude and action role shift. Davidson has recently provided just that. I propose some modifications to Davidson's approach to bring it in line with more traditional analyses of quotation, and to counter Schlenker's objection involving perspective mixing.

1 Schlenker: Role shift as visible context shift

Sign language researchers have devoted a lot of attention to role shift, a way of reporting what someone said, signed, thought or did. Typically, role shift is characterized as a kind of direct quotation, involving a shift of the body or eye gaze away from the current addressee, and allowing the signer to sign "from the perspective of the reported speaker", i.e. depicting the reported (utterance) event by re-enacting it.

In formal semantics however, following the success of Schlenker's (2003) 'Plea for Monsters' in spoken languages, the received view has quickly become that role shift is a kind of visible context shift (Zucchi, 2004; Quer, 2005, 2011; Herrmann & Steinbach, 2012). Role shift is not a form of quotation but the realization of an operator that manipulates context parameters (or context variables) in such a way that indexicals in its scope receive a shifted interpretation.

In recent years, Schlenker has been emphasizing some of the shortcomings of the simple monster approach for role shift. Firstly, in Catalan and German sign languages, Anand's (2006) putative universal SHIFTTOGETHER constraint on context shifting is violated: multiple 'shiftable' indexicals within a single role-shifted clause can be shifted or unshifted independently of each other (Quer, 2005; Herrmann & Steinbach, 2007). Moreover, role shift appears to be quite opaque, in the sense that ellipsis, NPI licensing and wh-extraction across the role shift boundaries are not (consistently) licensed.[1] Finally, role shift tends to be interpreted "maximally iconically". To illustrate, if Mary reports an utterance of John with a big smile, her big smile is interpreted as an iconic representation – a demonstration – of John's happiness rather than of Mary's own happiness. This iconic aspect, previously neglected in the formal semantics literature, leads Schlenker to a somewhat complicated account involving a monstrous operator and a principle of iconicity maximization.

In light of the above complications, Schlenker briefly considers but rejects a simpler quotational alternative approach, which prima facie would be in a better position to explain the observed indexical shifts, opacity effects, and iconicity maximization. Schlenker's first argument against a quotation approach is the fact that role shift is not restricted to reporting utterances, but is often used also to report thoughts, attitudes, and even entirely non-linguistic actions (so-called action role shift).

I concur that a straightforward implementation in terms of mixed quotation (as attempted in Maier 2016) fails to extend to action role shift, and, worse, fails to account for iconicity effects. However, since Davidson (2015), there is a more powerful approach to quotation on the market, one which promises to overcome these limitations. Davidson's main idea goes back to Clark & Gerrig (1990) who argue that "quotations are a type of demonstration. Just as you can demonstrate a tennis serve, a friend's limp, or the movement of a pendulum, so you can demon-

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[1]Schlenker reports data from one ASL informant who does allow wh-extraction. However, this informant also allows wh-extraction out of genuine direct discourse quotation (marked with the "finger-quoting" gesture/sign).

strate what a person did in saying something" (p.764). In other words, what we typically refer to as direct discourse is just a special case of a pragmatic mechanism of demonstration, i.e., reporting what happened not by describing it in words, but by re-enacting or 'depicting' salient aspects of it.

Sign language researchers outside of formal semantics have already widely adopted this kind of uniform, pragmatic approach to action and attitude role shift or, as they call it, constructed action and constructed dialogue (cf. e.g. Metzger 1995; Cormier et al. 2013). For these authors role shift just signals that we're leaving description mode and entering demonstration mode. Action role shift is a demonstration of what someone did; attitude role shift is a special case, a linguistic demonstration of a linguistic act, i.e., an utterance.

One of the main benefits of such an approach would be that we can get rid of Schlenker's modality-specific 'Super Monsters' in favor of a simpler account where iconicity falls out automatically (since, as Davidson and Schlenker agree, a demonstration is nothing more than an iconic representation). All we need to bring this simple approach into formal semantics, is a compositional analysis of the use of demonstration. Davidson (2015) has recently provided just that. In the remainder of this paper I reconstruct Davidson's approach, and then propose a modification and an extension.

2 Davidson: Role shift as demonstration

Davidson formalizes Clark & Gerrig's (1990) demonstration account of direct quotation. As she observes, contra Schlenker, sign language role shift is not all that special, the *be-like* construction in spoken English functions in much the same way. In Davidson's analysis, *like* introduces a demonstration of an event. This could be a verbal demonstration of a speech event, as in (1a), or some other kind of non-linguistic gesture demonstrating an event.

(1)   a.   John was like "I'm happy"
       b.   Bob was eating like [gobbling gesture].

$$\Big[\text{Schlenker's (87ab), citing Davidson 2015}\Big]$$

Davidson proposes the following semantics for (1a), in which d_1 denotes the event of the reporter uttering "I'm happy", and where *demonstration*(d, e) means that d is an event that reproduces some contextually salient properties of event e.

(2)   a.   like $\leadsto \lambda d\lambda e[demonstration(d, e)]$
      b.   (1a) $\leadsto \exists e[agent(e, john) \wedge demonstration(d_1, e)]$

In words, (1a) tells us that there is an event in which John did something similar to the reporter's uttering "I'm happy". This could be the event of John uttering precisely the words "I'm happy", but it could also be that John said something like "I'm glad it all worked out", or even just produced a big smile (if the context counts expressing happiness as the relevant feature being conveyed by the reporter).

 Davidson's minimalistic logical forms thus leave a lot of room for pragmatics. This may be ok for colloquial *be-like* quotations like (1a), and also for action reports (3a), and role shift (3b).

(3)   a.   (1b) $\leadsto \exists e[agent(e, bob) \wedge eat(e) \wedge demonstration(d_2, e)]$
                  (where d_2 denotes the reporter's gobbling gesture)
      b.   JOHN $\overline{\text{IX1 HAPPY}}^{\text{RS}}$ ('John's like, "I'm happy"')
           $\leadsto \exists e[agent(e, john) \wedge demonstration(d_3, e)]$
                  (where d_3 denotes the reporter's signing 'I'm happy' in ASL)

However, this amount of semantic underspecification is perhaps less desirable when we extend the account in the other direction, to overt say-reports in less colloquial or written modalities.

(4)   a.   John said, "I'm happy"
      b. $\exists e[agent(e, john) \wedge say(e) \wedge demonstration(d_1, e)]$

Let's say we're in a context where John's saying "Hurray" or "Well done, guys" with a beaming smile (or in a depressed monotone) expresses a very similar emotion as the reporter's saying "I'm happy" with a similarly beaming smile (or in a similarly depressed monotone, respectively). Even in such a context we would not necessarily count (4a) as a felicitous report of John's "Hurray"/"Well done". Especially, (4a) were written out, we'd expect some degree of specifically *linguistic* similarity between report and source (cf. the verbatimness constraint of Maier 2014).[2] In the following I will work out the intuition that at least canonical, written direct discourse constructions involving verbs like *say* (or *write*) followed by quotation marks restrict the type of similarity involved to similarity of linguistic

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[2]Moreover, it's not so clear to me how we are to understand a static, printed inscription as a demonstration event, or how such an "inscription event" could demonstrate a genuine utterance event, like someone signing or speaking very slowly.

surface form.

3   A more traditional approach to direct discourse across modalities

Davidson's proposal constitutes a radical departure from the traditional, logico-philosophical analyses of quotation. In this section I want to take a step back and show a way to incorporate Davidson's insights in an otherwise conservative traditional framework. I will use the resulting framework to overcome one of Schlenker's objections to Davidson in the next section.

In traditional analyses of quotation, direct discourse is a way to report the linguistic form of a speech act. To model reference to forms semantically we add a type u and a corresponding domain of linguistic entities D_u, usually thought of as the set of strings of letters in a given alphabet (Potts, 2007). I'll use Quine hooks to refer to such strings in the formal metalanguage, following the so-called disquotational principle:

(5)   If σ is a string of letters ($\in D_u$), then $\ulcorner \sigma \urcorner$ is an expression of type u and $[\![\ulcorner \sigma \urcorner]\!] = \sigma$.

With this bit of extra formalism we can immediately describe so-called pure quotation (*'dog' has three letters*), and perhaps the type of literal quotation found in academic writing. We can extend it to other modalities by including strings of phonemes or signs in our domain of linguistic entities. By adding a notion of context-dependent similarity between linguistic forms we can perhaps push it a bit further still (Maier, 2014), but the more fluid and iconic types of event demonstration in spoken or signed language will remain out of reach.

To overcome the above limitation of the classical logic of quotation, I first incorporate Davidson's idea of speech reports as ways of describing speech events (cf. also Brasoveanu & Farkas 2007, among others). I assume that speech events are a special subtype of events, viz. events that have both a content (intension and extension) and a form, in addition to the usual event properties like agent, time, theme etc. (Maier, forthcoming). We can then analyze direct discourse as specifying the form of some earlier utterance event.[3]

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[3]By analogy, indirect discourse specifies the propositional content of the reported speech event (cf. Maier forthcoming).

(6)   a.   John said "You're an idiot"

       b. $\exists e[say(e) \wedge agent(e, john) \wedge form(e, \ulcorner$You're an idiot$\urcorner)]$

I propose to introduce this semantics, most directly applicable to written direct discourse, alongside Davidson's semantics of *be-like* action reports in spoken language. This means that for gestural action reports we leave it entirely to pragmatics in what sense the reporter's action resembles/reproduces the original, while for canonical, written direct quotation we semantically restrict it to similarity of form. Compositionally, I suggest that it's the quotation marks that introduce the form restriction,[4] while *like* introduces demonstration.

(7)   a.   like $\rightsquigarrow \lambda d \lambda e$ [demonstration(d,e)]

       b.   "…" $\rightsquigarrow \lambda q \lambda e$ [form(e,q)]

     Crucially, in speech and signing, we can and often do combine both reporting styles. That is, when I utter (8a) I simultaneously quote Mary's words and demonstrate her tone of voice and gestures:[5,6]

(8)   a.   So then Mary was like, <high, creaky voice>"Oy! get off my lawn, you!"<shakes fist>

       b. $\exists e[agent(e, mary) \wedge form(e, \ulcorner$Oy! get off my lawn, you!$\urcorner) \wedge demonstr(d_5, e)]$
(where d_5 is the reporter's purported reproduction of Mary's voice, speech and gesture)

Back to sign language. I suggest that attitude role shift is a combination of quotation and demonstration, as in (8), while action role shift is mere demonstration, as in (1b). Applied to Schlenker's iconically enriched attitude role shift example:

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[4]Following Sudo (2013), we could appeal to a special composition rule, QFA (Quotational Function Application), to ensure that the argument of of the quotation function is of type *u*, i.e. a $\ulcorner \urcorner$ term (by analogy with the well-known IFA rule from Heim & Kratzer 1998).

[5]In (8) the quotation combines with a *be-like* construction, without an overt saying verb. However, the quotation marks presuppose that the reported event has a linguistic form, which means it must be linguistic (e.g. speech, thought, signing). With an overt say-verb the demonstration marker is usually not spelled out overtly in English (**he said like "Oh no!"*). Interestingly, in Dutch we typically find *zeggen* ('say') combined with an overt quotative marker *van* ('of'/'like'), as in *hij zei van "Oh nee"* ('he said like "Oh no"').

[6]For compositional implementation, note that *like* does not take scope over the quotation marks: *like* takes a demonstration, i.e. an action performed by the reporter, while the quotation marks take a phonological representation of the words as a string of letters. Working this out will require a multi-dimensional representation of utterances and/or the addition of dedicated composition (or type-shifting) rules for quotation (QFA) and demonstration.

(9)   a.   …YESTERDAY IX-a ANGRY. IX-a SAY $\overline{\text{IX-1 WILL LEAVE}}^{\text{RS}}$:)

       b.   …yesterday he was angry. He said, <smiling>"I will leave"

       c.   … $\exists e[\ldots \wedge say(e) \wedge agent(e, a) \wedge form(e, \ulcorner\text{IX-1 WILL LEAVE}\urcorner)$

$$\wedge\, demonstration(d_6, e)]$$

(where d_6 is the reporter's smiling while signing 'I will leave' in ASL)

In sum, I've complicated Davidson's radical demonstration analysis somewhat to make it continuous with the traditional analysis of written quotation in terms of reference to strings. The resulting analysis covers (i) strict written direct discourse (as pure form quotation), (ii) iconic multimodal quotative speech reports in speech and signing (as form quotation + event demonstration), (iii) and even non-linguistic action reports (as pure event demonstration). The account posits no fundamental distinction between speech and sign. The only difference is between full face-to-face communication (where the reporter can easily demonstrate events iconically) and more indirect means of communication (such as talking on the phone, instagramming, or publishing academic prose) where the potential for demonstration is more limited in varying degrees and dimensions.

4   Mixed perspective as unquotation and attraction

In discussing Davidson's demonstration account, Schlenker refers the reader to his earlier objections in 'Super Monsters II'. One salient objection there is that "Davidson doesn't say how her account would extend to languages such as Catalan and German Sign Language, which according to the literature allow for mixing of perspectives" (Schlenker forthcoming-:32-33). The examples of mixing typically involve a role shift with a shifted first person (IX-1) and an additional unshifted indexical, usually a temporal or locative one (Quer, 2005; Herrmann & Steinbach, 2012; Hübl, 2013).

In previous work I've discussed similar mixing of perspectives within the person domain. For instance, in a small pilot experiment[7] we showed that signers of

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[7]Martine Zwets and I ran a pilot experiment in 2012 where we presented videos of signed utterances, followed by role shift reports, to (near-)native signers of NGT, and asked them to judge the appropriateness of a given role shift report of a previous original utterance. Hübl (2016) reports similar findings for DGS with this methodology.

Dutch sign language judge (10b) to be an adequate report of (10a), thus apparently interpreting the first IX-1 in (10b) as shifted (referring to Martine), and the second as unshifted (referring to Macha).[8]

(10)　a.　Martine's original utterance: IX-1 BETTER SIGN THAN MACHA

　　　b.　Macha's report: MARTINE $\overline{\text{IX-1 BETTER SIGN THAN IX-1}}^{\text{RS}}$
　　　　　≈ 'Martine said she's a better signer than Macha'　　　[Maier 2016]

Similarly, signers judged (11b) to be an adequate report of (11a), despite the fact that the original signer used fingerspelling rather than a pointing sign. This means that the pointing (to a picture of Cruijff) in the report is neither strictly speaking quoted, nor interpreted relative to a shifted context, but simply interpreted relative to the actual context of the report.

(11)　a.　IX-1 THINK C-R-U-I-J-F-F BEST SOCCER PLAYER
　　　　　'I think Cruijff is the best soccer player.'

　　　b.　MARTINE $\overline{\text{IX-1 THINK IX-a}_{\text{pointing-to-Cruijff-picture}} \text{BEST SOCCER PLAYER}}^{\text{RS}}$
　　　　　≈ 'Martine said she thinks Cruijff is the best soccer player'　[Maier forthcoming]

　　As Schlenker points out, his original monster implementation, in terms of covert context variables, is flexible enough to handle such perspective mixing, while both the Anand-style account of context shifting and Davidson's demonstration account seem unable to handle it. Davidson responds as follows:

> the lack of shifting together among variables in Catalan and German sign language can be implemented through the demonstration relation as long as the indexicals that shift are iconic for purposes of demonstration. This makes the prediction that more iconic indexicals will shift before less iconic indexicals under role shift. (Davidson 2015:502)

But it's not clear that this prediction is borne out. First of all, sign language pronouns are not so much iconic as indexical. Although, as Schlenker argues, sign language pronouns have the potential for carrying 'iconic features', they primarily refer by pointing rather than by similarity. Second, even if some indexicals are inherently iconic, what about cases like (10) and (11b) where the mixing of perspectives involves two simple pointings that are arguably wholly indexical? Below I'll show that mixed perspective examples are better explained by a slightly

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[8]See Engberg-Pedersen 1995 for a description of similar examples of unshifted first person in role shift, taken from a corpus of naturally occurring utterances in Danish sign language.

more traditional quotational theory like the one sketched above, provided that we add a semantics and pragmatics of unquotation.

4.1   The semantics of unquotation

In certain genres of writing, square brackets are used to indicate editorial adjustments to a quotation.

(12)   "Look at those hands," Trump boasted, "are they small hands? And, [Republican rival Marco Rubio] referred to my hands, saying that if they're small, something else must be small."

Semantically, unquotation brackets indicate that the material inside is to be interpreted "from the reporter's perspective," i.e., outside the scope of the quotation. I propose that we use this unquotation mechanism to describe the truth conditions of mixed perspective cases:

(13)   MARTINE $\overline{\text{IX-1 BETTER SIGN THAN [IX-1]}}^{\text{RS}}$
       ≈ 'Martine said, "I'm a better signer than [me]"'

Formally, the idea is that unquoted expressions specify a referent, while the surrounding quotation specifies the literal linguistic form. I use the symbol $^\cap$ to denote concatenation of (strings of) signs, and $e' \sqsubset e$ to indicate that e' (here: the event of Martine uttering a referential term referring to Macha) is a subevent of e (here: the entire reported utterance event by Martine).

(14) $\exists e \exists e' \sqsubset e[agent(e, martine) \wedge$
       $form(e, \ulcorner \text{IX-1 BETTER SIGN THAN} \urcorner {}^\cap form(e')) \wedge referent(e') = macha$
       $\wedge demonstration(d, e)]$

In words, (14) asserts the existence of an event e with linguistic form given by the sequence of ASL signs IX-1, BETTER, SIGN, and THAN, followed by some underspecified sign(s) the reference of which is/are fixed by the unquoted material (IX-1) as signed by the reporter (Macha). Finally, as before, any iconic elements in the reporter's signing will be interpreted as a simultaneous demonstration, d, of the reported utterance event e.

4.2 The pragmatics of attraction

With unquotation we can adequately represent the truth conditions of mixed perspective cases, but merely stipulating covert unquotation of unshifted indexicals is not an analysis. We need a pragmatic story about when, and why, indexicals get unquoted. Inspired by Evans's (2012) notion of attraction, (Maier, forthcoming) sketches such a story, starting with spoken languages (including examples from Kwaza, colloquial English, and child language experiments), and extending it to sign language and free indirect discourse.

Evans (2012) coins the term 'speech act participant attraction', to describe a pragmatic mechanism that gives rise to unshifting inside quotation in some spoken languages. For clarity, let's formulate his putative pragmatic principle as a production constraint:

(15) ATTRACTION: when talking about the most salient speech act participants in your immediate surroundings, use indexicals to refer to them directly.

Concretely, this entails that a speaker should always use *I* to refer to herself (rather than, say, *the speaker* or *Emar*),[9] and *you* to refer to her current addressee. Note that I'm using 'refer' here in its pragmatic sense, i.e., a speaker using an expression to refer to something. By 'referring directly' I mean choosing an indexical that picks out its referent by being evaluated relative to the current utterance context. In that sense, indexicals in direct discourse reports may be used to refer *indirectly*. For instance, in *John said, "I am here"*, the indexicals *I* and *here* are used to refer indirectly to John and the place where he made his utterance.

The possibility of indirect reference in direct discourse points to a potential conflict between the semantics of direct discourse and the pragmatics of attraction. Specifically, a conflict arises in cases where we want to quote an utterance about someone who saliently participates in the reporting speech act, but who played a different role in the original speech act. This is exactly what happens in the mixed perspective cases above.[10] In (10), Martine used the name-sign MACHA to refer to Macha as a third person. Somehow, Macha overheard (or

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[9]This corollary is a slight generalization of a constraint on self-reference in Danish sign language observed by Engberg-Pedersen (1995): "signers are very resistant to refer to present entities by anaphoric pronouns; they never use the non-first pronoun … to refer to themselves."

[10]In Quer's example, discussed by Schlenker, it's place rather than a person that features saliently in the reporting context, i.e. it's the very location where the report takes place, and that also featured in the reported context, but in a different role.

was told) what Martine said about her signing abilities and wants to report this to someone else. According to our semantics of direct discourse Macha should just reproduce Martine's signs as best she can (optionally adding a demonstration of Martine's gestures, facial expression, emotion, signing speed, dialect etc.). In particular, she should use the name-sign MACHA to refer to herself. But this would constitute indirect self-reference, which conflicts with ATTRACTION.

Unquotation is a way to resolve such a conflict.[11] By unquoting the problematic indexical, as in the logical form with unquoted IX-1 in (14), we satisfy ATTRACTION, referring to the current signer with a first person pronoun, without violating our semantics (because the semantics of unquotation effectively puts unquoted material outside the scope of the form-faithfulness requirement).

5   Conclusion

Schlenker breaks with a cognitive/pragmatic tradition in the study of sign language role shift by claiming that role shift is the overt realization of a monstrous operator. He uses this to support the general claim that sign language is essentially more expressive than spoken or written language, since monstrous operators are never overtly realized there.

Davidson's compositional semantics of demonstration promised a simpler alternative approach, in line with the cognitive/pragmatic tradition, unifying action and attitude role shift with direct discourse and *be-like* quotatives in spoken language. However, Schlenker rightly objects that such an approach can't handle mixed perspective cases found in German and Catalan sign languages. To deflect this objection I combined a classical, logico-philosophical account of quotation (as reference to forms) with a Davidsonian flexible pragmatics/semantics of event demonstration. In this framework I then added a semantics of unquotation and a pragmatics of attraction to deal with mixed perspective cases.

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