Internet demonstrations: Using quotation and demonstration in written language

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Davidson (2015) first noted that analyses of quotation have neglected to account for how quotation actually occurs in spoken language. She provides a demonstration based analysis of quotation in spoken language, which accounts for iconic enrichments, such as gestures and prosodic modulations, that often accompany spoken quotations. The goal of this research is to extend this analysis to examples of reported speech on the internet, which also frequently feature reports of action alongside the reported speech. Typical examples can be seen in Figure 1. Although these kinds of speech and action reports are very common on social media platforms like Twitter, Instagram and Tumblr, as far as we are aware, there have been no previous attempts to provide a semantic analysis of such instances of reported speech. In this analysis, we propose to follow Davidson (2015) and analyse the action reports as a form of internet demonstration, somewhat comparable to gestures and prosodic modulation that may accompany reported speech in spoken language.
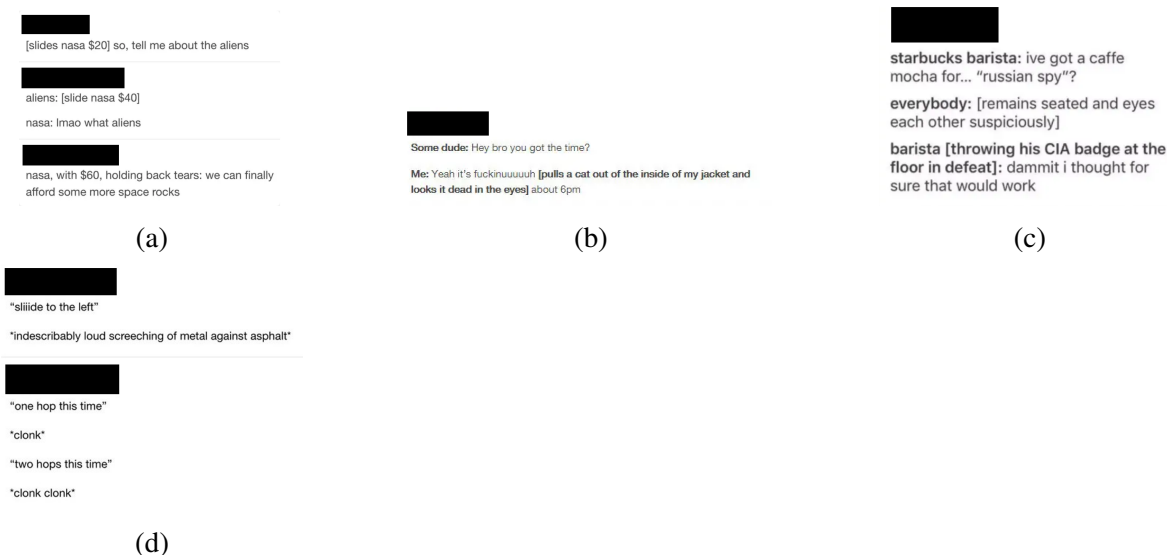

Figure 1: Examples of internet demonstrations from Golder (2019)

The general form of social media speech reports is the speaker's name followed by a colon and then the reported speech and/or action. The action reports may be interspersed throughout the quoted speech, as in (1a) and (1b) to indicate actions or sounds occurring at different points during the reported event, or alongside the speaker's name before the colon, as in (1a) and (1c), and sometimes they occur after the colon, but without any accompanying quotation, also as in (1a). The action reports are generally marked with asterisks or square brackets and use distinct morphology, in contrast to the reported speech which is direct quotation. This morphology consists of the third person inflection or the gerund in English, as in (1a),(1b) and (1c), for example, or reduced conjugation in German. There are also cases where the action report occurs without any quotation present, as in (1d).

Davidson (2015) analyses quotation in spoken language as a demonstration, *d*, which allows for the iconic enrichments such as gestures or prosodic modulation, which frequently occur alongside

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these quotations, as can be seen in (1).

(1)   a.   And Bill was like [that's not fair]_WHINY VOICE.
        b.   And Bill was like + GOBBLING GESTURE

Davidson (2015) argues that the demonstrative *like* provides the demonstration argument in quotations and that the demonstration stands in a *demonstration-of* relation to the reported speech event, where *demonstration(d,e)* applies just in case *d* reproduces relevant aspects of *e*.

The examples of iconic enrichments alongside reported speech in (1) clearly resemble the internet demonstrations observed alongside reported speech on social media. They seem to behave in a similar manner and to add similar information to their accompanying reports of speech. However, there is a crucial difference between internet demonstrations and iconic enrichments in spoken quotation; internet demonstrations are not iconic, as they are written and therefore employ a conventionalised system of arbitrary signs. As such, they are not directly gestural in the same manner that prosodic modulation or manual gestures would be in spoken language and cannot be modelled via a *demonstration-of* relation as proposed by Davidson (2015). As such, the demonstration argument is not necessary for this analysis, as there is no need to model an iconic relation.

Instead, I propose an analysis of reported speech and action on social media using events and subevents. The conventionalised form of introducing the speech and/or action report, namely a speaker or agent's name followed by a colon, introduces an main event argument. Quoted speech, which is generally direct speech and therefore marked by first person inflection, introduces a subevent of the main event. This is then an event of speaking, which will also result in the introduction of the covert predicate *speak*, which takes the reported speech as its complement. The conventionalised markers of internet demonstrations, such as an asterisk or square brackets or third person inflection, then introduce a further subevent of the main event, which is the reported action event. These subevents can stand in differing relations to each other within the main event.

Based on this, we can give the following analysis of the reported speech and demonstration in (2-a) (taken from 1c) as in (2-b), which is roughly glossed as in **??**.

(2)   a.   Barista: [throwing his CIA badge on the floor in defeat] Dammit, I thought for sure it would work.
        b. $[e] \wedge$ agent$(e,x) \wedge$ barista$(x) \wedge [e'] \wedge e' \subseteq e \wedge$ throws-CIA-badge-on-the-floor-in-defeat$(e') \wedge [e''] \wedge e'' \subseteq e$speak$(e'') \wedge$ form$(e'') = $ "Dammit, I thought for sure it would work" $\wedge$

Here the construction *Barista:* introduces the main event *e* and posits the barista as the agent of this event and therefore all subevents. The square brackets then introduce the subevent *e'*, which contains the action report that the barista throws his CIA badge on the floor in defeat. Finally, the speech report beginning with *Dammit, I thought* introduces a second subevent, an event of speaking and therefore also introduces the covert predicate *speak*, whose complement is the speech report of what the barista said.

The alignment of the quoted speech and the demonstration also seems to play a role in the interpretation of the demonstration. This can be seen in Figure (1b), where the event of pulling the cat out of the jacket is clearly supposed to be interpreted as occurring part way through the speech event. The analysis proposed here then allows for the main event to be split into several subevents, which can then stand in differing temporal relations to each other. For example, (2-a), the subevent

of the barista speaking and the subevent of throwing their badge on the floor occur simultaneously, whereas in Figure (1b), the action event of removing the cat from the jacket occurs partway through the speech event. Ironing out the exact details of this temporal alignment is left to future research.

This analysis can furthermore account for cases where the agent's name followed by a colon is used in combination with an image or gif, in place of written language, in order to indicate the actions of the agent. In this case, the action report clearly relies upon an iconic relation between the image and the reported agent's actions. While the *agent:* still introduces a main event, the use of an image generates two implicatures; firstly that there is a subevent of *e*, *e'*, which is the event of the agent's actions and secondly that the gif is a demonstration of this subevent *e'*. This is best illustrated with the example in 2, where the gif is a short clip of man jumping off a balcony before landing on a stage transformed as a popstar singing. The Bonnie Tyler song "Holding out for a Hero" plays in the background.

Me:

Figure 2: Source: @itslitgayshit Instagram Reel

This can be analysed as in (3-b).

(3)   a.   me: [Gif of man jumping over balcony as "Hero" plays in the background]
        b. $[e] \wedge \text{agent}(e,\text{SPEAKER}) \wedge [e'] \wedge e' \subseteq e \wedge [d] \wedge d = d_{gif} \wedge demonstration(d,e)$

Here the construction *me:* again introduces a main event. The use of a gif within this construction then implies that there is a subevent of *e*, *e'*, which is the event of the speaker's actions and that the gif is a demonstration of this event and therefore these actions.

An additional question regarding these internet demonstrations concerns their at-issue status. Ebert & Hinterwimmer (in draft) argue that iconic enrichments, such as gestures and prosodic modulations, which accompany reported speech are by default not at-issue. Whether this is also the case for internet demonstrations also requires further empirical investigation. When they occur alongside reported speech, the action reports do appear to be not at-issue. Take the final part of Figure 1c: while it seems acceptable to directly target the reported speech of the barista with a denial, it seems somewhat odd to target the information given in the demonstration, as can be seen

in (4).

(4)   a.   A: Barista: [throwing his CIA badge on the floor in defeat] Dammit, I thought for sure it would work.

        b.   B: That's not true, the barista didn't say that!

        c.   B': # That's not true, the barista didn't throw his badge on the floor!

In cases where the demonstrations occur within such quotation structures, but without any accompanying reported speech as in (1a), we argue that they resemble *pro-speech gestures* (cf. Schlenker 2018) and are necessarily at-issue due to the lack of any other at-issue content in the utterance and that this would also be the case for examples such as 2. There are also likely to be cases where the demonstration does occur with reported speech and is still at-issue, though when and how this could be the case remains to be determined.

These social media demonstrations are very similar to cases of spoken quotation with *be like*, which not only indicates the resemblance of internet language to spoken language, but also highlights how speakers compensate for the one dimensional nature of internet communication. Faced with a lack of multimodality and access to iconicity, which they would normally exploit when reporting speech in spoken language, social media users have developed new conventions for introducing descriptions of non-verbal actions alongside speech reports, allowing them to enhance their narratives and to include these aspects, even when restricted to the written medium. This in turn provides evidence for the argument initially made by Davidson (2015) that demonstrations play a key role in quotation; even in the written modality, speakers will seek to incorporate demonstrations in their utterances.

References

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