The interplay between quotation and referentiality: An empirical investigation into name-mentioning constructions

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This paper presents a large-scale corpus investigation into quotational constructions involving the predicate *call* as in the sentence *This natural phenomenon is called a "moonbow"*. The nominal mentioned in the quotation, i.e. *a "moonbow"*, adopts a referring interpretation. Importantly, the determiner preceding the quoted nominal is optional. The study puts evidence forward that names used in name-mentioning constructions that are accompanied by a determiner differ referentially from nominals without a determiner. Our corpus data provides evidence that there are significantly more valid name-mentioning constructions with a determiner which we interpret as indicating a difference in referential salience.

1 Introduction

Name-mentioning constructions (NMC), as in (1a), are a type of quotational construction used to point to linguistic shapes and inform the addressee about the name of a lexical concept.

(1) a.   This piece of writing is commonly called (a) "short story".

    b.   *A "short story" has three syllables.

NMCs involve naming verbs such as *call* or *refer to as* that function as name-selecting predicates. Name-selecting predicates typically involve three arguments, as shown in (2a): an (implicit) agent x (*one*), a theme y (*phenomenon*), and the name z (*moonbow*) of the theme y.

(2) a.   This natural phenomenon is called "moonbow".

    b.   This natural phenomenon is called a "moonbow".

    c.   *This natural phenomenon is called a "moonbow" but this phenomenon is not a "moonbow".

The event argument in the NMC in (2a) adopts a generic meaning. The semantics of the verb *call* entails a copular relation (Matushansky 2008; Härtl 2020), more specifically, an identificational copular relation in which the two nominals are referentially identified, which can be used to explain the referentiality of the quoted material.
Evidence for the assumption of an implicit copula comes from the fact that popular relations cannot be negated, as shown in (2c). Evidence for the assumption of an implicit copula comes from the fact that copular relations cannot be negated, as shown in (2c). Assuming that the speaker "verdically commits" (see Giannakidou & Mari 2019) to the truth of the utterance, i.e. that the phenomenon is a moonbow. The semantics of the nominal does not deviate from the conventionalized semantics, meaning that the nominal is used non-metaphorically. In sentence (2a-b), we are dealing with the same meaning of *moonbow,* and the negation in (2c) renders the sentence illogical and hence unacceptable. In other words, to call a phenomenon "moonbow" entails that the phenomenon is a moonbow.

1.2 NMCs and the use-mention distinction

In comparison to a sentence like *Kassel is a city in Hesse*, in which the word "Kassel" is used with its customary reference, the expression "Kassel" is mentioned in constructions like

"Kassel" has six letters, describing the linguistic setup of the word. As a matter of fact, mentioned expressions create reference to the word itself and are frequently accompanied by quotation marks (Cappelen & Lepore 1997; Saka 1998). Crucially, quotational constructions, as represented in (1a), may be accompanied by a determiner. In contrast, a metalinguistic quotation blocks the occurrence of a determiner as shown in (1b). We would like to emphasize that demonstrations of linguistic shapes usually do not contain an article. Further, metalinguistic quotations have a long-lasting tradition in philosophical debates and are commonly regarded as acceptable sentential constructions (see e.g. Washington 1992; Saka 1998; Brendel et al. 2011).

1.3 NMCs as instances of pure quotation

In recent debates, quotational constructions have been separated into at least four different kinds of quotation. A stereotypical example of pure quotation as in *"Table" has two syllables* is characterized by its metalinguistic operation, i.e. by creating reference to a linguistic dimension of the quoted expression *table* (see, e.g., Quine 1981). Here, the quoted expression is only mentioned and refers metalinguistically. Name-mentioning constructions of the type in (1a) and (2a/b) have been argued to be instances of pure quotation (see Schlechtweg & Härtl 2020). Pure quotations are distinct from further types of quotation, including direct quotation (*Lena said yesterday at the museum of modern art: "This piece of art is difficult to understand"*), indirect quotation (*Lena said that this piece of art is difficult to understand*), and mixed quotation (*Max believes that the Pope "has God on speed dial".*), see, e.g., Brendel et al. (2011); Cappelen & Lepore (2007).

1.4 State of the art and preliminary work

There is evidence from a corpus study conducted in German that in NMCs with the verb *nennen* ('call') quotes occur significantly more often when the mentioned nominals are preceded by a determiner (Härtl 2020). This can be interpreted as a pragmatic mechanism where the use of quotes serves to compensate for the denotational interpretation the determiner indicates by highlighting the mentioned expression's metalinguistic status. In an acceptability judgment study, we further observed a significant preference in English for nouns contained in NMCs to occur with a determiner. This difference is present for both *call* and *refer to as* predicates.

2 Empirical investigation

The current study aims to provide a more robust empirical foundation for the individual differences that determiner use induces in name-mentioning constructions.

2.1 Methods

The empirical investigation presents a large-scale corpus study using detailed concordance queries. We systematically use the enTenTen20 corpus (Jakubíček et al. 2013), and sampled N=2000 NMCs, which contained the predicate *call*. The four queries contained double quotes around the nominal and followed the patterns given in (3).

(3) a.   W calls X "Y".   [noDETa]

       b.   X is called "Y".   [noDETp]

       c.   X is called a "Y".   [DETp]

   d.   W calls X a "Y".   [DETa]

As a first step, the randomly selected constructions were labelled manually with regard to three criteria for valid NMCs. Valid NMCs have been defined as syntactical structures that (i) involve the naming predicate *call* functioning as a verb, (ii) involve exclusively nominal

tokens as the argument of the respective verb embedded in double quotes in the written mode, and (iii) constructions in which the postverbal nominal refers generically.

2.2 Results

For the statistical analysis, we ran a Generalized Linear Model (GLM) in R, which applies a logistic regression to a response parameter considered binomial (Winter 2020), see the descriptive statistics in Figure 1.

Figure 1: Percentage of valid NMCs per condition
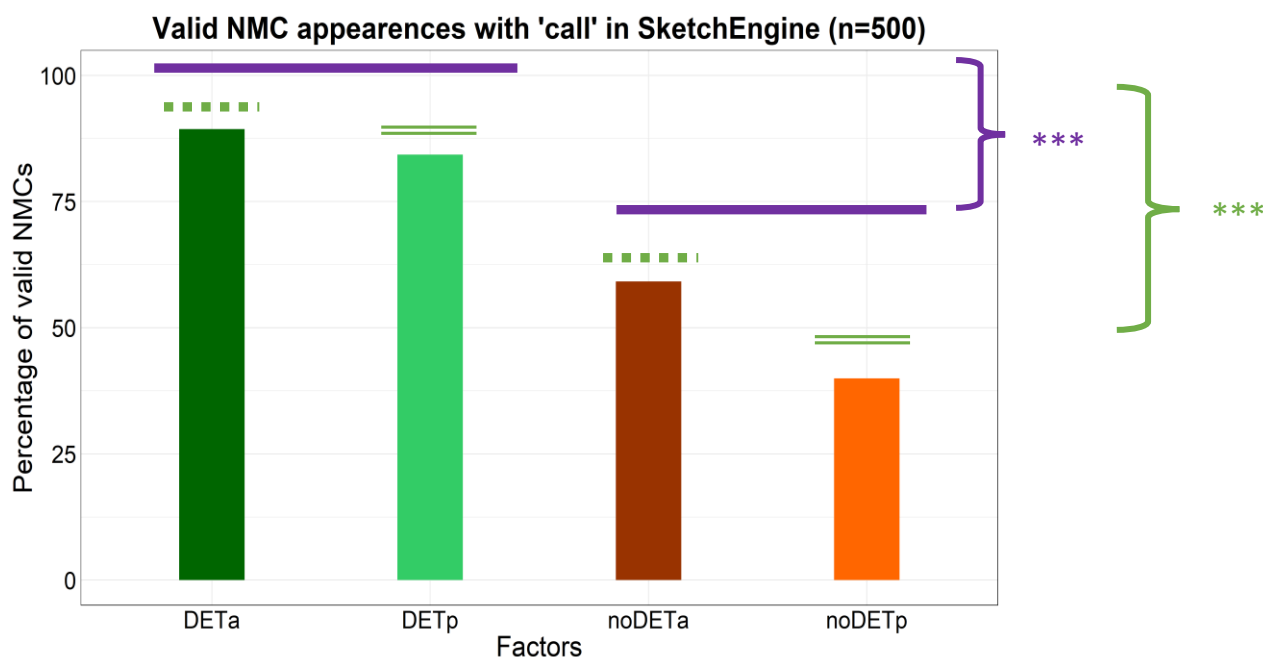
The results showed a significant effect for the presence of a determiner as well as a main effect for VOICE where significantly more valid *active* NMCs were found.

2.3 Discussion

We argue that this significant preference for the presence of a determiner indicates a difference in referentiality levels, revealing that nouns preceded by a determiner are referentially more salient. We follow a definition of referential salience claiming that it is a function activating the referent's conceptual representation in the discourse model (cf. Arnold & Griffin 2007). The degree of salience influences the assessability of an entity targeting a referent, meaning that highly salient entities are easier to assess in discourse operations. Our understanding of the notion of referential salience assumes this to be a graded notion (cf. Giora & Fein 1999).

Based on our corpus investigation, we conclude that NMCs containing a determiner introduce a more salient referent than those without a determiner. In other words, we argue that the name in NMCs accompanied by a determiner is perceived as referentially different from uses without a determiner. In future research, we will address the question of why referential salience should be considered relevant for naming, given the fact that the referent in NMCs is already introduced by another argument of the sentence, i.e., the theme argument.

Given that the statistical analysis also revealed that there are significantly more valid NMCs in active voice as opposed to passive constructions, it supports studies revealing that active structures generally appear more frequently (cf. Bada 2018). Naming constructions can be analysed as a small clause (cf. Matushansky 2008, Fara 2015). We follow the

underspecified copular approach for name-mentioning constructions as presented in Härtl (2020), arguing that NMCs are small clauses involving either a subject or an object. When considering the grammatical specifications of NMCs in active and passive, the nominals are assigned nominative case in passive voice (4b) as compared to a double accusative case in active constructions (4a).

(4) a.   Man   nennt das Phänomen   einen   Mondregenbogen
         one   calls   this   phenomenon.ACC   a   moonbow.ACC

    b.   Dieses Phänomen   wird ein Mondregenbogen genannt.
         this   phenomenon.NOM is   a   moonbow.NOM   called

In our discussion, will argue that NMCs should not be subsumed as a type of mixed quotation, i.e., a combination of direct and indirect quotation. Instead, we argue that NMCs should be interpreted as representing an instance of pure quotation. In our conclusion, we aim at implementing NMCs in the taxonomy of quotation types.

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