

Scare quotes as deontic modals: Evidence from limits on scare quoting

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Despite a growing literature, no well-specified formal semantics of scare quotes (SQs) has been proposed. What has been proved so far is that SQs contribute an additional content informally described as inappropriateness of expression, hostility towards the use of expression (Predelli 2003a), irony (Predelli 2003b), distancing oneself from/rejecting the use of expression (McCullagh 2017) or the lack of commitment to a part of content (Hess 2018).

These informal descriptions allow interesting observations when compared with some constraints imposed on SQ-nominals (# marks the lack of SQ-reading):

- (1) a. I talked with doctor Smith.
b. This 'doctor'/#This 'Smith' failed five exams during his graduate studies.
- (2) a. The doctor_i/He_i told me to give up smoking
b. 'The doctor'/#'He' can be hardly seen without a cigarette in his mouth.
- (3) a. There was his signature /There was 'Johnson' added at the bottom of the paper.
b. This 'signature'/'# 'Johnson' ' was in fact a daub left by his one-year-old child.

First, while the SQ-reading is perfectly fine for common nouns like *doctor*, it is blocked for proper names like *Smith* in (1b). Second, it is equally blocked by pronouns coreferential with common nouns occupying the same structural positions, as in (2b). Finally, though it is an unresolved problem whether pure quotes instantiate a kind of proper names, here they show exactly the same behaviour as in (1b) blocking the SQ-reading. I propose to take these limitations as following from treating SQs as covert deontic modals. Letting quotes be modal operators, I assume contextually salient norms. Then (1b) is roughly interpreted as follows:

1. NORM: Doctors do not fail medical exams
2. I talked with doctor Smith.
3. *x* such that *x* failed five exams during his graduate studies, was called *doctor* & given the norm in 1. he should not be called *doctor*
4. *x* such that *x* failed five exams during his graduate studies, was called *Smith* & there is no norm saying that *x* should not be called *Smith*

Just as in 4., there are no limitations on forming quotational names, hence the effect in (3b). The lack of SQ-reading in (2b) follows from standard semantics of pronouns whose referents are determined by the assignment function from indexes to individuals. Again, no norms for deontic modality can be reasonably defined for such functions.

References: Hess, L. (2018). Perspectival expressives. *Journal of Pragmatics* 129, 13–33. McCullagh, M. (2017). Scare-Quoting and Incorporation. In Saka, P. & Johnson, M. (eds.) *The Semantics and Pragmatics of Quotation*, 3–34. Predelli, S. (2003a). Scare quotes and Their Relation to Other Semantic Issues. *Linguistics & Philosophy* 26(1), 1–28. Predelli, S. (2003b). 'Subliminal' messages, scare quotes, and the use hypothesis. *Belgian Journal of Linguistics* 17(1), 153–166.