

“Hearing” quotation marks

Quotation marks are a common tool in written and gestural language. They can be used for different purposes, see (1), see also, e.g., Brendel, Meibauer & Steinbach (2011).

1. a. “July” has two syllables.
b. These little apes, called “lemures”, predominantly live in Madagascar.
c. “I see,” Tom said.
d. The minister emphasized the possible consequences of this “dramatic situation”.
e. The “villa” was in reality a small bungalow without any window.

(1a) is an example of pure quotation, in which the linguistic structure of the noun in quotes is described in a metalinguistic way. (1b) illustrates name-informing quotation, that is, the name of a specific lexical concept is highlighted within quotation marks. Direct quotation is shown in (1c). (1d), in turn, represents mixed quotation, characterized by the integration of a directly uttered sequence within indirect quotation. Finally, in (1e), we find a case of scare quotation since the word in quotes is used with a meaning deviating from its standard denotation. In the present paper, the focus is on name-informing quotation.

In two recent production studies, it was shown that quotation marks are read out (see Schlechtweg & Härtl 2020).¹ An example of the test materials (from German) is given in (2).

2. *Diese korbähnliche Transporttasche für den Rücken erleichtert die Arbeit in der Landwirtschaft. Man nennt sie Kiepe / „Kiepe“ unter Bauern.*
‘This basket-like bag for the back facilitates the work in agriculture. One calls it pannier / “pannier” among farmers.’

As we see in the example, the same sentences were contrasted, and one specific word was either embraced by quotes or not. During the phonetic analysis, one focus was the syllable right after the first quotation marks, that is, the syllable *Kie* in (2). Different acoustic parameters were analyzed, these were syllable duration, plosive duration, constriction duration and voice onset time (of the plosive), vowel duration, maximum fundamental frequency and maximum intensity of the vowel. A key finding was that the syllable, plosive, constriction, and voice onset time were significantly longer if quotes were present in comparison to if they were absent.

Having presented the details of the production studies just mentioned, I will discuss a new study, in which it is tested whether language users hear quotation marks. In an experiment realized with Eprime, subjects are exposed to two sound files in each trial. The sound files are taken from a production study just outlined. One sound file of each trial is the one in which a subject read out a sentence without quotation marks (2 above with *Kiepe*) and the other sound file of the same trial is the one in which the same subject read out the same sentence with quotation marks (2 above with „*Kiepe*“). The order of the conditions within the trials is counterbalanced. The study includes the listening judgments of German native speakers different from the speakers of the production studies. On the basis of the first about 2,500 evaluated sound files we can say that language users hear and detect quotation marks with a probability of about two third. We will add further data in order to improve the overall picture and will finally interpret the results against the background of the function and significance of quotation marks in different language modes.

References

- Apel, Heiner, Ines Bose, Sven Grawunder & Anna Schwenke. 2020. Der „Kaiser“ in einer Autobahnbaustelle – Prosodische Markierung von modalisierenden Anführungszeichen in Radionachrichten. In Wolfgang Imo & Jens P. Lanwer (eds.), *Prosodie und Konstruktionsgrammatik*, 111–134. Berlin: De Gruyter.
- Brendel, Elke, Jörg Meibauer & Markus Steinbach (eds.). 2011. *Understanding quotation* (Mouton Series in Pragmatics 7). Berlin: De Gruyter Mouton.
- Kasimir, Elke. 2008. Prosodic correlates of subclausal quotation marks. *ZAS Papers in Linguistics* 49, 67–77.
- Schlechtweg, Marcel & Holden Härtl. 2020. Do we pronounce quotation? An analysis of name-informing and non-name-informing contexts. *Language and Speech* 63 (4). 769–798.
- Schlechtweg, Marcel & Holden Härtl. 2021. Quotation marks and the processing of irony in English: Evidence from a reading time study. Ready for submission.

Word count: 458 (without title, examples, references)

¹ For other studies on the production and hearing of quotation marks, see Kasimir (2008) and Apel et al. (2020). However, these studies suffer from several shortcomings, such as low sample sizes, the absence of appropriate acoustic analyses, the absence of a (complete) statistical analysis, or semantic-pragmatic issues, see Schlechtweg & Härtl (2020, 2021) for extensive discussion.