
Do we pronounce quotation marks? A comparison of referring and name-mentioning expressions

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The current paper aims at comparing the phonetic features of (i) referring, see (1a), and name-mentioning expressions, see (1b), and (ii) quoted, i.e., (1a/b) with the underlined noun in quotation marks, and non-quoted material, see (1a/b).

- (1) a. *Diese Blütenknospen werden in Essig oder Öl eingelegt. Man kennt die Kapern in vielen Regionen.*
b. *Diese Blütenknospen werden in Essig oder Öl eingelegt. Man nennt sie Kapern in vielen Regionen.*

While the semantic properties of (pure) quotation are well understood, there is only few systematic empirical evidence as to how they are phonetically realized. Generally speaking, a quotational construction informs the addressee about the name of a lexical concept and the quotes indicate the use of an expression as a name. In contrast, denotational contexts do not inform about the name of a concept so that the quotes around the item are underspecified and could also adopt a distancing function, i.e., the function of what is known as scare quotes in the literature. This explains why it is rather uncommon that quotes are placed around referring expressions unless a distanced interpretation is intended.

Based on these observations, the questions to be addressed are, first, whether quoted and non-quoted material differ phonetically and, crucially, whether quoted name-mentioning expressions can be distinguished from quoted referring expressions on a phonetic basis. It is hypothesized that quoted and non-quoted items differ with respect to their phonetic characteristics, e.g., with respect to the dependent variables VOT, F0 peaks/contours, speech rate, intensity, and duration. Further, and crucially, it is expected that quoted name-mentioning expressions differ from quoted referring expressions on phonetic grounds.

In the study to be reported on, we analyze eight low-frequent German nouns. The sound files of eight German native speakers serve as the basis for the analyses of the dependent variables. QUOTATION MARKS (yes/no) and TYPE OF EXPRESSION (name-mentioning/referring) represent the two independent variables, which are investigated in repeated-measures ANOVAs (both independent variables are within-subject/item). First results point towards the hypothesized main effect of QUOTATION MARKS as well as to the expected interaction of the two independent variables: Quotation marks seem to be “more audible” in name-mentioning in comparison to referring contexts.

The results of the study are interpreted against the background of the interplay between the linguistic function and the phonetic realization of an expression. Further, the results of the current study will serve as the point of departure for a follow-up study, in which the perception of quotation marks in name-mentioning and referring contexts will be examined.