

Quotation as a Multimodal Construction
Natalia L. Blackwell, Marcus S. Perlman, and Jean E. Fox Tree,
University of California, Santa Cruz. USA.

Intro

People commonly produce quotations with the devices *like*, *said*, and *goes* when reporting another person's speech, and to varying degrees, when describing non-speech or non-human sounds

'He was like "....."'

'The cows were like "mooo"'

'The babies were going "ga ga ga"'

These quotations are often coordinated with imitative bodily gestures (Streek & Knapp, 1992) and might also involve some amount of vocal imitation of the speech or other sound (Clark & Gerrig, 1990). Past research has shown that the particular device that is used can be selected based on a variety of factors, such as whether the quoted information displayed attitudes or emotions (suggesting *like*, Buchstaller, 2001), contained sounds (suggesting *goes*, Butters, 1980), and whether the person quoted or addressed was of a higher status (suggesting *said*, Blackwell & Fox Tree, manuscript).

However, given how imitation is often incorporated into quotation, we wondered whether the choice of quotative device might also be associated with the amount of vocal and gestural imitation enacted by the speaker. Such an association would link the planning of words and grammar (i.e. relating to how the quotation is to be constructed) to imitative processes like those involved in iconic gesture.

Methods

Fifty-two undergraduates at the University of California, Santa Cruz, participated in the experiment in exchange for course credit. Participants watched a series of videos, and were asked to retell the videos in an entertaining way were recorded as they offered spontaneous, quotation-rich descriptions of

thirteen video clips to a confederate addressee. The clips contained a variety of sounds including human speech, animals producing human-like speech, animal vocalizations, and inanimate noises. Analysis focused on video clips in which participants used *goes*, *likes* and *said*s to report the same content, allowing us to evaluate imitativeness in association with device independently of the content being quoted. This included two clips: a dog howling what sounded like the words ‘I love you,’ and a talking parrot that produced imitations of human speech and the roar of a tiger.

Vocal and gestural ratings demonstrate that when *like* and *goes* were used, the quoted content was associated with significantly more vocal and gestural imitation than with *said*. The mean rating for vocal imitation for *goes* was 4.6 ($SD = .72$), for *like* was 4.7 ($SD = .70$), and for *said* was 2.00 ($SD = .38$), $F(2, 36) = 68.2, p < .001$. The mean rating for gesturing for *likes* was 2.7 ($SD = .79$), for *goes* was 2.74 ($SD = 1.17$), and for *said*s was 1.84 ($SD = .79$). These results suggest that devices *like* and *goes* are used to highlight the imitative or demonstrative aspects of the subsequent quotation, a point that is further supported by the positive association between gesture and vocal imitativeness, $r(93) = .363, p < .001$. Thus, quotation may be aptly treated as a multimodal construction that serves to combine linguistic structures with the iconic processes of gesture. In this light, quotation might be compared to certain constructions in sign languages, like classifier constructions, that similarly integrate linguistic structures with iconicity (Liddell, 2003). Both cases point to the broader consideration of language as a multimodal system of communication that makes use of both arbitrary (i.e., traditionally “linguistic”) and iconic elements (Permiss, Thompson, & Vigliocco, 2010).

References

Blackwell, N., & Fox Tree, J. E. (2011). Quoting with Said. Unpublished manuscript.

Buchstaller, I. (2001). An alternative view of LIKE: its grammaticalisation in conversational American English and beyond. *Edinburgh Working Papers in Applied Linguistics, 11*, 21– 41.

Butters, R. (1980). Narrative go “say”. *American Speech, 55*, 304–307.

Lidell, S. (2003). *Grammar, Gestures, and Meaning in American Sign Language*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

Permiss, P., Thompson, R. L., & Vigliocco, G. (2010). Iconicity as a general property of language: Evidence from spoken and signed languages. *Frontiers in Language Sciences, 1*, 227-241.

Streeck, J., & Knapp, M. L. (1992). The interaction of visual and verbal features in human Communication. In: F. Poyatos (Ed.). *Non-verbal Communication*. Amsterdam: John Benjamins.