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### **On Biro's Calling Names**

This is a short note that by the examination of three claims advanced by John Biro in 'Calling Names'<sup>1</sup> tries to shed some light on quotation as expression mentioning unmediated by mentioning terms.

1 Inverted commas are just one way of indicating that one is mentioning, rather than using, an expression (Biro 2012:290).

2 The (first) name of the author of *Word & Object* was Willard (ib.).

3 The (first) name of the author of *Word & Object* was not 'Willard' (ib.).

1 Inverted commas are just one way of indicating that one is mentioning, rather than using, an expression.

In order for 1 to be true it must be the case that

1a Inverted commas are a way of indicating that one is mentioning, rather than using, an expression.

1b There are other ways, i.e. ways different from inverted commas, of indicating that one is mentioning, rather than using, an expression.

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<sup>1</sup> Biro, J. 2012. Calling Names. *Analysis* 72: 285-293.

1a Inverted commas are a way of indicating that one is mentioning, rather than using, an expression.

There two problems with 1a. Are inverted commas a way of indicating that one is mentioning an expression? And, if inverted commas are a way of indicating that one is mentioning an expression are they a way of indicating that one is not using an expression?

If inverted commas are a way of indicating that one is mentioning an expression, the expression indicated to be mentioned cannot but be the expression occurring within inverted commas, i.e. the expression used in inverted commas. If so, it would be rather peculiar that inverted commas should indicate both that the expression within them is mentioned and that it is not used.<sup>2</sup>

If they indicated that the expression within them is mentioned and is not used, they would be invariably wrong indicators, i.e. fake indicators. Indicators can be unreliable, i.e. indicate what is not the case. For example a road signal indicating men at work on the road may be there before the works on the road begin or after their completion. Yet an indicator which never indicates what is the case is no indicator. To cry wolf is an indication of the presence of a wolf only if wolf is not cried always or too often in absence of a wolf.

If indicators can be unreliable indicators, to indicate that p is not a way of making it the case that p. Hence if we take seriously the notion that inverted commas are indicators of mention we have to agree that they are not devices of mentions, i.e., tools by which mention is realized. Unfortunately Biro does not take seriously the notion that inverted commas are indicators of mention. In fact he talks of inverted commas as indicators of mention but also as devices of mention (291). It should be clear, however, that an indicator of X even when reliable (true to the facts) is not a device for X. For example a road signal may be an indicator of peril (or bumpiness) without for this being a device of

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<sup>2</sup> For sure a more charitable reading of 1a would be: Inverted commas are a way of indicating that one is mentioning, rather than using in the standard way, an expression. What is the standard use of an expression? Well using it in its semantical and syntactical capacities. Namely using it for what its semantic or syntactic features contribute to what is said by the sentence in which it occurs. When an expression is used non standardly is the expression itself rather than its features that contribute to what is said.

peril (or bumpiness). The point is that indicators, no matter of what, have no role to play, unlike devices, in bringing about what they are indicators of.

This said, we should notice that inverted commas fare pretty poorly as indicators of mention of an expression. All too often inverted commas are used as scare (sneer) quotes, a reproachable and inept way of distancing oneself from the expression used and felt inadequate.<sup>3</sup> And quite often inverted commas are used to indicate direct (literal) report of what someone said (either someone else, or the very reporter).<sup>4</sup> We have to look elsewhere for decent indicators of expression mentioning.

1b There are other ways, i.e., ways different from inverted commas, of indicating that one is mentioning, rather than using, an expression.

Among the many ways, other than commas, of indicating that one is mentioning an expression (without using it, or as I would rather say, by using it as an object of predication), Biro envisages there is “putting ‘the expression’ (or ‘term’, ‘word’ ‘name’, ‘adjective’, etc.) in front of the expression”(290).<sup>5</sup>

It must be said that fronting an expression by ‘The X’ where ‘X’ is a schematic letter for a word standing for a property of expressions fares much better than inverted commas as indicator of

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<sup>3</sup> Maybe matters are a bit more complicated. Maybe when used in scare quotes expressions are used primarily non quotationally and parenthetically quotationally. In ‘Carl is a “genius”, ‘genius’ is primarily used for what it means and parenthetically commented upon. Carl is a genius, if genius is the right word.

<sup>4</sup> According to Biro (fn.2 , 285) ‘mentioning – or, as I would prefer to say, displaying – expressions and reporting someone’s use of them are very different things and should not be conflated’. One should not confuse mention of expressions by display and reporting someone’s use of them. Yet it is difficult not to confuse them in so far as we conceive of direct reports as reports of someone’s use of expressions, rather than as literal reports of what someone claimed or asked or commanded. In fact a direct report may be made by using (into inverted commas) not the expressions that someone used but a translation of them into the language of the reporter.

<sup>5</sup> To be fastidious what is put in front is not ‘the expression’ (or ‘term’, ‘word’, ‘name’, ‘adjective’, etc.) but ‘the expression’ (or ‘the term’, ‘the word’,..., etc.)

mention. In fact fronting an expression by 'The expression', ('The word', etc.) is of no use for direct report or for distancing oneself from the expression used.

Fronting fares better than inverted commas and still it is not guaranteed to fare well as indicator of mention. For sure you are not going to indicate mention of the sentence 'The cat is sitting on the mat' by fronting it by 'the word'. What could we make of 'The word the cat is sitting on the mat'? Fronting an expression by a determiner phrase whose predicate stands for a property of expressions will indicate mention of the expression fronted only if the predicate in the fronting phrase is true of the fronted expression, and the fronting expression can be repositioned as an apposition to the expression fronted.<sup>6</sup>

So apparently there are no unconditional indicators of the mention of an expression. Both inverted commas and fronting are indicators of mention when they are. The point is that when they are indicators of mention, they are not devices of mention, even if correct indicators of mention. If they are correct indicators of the mention of an expression, they indicate the mention of an expression that it is already and otherwise mentioned. Crucially, the expression that is already and otherwise mentioned cannot but be the expression indicated to be mentioned, i.e. the expression used in inverted commas or fronted by 'The expression' or the like.

Any expression whatsoever can be correctly indicated to be mentioned. If the indicators of mention are not devices of the mention of the expression indicated to be mentioned what does the mentioning of it?

An expression, as anything else, can be mentioned by using an expression that mentions it. If mention of A is realized via a mentioning expression E then almost always A differs from E, i.e. the

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<sup>6</sup> In 'The name of the author of *Word & Object* was Willard' 'of the author of *Word & Object*' is not indicated to be mentioned even though it is fronted by 'the name'. In fact 'the name' could not be repositioned as apposition. Notice that 'The name of' would indicate mention of 'the author of *Word & Object* was Willard' no more than 'The name' indicates mention of 'of the author of *Word & Object*'. 'The name of' could be repositioned as an apposition to 'the author of *Word & Object*' no more than 'The name' could be repositioned as an apposition to 'of the author of *Word & Object*'. The 'of' makes quite a difference, as testified by 'The expression of sadness' which unlike 'The expression sadness' indicates a miserable psychological state rather than a word, or by 'The father John' which unlike 'The father of John' mentions John rather than his father.

expression mentioned is not the expression used. (There are exceptions like using, perversely, 'Tom' as name of the expression Tom rather than of an individual so named, or saying 'The description that occurs in this sentence is composed of seven words' where 'The description that occurs in this sentence' mentions the very expression 'The description that occurs in this sentence').

Where the expression E is mentioned by another expression F what we have is that F is used while E is not. So there is no way of indicating that E is mentioned by using inverted commas around E or an indicator such as 'The expression' before it. Since E is not there it cannot be embraced by inverted commas or fronted by 'The expression'.

The question then is: How could ever an expression E (which is not self-mentioning) be correctly indicated to be mentioned? Well, an expression E (which is not self-mentioning) can be correctly indicated to be mentioned iff it is mentioned but the mention is not mediated (performed) by an expression that either refers to or describes it. In short an expression (which is not self-mentioning) can be indicated to be mentioned iff it is mentioned by being used as an object of predication.

Most expressions are not self-mentioning and most of the time non self-mentioning expressions that are used are not mentioned, yet all expressions can be mentioned by being used. So the problem is: In virtue of what an expression is mentioned by being used? What does the mentioning? The answer, as I will detail below, is that the mentioning when not done by the expression itself is done by the sentence in which the expression occurs.

2 The name of the author of *Word & Object* was Willard.

If we agree that Willard was the (first) name of the author of *Word & Object* it is only because we think that the very expression Willard rather than what it stands for is what is mentioned. As it happens the name Willard stands for a human individual going under the name hence, since a human individual is not an expression, it does not mention any expression, in particular the expression Willard. What makes us think that Willard, a name of individuals, rather than Willard, an individual going under the name, is mentioned in 'The name of the author of *Word & Object* was

Willard'? Well, the fact that the name Willard itself is made by 2 into an object of thought and talk. And the reason why it is so is that a) the occurrence of 'Willard' is argumental (argument providing), b) the predication makes sense only of expressions and c) 'Willard' does not stand for an expression.

To generalize: An expression E is mentioned by being used in a sentence S iff there is no other way of making sense of a statement of S but assuming that S is about the very expression E rather than what it mentions (what it refers to or describes).<sup>7</sup> This is the case when the sentence enacts a predication that is appropriate only of expressions and there is no argumental expression-mentioning expression to which the predicate could felicitously apply.<sup>8</sup> Or, when, as envisaged in fn 7 above, the sentence enacts a predication that is appropriate of non expressions but not in the context of use.

3 The name of the author of *Word & Object* was not 'Willard'.

3 is a rather surprising claim. Even more surprising if we reformulate it as:

3a The name of the author of *Word & Object* was not the name Willard.

(The reformulation is fine if we agree with Biro that embedding in commas and putting 'the name' in front of an expression are different ways of indicating mention of an expression).

Now, if the occurrence of 'The name' fronting 'Willard' indicates that a name rather than an individual going under the name is mentioned it is clear that 3a (and hence 3) is false, at least in so far as 2 (The name of the author of *Word & Object* was Willard) is true. The name whose mention is

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<sup>7</sup> One could object that the biconditional is too strong, in particular that it is not the case that an expression E is mentioned by being used in a sentence S only if there is no way of making sense of S other than assuming that E is mentioned. For example 'Sylvia' may happen to be mentioned in 'I like Sylvia' even though 'I like Sylvia' makes perfect sense as a statement about a human individual rather than a word. The point is that when 'Sylvia' rather than Sylvia is mentioned via 'I like Sylvia' it is because in the context there is no way of making sense of the statement 'I like Sylvia' if not by assuming that 'Sylvia' is mentioned. This is the case when, for example, the context is a debate concerning the name to be imposed to a new born or to a prospective child.

<sup>8</sup> A self-mentioning expression is not mentioned by being used in a sentence that is about it. Rather the sentence is about it since the expression used coincide with the expression mentioned by the expression used.

indicated by 'The name Willard' is Willard and of it is actually true that it was the name of the author of *Word & Object*.

The only reason for accepting 3a is in short to think that in 3a 'the name Willard' (rather than the name Willard) is mentioned. Why so? Biro claims 'that doubling up on devices of mentioning ... results in mentioning the whole of what follows the last such device added' (290).

One could note that the claim is irrelevant to the question in so far as inverted commas and 'The name' are not devices of mention but rather (sometimes) indicators of mention. Doubling of indicators is not going to alter what is indicated. Double indication of X is reinforced, though annoying, indication of X. A command for example is an indication of what should be done.

Reiteration of the command to do X is not going to alter the X to be done. If anything it will alter the probability for the worse or the better that X will be done.

In any case the claim is irrelevant unless it is assumed that 3 (or 3a) exemplifies doubling. For sure in 3 there is an occurrence of 'The name' and an occurrence of inverted commas and in 3a there are two occurrences of 'The name'. Yet where is the doubling of devices or indicators of mention in 3 or 3a?

Biro says that 'once we recognize that 'E' and 'the expression E' are equivalent (i.e. they mention the same thing), we will no longer think that 'the expression "E"' is equivalent to either' (p. 291).<sup>9</sup>

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<sup>9</sup> Incidentally, something went wrong here with Biro's use of commas. If putting into commas and fronting are equivalent it is not 'E' but "'E'" to be equivalent to 'the expression E'. And something is wrong with Biro's claim when the use of inverted commas is amended. Now if "'E'" and 'the expression E' are equivalent, 'the expression "E"' is equivalent to 'the expression the expression E'. What are we to make of it? For sure 'The expression the expression good' does not sound good and if it can be tolerated at all it will be tolerated as an unusual form of staggering, a staggering where phrases rather than syllables or words gets unduly repeated. If so the reiteration of 'the expression' will be considered as an unusual pathology of speech production of no consequence as to what is indicated to be mentioned. What about the almost unreadable "' 'E' '" (extra spaces are intentional devices for clarity) i.e. the version of 'the expression "E"' where the occurrence of 'the expression' has been replaced by an occurrence of inverted commas? Well it will be unobjectionable and consequential only if inverted commas are seen as devices (rather than indicators) of mention. Only by seeing inverted commas as operators the application of which to an expression results in a new expression that mentions the original expression. The view is well entrenched and yet pretty obscure. As it is shown by the fact that it is sometimes said that the whole -inverted commas, E, inverted commas- is a structural name of E. But what could a structural name be other than a mythological monster that combines into one entity incompatible features such as being a name of E and a description of E?

As I detail in the preceding footnote I do not think that the claim is true. The point is that the claim, even if true, is irrelevant to the question. The claim concerns doubling as iteration (contiguous occurrence) and in 3a (a forthcoming version of 3) there is no iteration (contiguous occurrence) of either devices or indicators of mention.

The point is that 'The (first) name' in its first occurrence is neither an indicator nor a device of mention of an expression. Certainly not of 'of the author of *Word & Object*' (see fn 6 above). And if not of it why of 'the name Willard'? Consider 'The (first) name of the author of *Word & Object* was the (first) name his parents chose for him'. Would you say that the first occurrence of 'The (first) name' is an indicator of the mention of 'the (first) name his parents chose for him'? Surely not. In fact the first occurrence of 'The (first) name' is no more an indication of mention of an expression than the second occurrence is.

The moral is that an expression can be mentioned without the mediation of an expression mentioning it by occurring in an adequate linguistic context, a context apt to make it the case that an expression occurring in it is made into an object of predication (an object of thought and talk). If the indicators of mention are not devices of mention the only difference between 2 (The (first) name of the author of *Word & Object* was Willard) and the negation of 3 (The (first) name of the author of *Word & Object* was the name Willard) is that in 2 there is mention of the name Willard without any indicator of its mention while in the negation of 3 there is mention of the name Willard with an indicator of its mention.<sup>10</sup>

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<sup>10</sup> Thanks to Andrea Bianchi for his very helpful comments.

