

Pedagogical Foray

Standing (a little) aside from what you're saying

John M. Swales

Consider this short MICASE extract. It is spoken by a student—himself a native speaker of German—at the beginning of his dissertation defense in musicology. His topic is the jazz pianist, Keith Jarrett. Pay particular attention to the bolded phrases:

Jarrett's jazz is performed as a chamber musical product, for the concert stage. this predilection appeals to European audiences, who generally come to jazz from a classical western background. in short, i began as a listener, a fan, **if you will**. Jarrett's music fit my own predilections and, **so to speak**, my identity needs.

These phrases communicate to the listeners that the speaker is not to be taken too seriously at this moment, not too literally. When speakers use this kind of phrase they stand a little aside from what they are saying; they detach, distance or disassociate themselves somewhat from the actual words. In other words, they are a special kind of hedge¹. In this particular case, the speaker first does not commit himself to *really being a fan* by his use of "if you will". After all being "a fan" of somebody might not be a good academic reason for writing a dissertation about that person! In the second instance, his use of "so to speak" suggests to the audience that "my identity needs" is not to be taken too seriously. Without the stand-aside, the phrase "my identity needs" might be taken as indicating a psychological complex of some kind.

Task One

Look at these extracts. Some contain a stand-aside, and some don't. Indicate those that do with a "Y" and underline the detaching word or phrase.

1. ____ and then seeing it as an unknown object as if it were in fact a piece of art
2. ____ so often the tumor has progressed and it's quote unquote more aggressive
3. ____ we are indeed able to have the luxury if you will to play with crossing boundaries
4. ____ the last point is simply to say that it has to translate to reproductive success
5. ____ i just wanted to be part of the wallpaper so to speak
6. ____ so sperm separate from the egg please. okay fertilize if you will

¹Some people indicate the "quote unquote" stand-aside by wagging the two forefingers of each hand at the audience; this purely visual signal is not detectable in MICASE.

7. ____ there is quote a moral sense or instinct by which men distinguish what is morally good from what is morally evil
8. ____ so then you have to as it were take it on faith that God's passing along the right commands to you
9. ____ i've indicated that by means of this drawing you see an electron moving and at some point it loses a photon so to speak
- 10 ____ so to summarize Wallace and Darwin's theory of evolution is really a group of related ideas.

The quantitative data for these phrases from MICASE (manually disambiguated from the non-distancing uses) is the following:

so-called	38 examples
if you will	31
so to speak	20
quote unquote	16
as it were	5
so to say	5
if you like	4

Many of the speakers of these stand-asides are either older or more academically senior, or both.

Task Two

Do you think these phrases are more likely to come *before* or *after* the stretch of speech from which the speaker wants to stand aside or detach him- or herself? Which of these do you prefer?

- | | |
|--------------------------------------|-------------------------------------|
| 1a) so-called new potatoes | b) new potatoes so-called |
| 2a) if you will, a master plan | b) a master plan, if you will |
| 3a) so to speak, lesser crimes | b) lesser crimes, so to speak |
| 4a) quote unquote, the criminal mind | b) the criminal mind, quote unquote |
| 5a) as it were, hibernating | b) hibernating, as it were |

Task Three

Here are three extracts. Where would you put *quote unquote* in the first, *so to speak* in the second, and *if you will* in the third?

1) he said okay look Carrie, I want this thing. I want to say something, and then they all call some battle-cry response, and then they jump out of the grass. so I'm like, why don't I talk to them and see if they have a thing as a battle cry.

2) let's just take penicillin as an example. how much penicillin does it take to nuke the bacteria. some members of this strain of bacteria may be go <SOUND EFFECT> with a little penicillin, they fall over and kick their little legs and they're dead.

3) and which of these three groups of nurses do you think exhibited the most autonomy? <SS: community> community health nurses yes and also that's because part of the environment in which they practice, they have that uh environmental looseness which permits them to practice more autonomously.

~ * ~

Commentary

Task One

2. quote unquote

3. if you will

5. so to speak

8. as it were

9. so to speak

Task Two

The MICASE corpus provides the following numbers which may indicate some native-speaker tendencies:

so-called: 36 before; 2 after

if you will: 0 before; 31 after (although some come after the first part of a noun phrase, as in "just the auto-reactive if you will B-cells")

so to speak: 3 before; 17 after

quote unquote: 12 before; 4 after

as it were: 2 before; 3 after (so no very clear pattern here)

Task Three

1. *Quote unquote* battle cry. (The female speaker is being ironic about the words of the male speaker)
2. kick their little legs *so to speak*. (If you put the phrase after “nuke” that would be an acceptable alternative.)
3. that uh environmental looseness *if you will*. (This is the only unusual phrase in this extract; also the “uh” might indicate a momentary filled pause while the speaker searches for a striking phrase.)