

## Deficiency-Marking Air Quotes as Expressive Privatives

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I present an analysis of a prominent semantic function of air quotation in English that marks *property deficiency*. In the following indicative cases deficiency inferences are available:

A) Wow, its been six years since i [sic] have seen you, whatever happened to your (air quotes) “band”.

→ *the speaker believes that the addressee’s band is not a real band.*

B) Malaysia sends experts to examine Maldives ‘debris’, as if haha, we all know it’s not really debris, don’t we.

→ *the speaker believes that whatever is at the Maldives crash site is not really debris.*

These deficiency inferences are uncancellable (??Whatever happened to your “band” – although I actually think it’s a perfectly good band!) and are available with low contextual specification. Air quotes that give rise to deficiency inferences also exhibit distinctive distributional behavior (preference for single lexical items or small phrasal projections, infelicity with functional material and purely referential material) indicating the conventionalization of a distinctive sense. I call this ‘**deficiency-marking**’ air quotation and present a formal semantic analysis. I make two major claims:

**1) Deficiency marking air quotes are semantic privatives.** I demonstrate that they have the inferential profile of core privatives like ‘fake’ and ‘phony’ and follow Partee (1990) in offering a *subsective plus coercion* account of their interpretation. I present the following proposal for the truth-conditional content of deficiency-marking air quotation:

Where  $P$  is a predicate and  $x$  is its argument, “ $P^s(x)$ ” is such that  $x$  is a  $P$  that does not satisfy a contextually set standard for being [a] real  $P$ .

$$[[\text{“}P\text{”}(x)]]^{M,g} = \lambda P_{\langle e,t \rangle} \lambda x_e [P(x) = 1 \wedge P^s(x) = 0]_t$$

*Example:* Let the contextually set standard in (A) for being a *band* be: having performed in front of an audience--- call this performance. On this analysis an (air quotes) “band” is one that falls under the usual, or perhaps a contextually coerced extended interpretation of the predicate, but does not satisfy performance.

**2) Deficiency marking air quotes are mixed expressives.** I argue deficiency-marking air quotation also bears use conditional meaning; namely speaker affect, which I categorize as *rejective affect* colored with *amusement*. Rejective affect is affect that communicates affective dismissal of proffered content and is captured in discourse particles such as: ‘ew’, ‘yeah, right’, ‘get lost’, ‘Ha!’, ‘lol’, and ‘pfft’ – the last three of these communicating speaker *amusement* as the base mode of dismissal. Drawing on work by Potts (2007) and Gutzmann (2015), on my experimental work on low-context detectability of affective content and on a novel probe for the presence of rejective

amusement that I call the ‘what’s so funny’ test, I present the following analysis of the use-conditional content of deficiency-marking air quotation:

Where  $P$  is a predicate and  $x$  is its argument, the speaker finds it laughable that  $P$  should be applied to  $x$ .

$$[[\text{“}P\text{”}(x)]]^U = \lambda P_{\langle e, t \rangle} \lambda x_e [\text{the speaker finds the application of } P \text{ to } x \text{ to be laughable}]_U$$

*Example:* by using deficiency-marking air quotation the speaker of (A) expresses that they find it laughable that the predicate *band* be applied to the addressee’s band.

Finally I propose a felicity condition that ties the proposed expressive and descriptive dimension together, predicting discourse infelicity in the case that the use- and truth- conditional content are unrelated.

**Reason:** The speaker finds it laughable that the predicate should be applied to the target *because* the target falls short of the predicate.

### Extended Sample data:

[A child at a science fair is talking about his lump of coal entry, ‘Lumpy’:]

(1) He’s on a journey to figure out what he’s going to be and what he could be when he “grows up” [Oliver’s response: ‘Top notch use of air quotes there because you and I both know kid that Lumpy is not going to grow up.]

(John Oliver, ‘Coal’)

(2) “Dr. Paul’s misinformed statements on the dangers of vaccination seem to suggest that we should use air quotes when calling him ‘doctor,’” said an AMA spokesperson. *(The Huffington Post)*

(3) I’m sure all those “long hours and work” you’ve been putting in have made you exhausted.

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(3) this remarkable piece of ‘art’ consists of a large canvas covered with mud and old bus transfers. *(Predelli, 2003)*

(4) the ‘debate’ resulted in three cracked heads and two broken noses.

*(Predelli, 2003)*

(6) A girl I knew committed suicide when she was 13, and BBC News wrote something like: Her mother was “devastated”. Just makes it look like she wasn’t really devastated.

(‘The BBC News website’s “overuse” of quotation marks’  
<<https://tinyurl.com/yckvmbux>>)

(7) Lahore bomb blast ‘kills six’ Is the BBS [sic] implying that these people didn’t die or weren’t killed?

(‘The BBC News website’s “overuse” of quotation marks’  
<<https://tinyurl.com/yckvmbux>>)

(8) Malaysia sends experts to examine Maldives ‘debris’, as if haha, we all know it’s not really debris, don’t we?

(‘The BBC News website’s “overuse” of quotation marks’  
<<https://tinyurl.com/yckvmbux>>)

## References

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