

Air Quotes – a case of non-written quotation

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Abstract

Quotation theory, in general focussing on written use, has been applied to spoken contexts to a certain extent. Air quotes in the visual-auditive modality as well as their counterparts in purely auditive modalities on the other hand have only been targeted in passing. The talk will try to give an account of the characteristics of such instances of visual and vocal quotation and examine, if they exhibit the same possible uses of quotation that have been identified for written contexts.

Two uses of the broader range in written quotation appear to be dominant with instances of air quotes and their equivalents and a general direction for potential inferences identifiable. They seem mainly to either indicate, that the speaker deems the quoted term as not fully applicable or even as condemnable. The question of applicability may arise from diverging specifications of semantic features in contrast to conventionalised meaning. The pragmatic aspect of inference touches upon a semantic dimension, when an addressee is supposed to recognise, which feature of the item is supposedly not in accordance with its lexicalisation.

No modification of meaning seems implied in instances indicating, that the term is judged as inaccurate or condemnable for different reasons (e.g. political correctness, suggestions of pejorative connotations). The induced inference can be interpreted as rejection of the quoted material, while initiating additional implications concerning the reasons for marking it as inappropriate.

The analysis of Gutzmann/Stein (2011), which the authors deem to be easily applied to these instances of quotation, states that the latter mark and block stereotypical interpretations of the thus labeled material and evoke the inference of alternative ones. Such an approach has to classify air quotes as a pragmatic phenomenon. Should this theory explain the latter more accurately than a semantic modification theory? Or do the involved mechanisms operate on a pre-semantic stage as McCullagh (2017) suggests for so called scare quotes, while assuming context shifts among

other things, seeing as these shifts per se seem to be more reconcilable with pragmatic accounts (cf. Recanati 2009:680f., de Brabanter 2019)?

The talk will try to integrate these phenomena into quotation theory and to position them with respect to the semantic-pragmatic divide. To this end air quotes will be subjected to an analysis as conversational implicatures.

References:

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- Recanati, F. (2009): Open Quotation Revisited. *Philosophical Perspectives*. Wiley, 399–427.