

Expressive, much?

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Introduction

- ▶ The distribution of *much* has played a major role in debates about the inventory of degree-denoting expressions in natural language and their compositional interpretation.
- ▶ In this talk we add to this literature by investigating a use of *much* in a construction that has not yet been recognized in the literature.

- ▶ The distribution of *much* has played a major role in debates about the inventory of degree-denoting expressions in natural language and their compositional interpretation.
- ▶ In this talk we add to this literature by investigating a use of *much* in a construction that has not yet been recognized in the literature.



- ▶ We dub this »expressive *much*« (*x-much*).

- ▶ As we will see, *x-much* exhibit special syntactic, semantic, and pragmatic properties.
- ▶ We will the go on to ask what kind of speech act is performed by the use of the *x-much* construction.
- ▶ In order to account for the properties of *x-much*, our primary proposal is that *x-much* is a shunting operator in the sense of McCready 2010, which targets a gradable predicate and adds a speaker's evaluative attitude about the degree to which an individual stands out on the relevant scale.
- ▶ We will argue that it performs an »expressive question«, which can be understood as a counterpart to a polar question, but in the expressive meaning dimension.

Syntax of *x-much*

- ▶ Syntactically, *x-much* is preceded by a target phrase that can be of various phrasal types.

Adjectives: Rude much?



- ▶ Syntactically, *x-much* is preceded by a target phrase that can be of various phrasal types.

Verbs: Geez! Overreact, much?

Presume much?



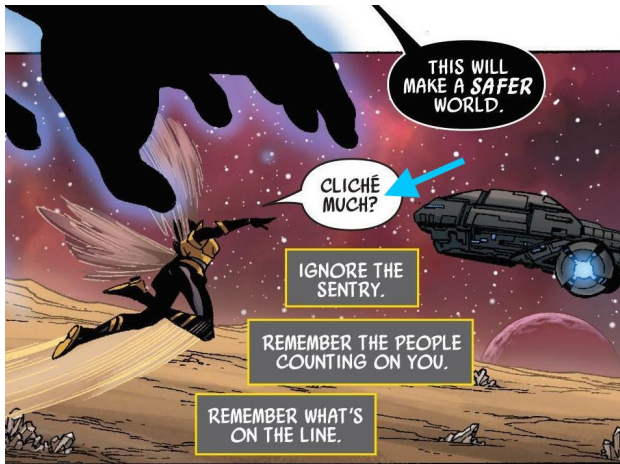
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Verb phrases: Jeez, live in denial much, Chase? Wow, flatter yourself much?



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Nouns:



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Noun phrases:



The conversational force of *x-much*

- ▶ Uses of *x-much* in the wild often almost always occur with a question mark.
- ▶ At first pass, one might think then that *x-much* is some sort of grammaticalized elliptical question.

x-much as questions

(5) a. Angry, much?

b. Are you angry much?

- ▶ While not a question, we can equally show that *x-much* does not make an assertion.
- ▶ It cannot be used to provide an answer to an explicit question.

x-much as assertions

- (8) A: What's up with Harry?
B: [Pointing at Harry:] # Angry, much?

- ▶ While neither an answer-seeking question nor an assertion, perhaps *x-much* is an obligatory rhetorical question—i.e., a non-answer-seeking question.
- ▶ *x-much* resists modification by modifiers like *after all*, which Sadock (1971) shows obligatorily introduce rhetorical questions.

x-much as rhetorical questions

- (9) You and the addressee both know that John has a quick temper. Furthermore, the addressee has just related a story about John flying off the handle.
- a. Figures. After all, isn't John angry all the time?
 - b. Figures. #After all, angry, much?

- ▶ A second test is that NPIs are only appropriate in rhetorical questions, not ordinary questions (Caponigro 2007).
- ▶ *x-much*, which we know isn't an ordinary question, also rejects NPIs.

x-much as rhetorical questions

- (10) a. After all, did John really give a damn?
 b. After all, did you even lift a finger?
- (11) a. I'm really curious. #Did John really give a damn?
 b. I'm really curious. #Did you even lift a finger?
- (12) a. #Lift a finger, much?
 b. #Give a damn, much?

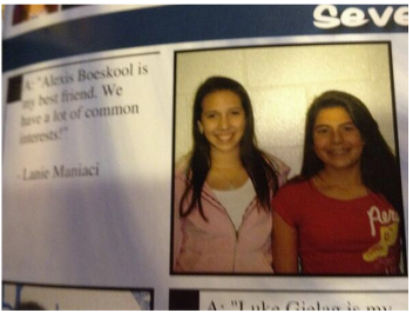
Having ruled out treating *x-much* as an assertion or question, we come to our positive proposal, which is that *x-much* is an expressive (Potts 2005).

- ▶ In particular, the use of an *x-much* construction makes a not-at-issue assertion that a salient individual has the property in question.
- ▶ It also expresses the evaluative attitude that that fact is »laughable« or »ridiculous«.

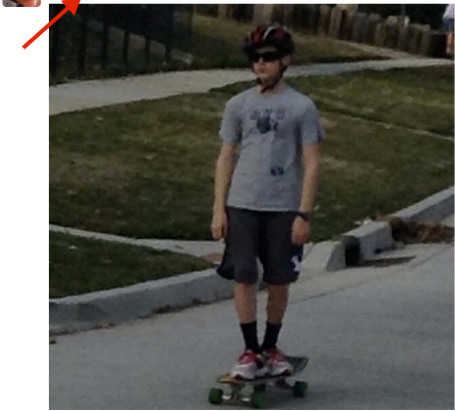
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- ▶ In particular, the use of an *x-much* construction makes a not-at-issue assertion that a salient individual has the property in question.
- ▶ It also expresses the evaluative attitude that that fact is »laughable« or »ridiculous«.
- ▶ That is, in most case, this comes down to the expression of some sort of disdain.
- ▶ However, it can also be used positively in a playful way.

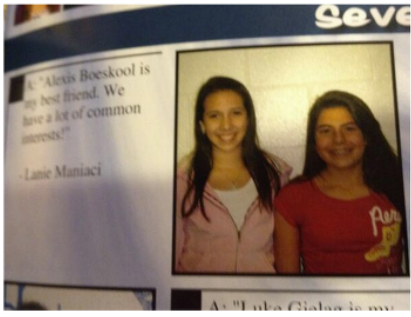
Dalton Riggs @DaltonR19 · Jan 1
Swag much?? @laniemaniaci_ @alexisboeskool_ me and joe strolling through the year book 🤔🤔🤔 pic.twitter.com/T5zsuf6Dpt



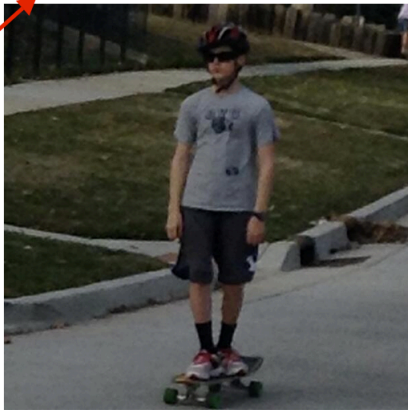
Auden 从 c@ @Audenwin · Dec 9
Um swag much he's still single ladies #Mmiller pic.twitter.com/xMOSHbLric



 Dalton Riggs @DaltonR19 · Jan 1
Swag much?? @laniemaniaci_ @alexisboeskool_ me and joe strolling through the year book 🤔🤔🤔 pic.twitter.com/T5zsuf6Dpt



 Auden 从 c@ @Audenwin · Dec 9
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- ▶ Like many such examples, the first from twitter is accompanied by the “laugh until crying” emoji.
- ▶ The second one is clearly ironic, as the author does not mean to claim that that dude is cool and has style.

Semantic properties of *x-much*

- ▶ A first-pass analysis of *x-much* would try to assimilate it to other post-predicate uses of *much*.

Post-predicate *much*

- (13) Do you come around here much?
- (14) Bill doesn't dance much.

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Post-predicate *much*

(13) Do you come around here much?

(14) Bill doesn't dance much.

- ▶ The problem is that post-predicate *much* only allows frequency readings, but *x-much* admits a wider class of readings.

- ▶ First, *x-much* allows high degree readings that are missing with post-predicate *much*.

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chicken wings @sarcasticwbu · 27 Apr 2012

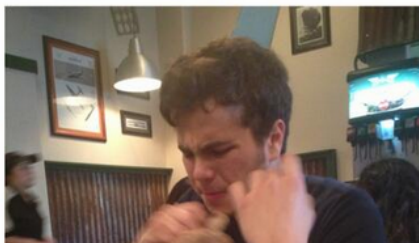
wow tall much? RT @CalmYourCarrots: Harry's cousin makes Niall look like a real life leprechaun... pic.twitter.com/Y02gLW6t





carolina @CarooDavi · 5 Apr 2013

#picstitch spicy much jorge? pic.twitter.com/de6xLIZ0IL



- ▶ High-degree readings are unavailable for canonical examples of post-predicate *much*.

Post-predicate *much* and high degrees


(15) Is Harry's cousin tall much? ≠ Is Harry's cousin very tall?


(16) That wing wasn't spicy much. ≠ That wing wasn't very spicy.


- ▶ Second, if *x-much* modifies a noun, it allows large cardinality / quantity readings that are missing with post-predicate *much*.

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dee_darlin
 24 months ago
 Guitars much? #guitarcenter


tylergosey [angieflores.guitarcenter](#)
 this.





dixon @dailyxno_ · Sep 6

Wine much? pic.twitter.com/CxKCYaY1fn



- ▶ Once again, this large cardinality / quantity readings unavailable for canonical examples of post-predicate *much*.

Post-predicate *much* and high degrees

(17) Were there guitars much? ≠ Were there a many guitars?

(18) There wasn't wine much. ≠ There wasn't much wine.

- ▶ Note that *x-much* actually shares this reading with determiner *much* / *many*, but without sensitivity to the mass / count distinction.

- ▶ While *x-much* has readings that post-predicate *much* does not, they share high frequency readings.

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 rachhhh @Rach_gosselin · Apr 30
 MEG QUILLS LIFE BE LIKE OOOOOO AHHHHH 😊 absent much meggers?
pic.twitter.com/5JvQJ7Hju8


-14 Attendance For Walled hern	
Total Excused Periods:	213
Total Unexcused Periods:	0
Total Tardy Periods:	10

Attendance Detail





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Post-predicate *much* and high frequency

(19) Was Meggers absent much?

Formal proposal

- ▶ In order to account for the observed properties of *x-much*, we assume a multidimensional semantics in the Pottsian tradition (Potts 2005).
- ▶ In particular, we follow McCready's (2010) extension in assuming shunting types (σ^S) in addition to simple descriptive and expressive types (σ^C).
- ▶ Equipped with this, we render *x-much* as a shunting expression that takes a degree relation of the usual type as its argument.

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Denotation of *x-much*

(20) *x-much*

$$\rightsquigarrow \lambda G \exists d [G(d)(x) \wedge d >!! \text{std}_c(S_G) \wedge \text{LAUGHABLE}(d)] : \langle \langle d, \langle e, t \rangle \rangle, t^s \rangle$$

- ▶ That is, some contextually given individual *x* is *d*-angry, which not only greatly exceeds (>!!) the contextual standard on the scale of anger, but is also laughable.

- ▶ What is special about shunting expressions is that they »shunt« their descriptive argument to the expressive dimension, but do not anything behind at the truth-conditional layer (which contrasts with the resource-insensitive ordinary expressive expressions).

(21) Angry, much?

Semantic derivation of a *x-much* construction (simplified)

(22)

$$\langle \emptyset, \text{XMUCH}(\text{ANGRY}) : t^s \rangle$$

$$\text{ANGRY} : \langle d, \langle e, t \rangle \rangle \quad \text{XMUCH} : \langle \langle d, \langle e, t \rangle \rangle, t^s \rangle$$

- ▶ The 2-dimensional meaning of (21), would end thus up as follows.

(23) $\langle \emptyset, \exists d[\text{ANGRY}(d)(x) \wedge d >!! \text{std}_c(S_{ang}) \wedge \text{LAUGHABLE}(d)] \rangle$

- ▶ The shunting analysis not only captures the expressive character of *x-much*,
- ▶ but also the fact that it is not asserted, while still committing the speaker to its content.
- ▶ The shunting analysis also explains why the *x-much*-construction cannot be extended syntactically:
- ▶ In virtue of contributing nothing in the truth-conditional dimension, the analysis correctly predicts that the *x-much* construction cannot compose with truth-conditional operators like conjunction and disjunction.

Directedness

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- ▶ In contrast, it is perfectly acceptable to ask oneself a canonical polar question or exclaim something to oneself.

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- Is that an oak?
 - #That's an oak?

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- ▶ In contrast, it is perfectly acceptable to ask oneself a canonical polar question or exclaim something to oneself.

(24) [While walking through the forest alone, you come upon what you think might be an old oak.]

- a. Is that an oak?
- b. #That's an oak?

(25) [While walking through the forest alone, a giant tree crashes down in front of you.]

- a. That was very scary!
- b. #Scary, much?

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- ▶ Along these lines, we propose that rising intonation of *x-much* updates the addressee's commitment set with expressive content instead of normal propositional content.
- ▶ Crucially, since it is expressive content, the hearer cannot react in a direct, at-issue way, preventing *x-much* from being a bona fide question.

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- ▶ Crucially, since it is expressive content, the hearer cannot react in a direct, at-issue way, preventing *x-much* from being a bona fide question.
- ▶ In this sense, *x-much* is a tool to seek mutual alignment of expressive attitudes without putting them directly on the discourse table, which explains their use to establish a connection (mostly when used about another person/object) or to accuse the hearer of exaggerating in some respect.

Thanks, much?