

LSA.376: Muchalot

Language Log postings:

AZ, 4/5/06: Much ado about a lot:

<http://itre.cis.upenn.edu/~myl/languagelog/archives/002990.html>

AZ, 5/17/06: Big much squib:

<http://itre.cis.upenn.edu/~myl/languagelog/archives/003157.html>

Grano & Zwicky on *much* vs. *a lot*:

<http://www-csli.stanford.edu/~zwicky/SUhand.0607.pdf>

A. types

In construction with N-type expressions: types 1-3

1. determiner *much* (in combination with mass Nom; *much/many* according to M/C status of head N)

There was much confusion about our plans. (There were many puzzles about our plans.)

2. partitive *much*, in combination with *of* + NP

2a. predeterminer *much* (in combination with *of* + mass NP; *much/many* according to M/C status of head N, and sg/pl as well)

Much of the food has been eaten. (Many of the dishes have been eaten.)

2b. extent *much* (in combination with *of* + unrestricted NP; *much/all/some/etc.* is head, and singular) – can occur with count singular or plural

Much/All/Some of this book is well written.

Much/All/Some of these countries is under the cover of snow all winter.

(‘a large part/the whole of/some part of this book/these countries...’)

3. headless *much*

3a. free (related to determiner)

Much has been said about this problem.

3b. anaphoric (related to partitive)

We stared at the food on the table. Much had already been nibbled at.

In construction with A-type (4) or V-type (5) expressions: “adverbial” *much*

4. degree (A adverbial) *much*

4a. first-level (in combination with A, including Deg *more*)

This one is much bigger and runs much faster.

This one is much more powerful and runs much more elegantly.

- 4b. second-level (in combination with Det *more* + mass Nom)
There was much more confusion afterwards.

5. VP adverbial *much*

5a. frequency

We don't come here very much.

5b. degree

We enjoyed these concerts very much.

5c. preverbal (CGEL's "central")

5ci. postsubject

We very much would like to see your etchings.

5cii. postauxiliary

We would very much like to see your etchings.

5d. postverbal (CGEL's "end")

5di. postverb

We would like very much to see your etchings.

5dii. VP-final

We would like to see your etchings very much.

B. issues:

0. history, variability

history (in OED): *much* incalculably old; *a deal of* very old (OE, early ME) (now occurring essentially only with *great/good*), also predicate *plenty* and *plenty of* + E; *lot*, *lots* from early 19th c.*; *plenty* + A and *plenty* + E noun 'plenty of E' mid 19th c.; V + *plenty* mid 20th c.

*see lot.OED.doc [Appendix 1 below]:

1812 lots of our senators; 1816 lots of beer; 1835 a good lot of the Fathers; 1849 lots of villas; 1853 lots of gossip; 1858 [have] lots of time; 1886 a lot too much [cider]; 1891 [have] lots to do; 1894 [get] lots more [people] to take your post

1. alternation with *a lot (of)* – for all five types above

1a. stylistic factors (1st LLog posting)

ok I foresee much confusion about this proposal.
?? I see much furniture around the house.

1b. syntactico-semantic factors

1bi. NPI contexts: neg-polaroid character of most types of *much* (for some, just negatives and interrogatives; for others, conditionals as well; a few subtypes are actually NPIs; and a few – degree *much* with comparatives – are not at all neg-polaroid) [NOAD2 has the negative/interrogative connection, AHD4 does not]

1bii. possibilities for modification by adverbials:

much/many take degree adverbials that can modify As, which is quite a set: *very, pretty, how, so, as, that,...*; *a lot* takes (external) exclamatory modifiers than can modify Ns (no surprise, since *lot* is a N), and these are relatively few: *what, a hell of, quite, such* (plus internal modification in the formulas *a whole lot* and *an awful lot*); both can be modified by *not*

1biii. differences in distribution of modified vs. unmodified *much* (2nd LLog posting)

1biv. effects of following material (?prosodic effect)

There's ?? much / ok a lot here.

There's ok much / ok a lot to be said here.

1bv. effects of head N (affinity of determiner *much* for mental/physical states, activities)

1bvi. effects of syntactic function

(for determiner *much*: subject, predicative in existential, ordinary predicative, direct object, object of preposition)

[pointing to a pile of stuff]

That's * (very) much!

That's ok a (whole) lot!

subject vs. object:

Much time was wasted/spent/etc. on this project.

?? We wasted/spent/etc. much time on this project.

(possibly for degree *much* with non-comparative adjectives, predicative vs. adnominal)

1bvii. for VP adverbials, positions available (see 2nd LLog posting)

1bviii. for degree *much*, eligible heads (see Lawler e-mail [Appendix 2 below])

1bix. contexts that exclude *a lot*:

preverbal VP adverbial (2nd LLog posting):

* We a lot enjoyed these concerts.

ok We much enjoyed these concerts.

degree with non-comparatives:

?? They suddenly became a lot interested.

ok They suddenly became much interested.

* This solution is a lot preferred to that one.

ok This solution is much preferred to that one.

1bx. iterability: *much much*, and *many many* (iterable, like adjectives of quality)
vs. **a lot of a lot of*, **a lot a lot of*, **a lot lot of* (non-iterable, like nouns)

1c. semantic differences, especially noticeable in negatives and interrogatives, as
in this example found by Thomas Grano, 5/21/06:

“Because the world didn’t really care what Africans thought until about 2004, they were sort of
in a hermetically sealed Christian terrarium for a hundred years,” Paul Zahl says. “Their
Christianity didn’t get torpedoed by a lot of Western nihilism.”

http://www.newyorker.com/fact/content/articles/060417fa_fact5

2. parallels with *many* – for types 1-3; *many times*, perhaps, for 4; certainly *many times* for 5a

much generally more restricted than *many* (but free headless *many* more restricted; pretty
much has to be ‘many people’)

much/many in subjects of (positive declarative) clauses vs. *a lot of*:
difference between *much* and *many*

much effort has been: 374,000 raw hits on 5/1/06 [-how -so -as -too -very: 9,590]

!a lot of effort has been: 82,300

!many Germans are: 16,300 [-how -so -as -too -very: 412]

a lot of Germans are: 322

!many Chinese are: 28,400 [-how -so -as -too -very: 1,020]

a lot of Chinese are: 252

3. parallels with *little* (and, for *many*, *few*) – certainly for types 1-3, perhaps for some others

4. *a lot* vs. *lots* (and *a great/good deal*, *plenty* etc.) [*plenty* might be a positive polarity item in
some of its uses] [MWDEU has a nice entry for *plenty*]

lots seems to be generally viewed as more colloquial than *a lot* [see Appendix 3 below]

5. the postverbal VP adverbial *muchly* (in Brians; MWDEU)
6. idioms with *much* in them: *be much of a*, *be much to look at*,...: occur with NEG and Q and conditionals, but not main positive declaratives – hence, strict NPIs

References cited:

AHD4: American heritage dictionary of the English language, 4th ed.

Brians: Paul Brians, Common errors in English usage:

<http://www.wsu.edu/~brians/errors/errors.html>

CGEL: Huddleston & Pullum, Cambridge grammar of the English language (2002)

MWDEU: Merriam-Webster's dictionary of English usage (1989)

NOAD2: New Oxford American dictionary, 2nd ed.

OED: Oxford English Dictionary, on-line at <http://www.oed.com>

Appendix 1:

LOT n. in OED2

...**8. a. gen.** A number of persons or things of the same kind, or associated in some way; a quantity or collection (of things); a party, set, or 'crew' (of persons); also, a quantity (of anything). Now only *colloq.*, except with reference to articles of commerce, goods, live stock, and the like. Often with some degree of depreciation, either implied, or expressed by an epithet. (Cf. sense 3.)

c1575 J. HOOKER *Life Sir P. Carew* (1857) 49 The next day the people, like a lot of wasps, were up in sundry places. **1725** in G. Sheldon *Hist. Deerfield, Mass.* (1895) I. 449 Our men...discovered a partie of the Enemy that had killed a mare & a Lott of men. **1789** BENTHAM *Princ. Legisl.* xvi. §16 On the one hand a lot of punishment is a lot of pain; on the other hand the profit of an offence is a lot of pleasure. **1805** T. HOLCROFT *Bryan Perdue* I. 30 Put all the countries in the world in a bag, and the whole lot of them not worth little I-reland. **1854** MRS. CARLYLE *Lett.* (1883) II. 249 Mr. C being too busy with his book to waste a month at present, besides having a sacred horror of two several lots of children who were to be there. **1872** RAYMOND *Statist. Mines & Mining* 140 The Good Samaritan, on the dump of which a large lot of ore has accumulated. **1879** W. BENHAM *Mem. Cath. & Crau. Tait* 501 Their crew seem to have been a lazy lot. **1883** *Harper's Mag.* Jan. 206/2 The men who do this work are an interesting lot. **1884** E. R. TURNER in *Law Times* 30 Aug. 310/1 The defendant saw the calves,

one of which, the only wye calf in the lot, was poorly. **1884** *West. Morn. News* 30 Aug. 1/6 The above will be found to be an altering lot of Stock. **1897** M. KINGSLEY *W. Africa* 348 He said the natives were an exceedingly bad lot.

...**9. colloq.** A considerable number, quantity, or amount; a good deal, a great deal. Used in sing. (*a lot*) and plur.; also as quasi-adv. Often *absol.*, without explicit mention of the persons or things intended. Also with adj., as *a good lot, a great lot, (this, that) little lot*.

1812 *Spirit Pub. Jrnls.* XVI. 191 Lots of our Senators have of late been subject to the awful visitation. **1816** 'QUIZ' *Grand Master* II. 47 Gallons of Arrack, lots of beer. **1835** KEBLE in Sir J. T. Coleridge *Mem.* (1869) 201 Till you have read a good lot of the Fathers. **1849** CLOUGH *Poems*, etc. (1869) I. 158 You see lots of villas, six or seven at least, in ruins. **1853** LD. HOUGHTON in T. W. Reid *Life* (1891) I. xi. 491 General B... who is factotum of the Court, and who has lots of gossip. **1858** MRS. CARLYLE *Let.* II. 368 Having had lots of time to unpack and dress. **1886** *Cornh. Mag.* July 41 There was plenty of cider--a lot too much, indeed. **1891** E. PEACOCK *N. Brendon* I. 69 Good bye, I've lots to do. **1894** H. NISBET *Bush Girl's Rom.* 306 The colony could get lots more to take your post, if they hanged you. **1898** J. D. BRAYSHAW *Slum Silhouettes* 141 Yus, it's a nobby little turn-out, ain't it?.. Mine? Lor' luv a duck! No, that's Sal Hogan's little lot. **1901** *Blackw. Mag.* Aug. 223/1, I would give a lot to have had Raeburn paint her. **1901** A. HOPE *Tristram of Blent* x. 113 But, mind you, Duplay's a very superior fellow. He knows the deuce of a lot. **1920** J. MANDER *Story N.Z. River* v. 76, I just love you, lots. **1957** 'J. WYNDHAM' *Midwich Cuckoos* iii. 24 That there Miss Ogle ain't 'alf goin' to cop 'erself a basinful of 'Er Majesty's displeasure over this little lot. **1961** B. CRUMP *Hang on a Minute* 91 Have a bo-peep at this little lot, Jack, called Sam from the back of the truck. **1965** [see BUSTER 2b]. **1968** *Listener* 1 Aug. 148/1 Mr Donoghue, like any good critic, doesn't mean us, he means you lot. **1975** P. G. WINSLOW *Death of Angel* 125 A group of lads she doesn't care about... Next stop Wormwood Scrubs, that little lot.

Appendix 2: Lawler e-mail:

From: jlawler@umich.edu
Subject: Much ado
Date: May 18, 2006 10:45:24 AM PDT
To: zwicky@csl.stanford.edu

I recalled thinking about this a while back and jotting down some notes. Here is what I found, finally, on my hard disk.

much better *much good
much improved *much interested
much obliged *much grateful
much reduced *much shrunken
much enlarged *much grown
much different *much varied

much changed *much variable
much the same *much equal
much alike *much old
much similar *much small

- (1) OK with comparatives
He's much better.
- (2) OK with superlatives
He's much the best.
- (3) No good with incomparables.
*He's much/very dead.
- (4) OK with (some) implicit comparatives
He's much different.
He's much improved.
It's much reduced.
I much prefer the white wine. (adv)
- (6) No good with scalar statives
He's *much/very old.
He's *much/very tall.

Participles and adjectives from participles also seem to be better in some ways, though there are plenty of them that don't work, e.g *much disgusted.

My feeling is that the acceptable cases are a smaller set than the * cases, and that there may be something in the semantics of the acceptable cases that implies a comparison. Though that doesn't explain *much shrunken ~ much reduced.

From: zwicky@csli.stanford.edu

Subject: Re: Much ado

Date: May 25, 2006 11:04:37 AM PDT

To: jlawler@umich.edu

Cc: tgrano@stanford.edu, dkenter@stanford.edu, laurence.horn@yale.edu

On May 18, 2006, at 10:45 AM, you wrote:

>I recalled thinking about this a while back and jotting down some notes. Here is what I found, finally, on my hard disk.

much better *much good<

fascinating stuff, for which i thank you. i was familiar with the (explicit) comparatives, for which "much" is always acceptable, not detectably (to me) formal in style, and not even slightly neg-polaroid (the term i've started to use for items that show an affinity for neg-polarity contexts, without actually being NPIs). and i knew about the implicit comparatives, like "different". but i hadn't really thought about the rest, and it looks wonderfully complex (a goldmine, or a

minefield, depending on how you feel about data complexity -- maybe we should call such domains "goldminefields").

(the *string* "much good" is fine, by the way, but only in some idioms with the *noun* "good" in them: "that solution isn't much good", "the elixir won't do much good for your cough" etc.)

>much improved *much interested<

oh dear:

- * I'm much interested in your ideas.
- ok I'm very much interested in your ideas.
- ok He isn't much interested in your ideas.

so degree "much" begins to look a lot like VP adverbial "much", with differences between different heads (adjectives here, verbs there) in their behavior, and with some items showing modification and neg-polarity effects.

i *think* that you're right that most gradable non-comparative adjectives work like "interested" rather than "improved" (non-gradables don't of course take "much" regardless of context), at least in not allowing unmodified "much" in positive declarative contexts. (some might not allow "much" no matter what.)

>much obliged *much grateful<

"much obliged" might be a formula. elsewhere, we see lots of occurrences of "thanks much", "thank you much", and even british "ta much", despite a general unhappiness with unmodified etc. postverbal "much" -- probably also formulas.

i think that "much grateful" is improved by modification -- "I am very much grateful to you for your help" -- but negation doesn't help:

- *He isn't much grateful for the help he got.
- (meanwhile, "thankful" seems generally hopeless here.)

>much reduced *much shrunken<

past participial adjectives derived from change-of-state verbs ("improved", "reduced", "enlarged", "changed") seem generally ok with "much", so long as the denotation of the adjective really does involve the change of state, and not merely (as i think is the case for "shrunken") the resultant state. "shrunken", in fact, seems generally hopeless with "much", even modified and in negative contexts.

>much enlarged *much grown<

"grown" is state-denoting, i think. similar remarks for some of the others on your list.

Appendix 3: The rogues' gallery of advice givers

0. apparently A LOT OF, LOTS OF not in Garner at all (nor in Hall 1917), and apparently not in Strunk & White

not in Fowler, except in a discussion of number agreement in expressions with HEAPS OF and LOTS OF

MWDEU notes that Gowers' Fowler 1965 says "the Concise Oxford English Dictionary labels *a lot* colloquial but that modern writers do not hesitate to use it in serious prose."

about 3/4 of their sources labeled it colloquial; from Shaw 1970:

Lots of, a lot of, a whole lot. These terms are colloquial for "many," "much," "a great deal." The chief objection is that each is a vague, general expression.

(MWDEU suggests this line of attack goes back to Jensen 1935 and Bierce 1909.)

Crisp 1971 survey of attitudes found all groups finding *lots, a lot* "established". Perrin & Ebbitt 1972 says (MWDEU) "all these expressions are established in general, though not formal, usage". MWDEU's conclusion: "These expressions have been used in serious but not overformal writing for a long time, and they still are."

1. AMZ --> TAG, 7/10/06

for the rogues' gallery:

Guth, Hans. 1959. Words and ideas: A handbook for college writing. SF: Wadsworth Publ. Co.

p. 461, in the section on "Colloquial Words":

Commonly used words with a colloquial flavor are nouns like *boss, buddy, folks, and job*; verbs like *faze, flunk, sass, and snoop*; adjectives like *brainy, mean, skimpy, and sloppy*...

Colloquial language uses conversational tags like "well,...", "now,...", "yes,...", "why,..."; qualifiers like *kind of, sort of, a lot, lots*; abbreviated forms like *ad, bike, exam, gym, phone*. It uses many "phrasal verbs," verbs that combine a short basic verb with one or more prepositions; *check up on, chip in, come up with, cut out* (noise), *get across* (a point), *take in* (a show), *take up with* (a person).

Colloquial English usually contains a liberal sprinkling of catch-all words like *nice, cute, awful, wonderful, or terrible*. It is fond of figurative expressions like *play ball, polish the apple, have a brainstorm*.

25 years later he was still at it, in:

- 1985. *New English handbook*. 2nd ed. Belmont CA: Wadsworth Publ. Co.

in section 31b, pp. 236-8, which expands on the earlier stuff, with little change (though *phone*, *ad*, and *exam* "are now commonly used in serious writing"). on p. 238:

Do without informal tags. Informal language uses many tags like *kind of*, *sort of*, *a lot*, *lots*.

2. MWDEU takes it back to Bierce 1909 (*Write it right: A little blacklist of literary faults*), p. 42:

Lots, or *a Lot*, for *Much*, or *Many*. "Lots of things." "A lot of talk."

3. Ayres 1909, p. 166:

Lot--Lots. Very inelegantly used for "a great many," "a great deal"; as, "They have *lots* of enemies," "We have *lots* of apples," "He had a *lot*, or *lots*, of trouble," "She gave us a *lot* of trouble," etc.

4. Trask, p. 171 on LOTS OF, A LOT OF:

Normal in spoken English, these expressions still look rather strange in formal writing. Quite a few people are now happy to use these things in formal writing, and write *Lots of research has been done*, but many readers will still find this objectionable. You are advised to write *A great deal of research has been done*, or, in very formal writing, *Much research has been done*.

5. Wilson, *Columbia Guide*, p. 277, on lots of, a lot of:

Many commentators label these locutions Colloquial, but it is clear that they are both Standard and acceptable at all levels of use, although some conservatives may think *lots of* unsuited to formal contexts: *We had lots of comment on the proposal. There was a lot of good-natured dissent expressed.*

6. Lunsford & Connor: no warning on A LOT (OF), warning on LOTS (OF):

glossary of usage, p. 731: *lots*, *lots of*. Avoid these informal expressions meaning "much" or "many" in academic discourse.

7. Hacker, *Rules for Writers*, p. 540 (ok for A LOT, not LOTS)

8. Holt Handbook (6th ed.), p. 814, glossary of usage:

lots, lots of, a lot of. These words are colloquial substitutes for *many*, *much*, or *a great deal of*. Avoid their use in college writing: The students had *many* (not *lots of* or *a lot of*) options for essay topics.

9. Bedford Guide (2nd ed.), p. 777

10. Rosen & Behrens, p. 786

11. Foerster & Steadman (1931), p. 329

12. Kierzek, Macmillan Guide (1939), p. 372

13. Burchfield 1998: "the main contexts in which one finds them are in plain workaday sentences or conversations... The informal nature of both *a lot of* and *lots of* is underlined by the presence in many 20c. works of the contracted forms *lotta* and *lotsa*..."

AMZ --> TAG, 7/10/06

but, but, if most language is "plain workaday sentences or conversations", then stylistically neutral items would be expected to be found mostly there.

the other argument seems to assume that informal expressions are more likely to undergo "contraction" than formal expressions. there are tons of obvious counterexamples: woulda, shoulda, coulda, mighta, wanna, etc. the function of such reductions, in fact, is mostly to provide informal variants of neutral or formal expressions.

shoddy, shoddy reasoning.