# Some Remarks on Proportional Quantifiers

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In his talk, I will investigate proportional quantifiers such as *most, more than half,* etc. in English and German and defend the following claim:

> The meanings of proportional quantifiers are not semantic primitives of quantification in natural language - contra Generalized Quantifier Theory (GQT). Instead, proportional quantifiers employ semantic primitives familiar from the study of comparative constructions (degree expressions, comparative – and superlative operators, degree functions, measure functions, etc.).

Support for this claim comes chiefly from a detailed argument combining language internal ("theoretical") evidence and language external (processing) evidence that *most* needs to be analyzed as a superlative expression while its truth-conditionally equivalent counterpart *more than half* is a comparative construction.

The language internal argument is based on the observations that *most* and its German counterpart *die meisten* not only bear morpho-syntactic resemblance to the superlative of *many/viel* (a tendency that seems to hold across languages)*,* they are also subject that the same constraints that govern the possible interpretations of superlatives in general – with two important qualifications: 1. *most/die meisten* does not have a genuine absolute interpretation. In its stead it has a proportional determiner interpretation equivalent to *more than half*. 2. The polar counterpart *fewest/die wenigsten* cannot be understood to convey a proportional quantifier meaning along the lines of *less than half*. It has only a relative superlative interpretation. The second point exemplifies a systematic "lexical" gap in the inventory of quantificational expressions that holds across languages. Obviously, this gap cannot be explained by appealing to a GQT universal, since the intended meaning is perfectly legitimately expressed my *less than half*. Instead it calls for a compositional analysis of *most* and *fewest* that explains how *most* gives rise to a proportional meaning in contexts that allow only absolute readings of superlatives but *fewest* cannot. I will show that such an analysis can be obtained once *most* and *fewest* are decomposed into a superlative *–est* and *many/few.*

The analysis of proportional *most* as superlative of *many* leads to the second argument in that it predicts different LFs for truth-conditionally equivalent statements of the for *most A B* and *more than half of the A B.* Given that and assuming that LFs (or structured propositions) inform verification procedures, it is possible to derive different verification strategies for the two types of statements. I will argue, more specifically, that *most AB* triggers a form of vote-counting, which does not involve counting the total number of As, while *more than half of the AB* triggers counting strategy similar to the one triggered by basic comparative quantifiers such as *more than n AB.* Empirical support for this difference in verification strategies will come from verification studies using a novel experimental technique called "Self-Paced Counting."