

Inquiry into the semantic properties of comparatives like that in (1a) has established the utility of an analysis based on a comparison of degrees (GAs, which usually introduce the degrees; e.g. [K99], [H01], [B06]). In contrast to comparatives with adjective+*-er* or pre-adjectival *more* (“pre-A”; (1a)), those with *more* in post-adjectival position (“post-A”; (1b)) have received less attention. We provide experimental evidence for an ambiguity of (1b), lending *prima facie* support for a recent uniform account of (1) in which MUCH introduces degrees ([W19]; cf. [B15]).

- (1) a. A was bluer/more blue than B (was). $\rightsquigarrow \mu_{\text{blue}}(a) \succ \mu_{\text{blue}}(b) \rightsquigarrow \text{BLUENESS}$
 b. A was blue more than B was. $\rightsquigarrow ??$

For [W19], pre-A involves measurement of states, and post-A leaves open the possibility of measuring events or event pluralities (e.g., via covert ‘eventizing’ [K04] and pluralizing morphemes [F05]). So, pre-A looks as in (2a), while post-A leaves (2b-i) and (2b-ii) open. (In (2), the *than*-clause contents are abbreviated as d_b, d'_b, \dots ; $\sigma(\mu)$ is an ‘appropriate measure’ determined by assignment σ ; $e \triangleright^\tau s$ is read ‘ e is temporally constituted by s ’; E ranges over pluralities of events.) Appropriate measures must, *inter alia*, preserve the structure of the measured domain [S02].

- (2) a. $\exists s[\text{holder}(s)(a) \ \& \ \text{blue}(s) \ \& \ \sigma(\mu)(s) \succ d_b] \rightsquigarrow \text{BLUENESS}$
 b. i. $\exists e \exists s[\text{holder}(s)(a) \ \& \ \text{blue}(s) \ \& \ e \triangleright^\tau s \ \& \ \sigma(\mu)(e) \succ d'_b] \rightsquigarrow \text{DURATION}$
 ii. $\exists E \forall e \in E \exists s[\text{holder}(s)(a) \ \& \ \text{blue}(s) \ \& \ e \triangleright^\tau s \ \& \ \sigma(\mu)(E) \succ d''_b] \rightsquigarrow \text{NUMBER}$

This theory expects that dimensional selection should depend on fine-grained linguistic and contextual factors. All else equal, pitting degrees of blueness against numbers of occasions of being blue, people should evaluate (1a) by BLUENESS but (1b) by NUMBER (Exp. 1). Pitting number of occasions against total duration, people should prefer NUMBER for scenes suggesting ‘atomic’ parts of a plurality and DURATION otherwise, as when evaluating (1b) against scenes showing discrete, repetitive activity (‘flashing’) versus nearly-continuous activity (‘glowing’) (Exp. 2).

Fig. 1: post-A (L) vs pre-A (R) (Exp. 1)

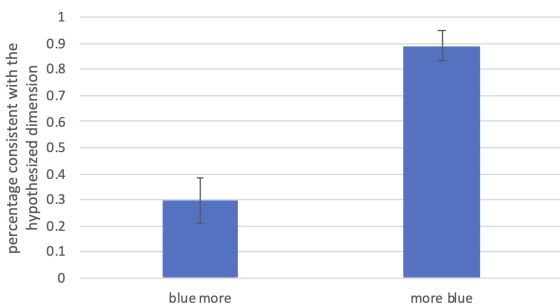
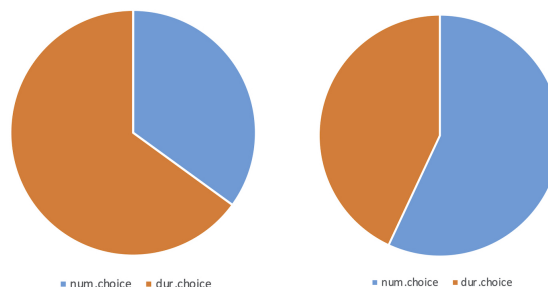


Fig. 2: post-A glowing (L) vs flashing (R) (Exp. 2)



(1a) preferred BLUENESS (~90%), and (1b) attracted NUMBER (~30%) but it wasn’t preferred (Fig. 1). Plausibly, this suggests that all else *wasn’t* equal.¹ In Exp. 2, (1b) was only sensibly interpreted in event terms, and here preference for NUMBER or DURATION depended on the scene type (Fig. 2). [W19]’s theory can explain this: (i) state-to-event and/or event-to-plural mapping before combination with *more*, and (ii) carefully-constructed scenes providing cues to disambiguation.

¹A certain prosody on (1b) can invite a degree modifier reading, possibly indicating further ambiguity. Indeed, 6 participants plainly evaluated (1b) in Exp. 1 by NUMBER, and 14 by BLUENESS. One of these reported the target as “more blue” when it was “blue more” on for every trial. Another noted, “I wasn’t sure if [the instructions asked] me to select the square that was more blue or if [they] wanted me to select the square that flashed blue more times”.

References.

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