



*tall* vs. *very tall*). In this case, I propose that the second option (4b) for determining the ‘better than’ relation between alternatives is invoked, yielding the following for the original sentences in (1):

- (6)  $\varphi = \text{Bob has/doesn't have about 50 sheep.}$      $\varphi' = \text{Bob has/doesn't have 50 sheep.}$   
 $\varphi' \sim_{INF} \varphi$      $\varphi' >_{SIMP} \varphi$     therefore     $\varphi' > \varphi$

As seen here, the unmodified alternative  $\varphi'$  is in both cases the better one, being equivalent in strength to the original  $\varphi$  but simpler; by the assertion rule in (3),  $\varphi'$  should be used if possible. The use of the approximator-modified version thus implicates that the corresponding bare alternative is not weakly assertable. In the positive case (1a), this is unproblematic. We assume that in a context in which *about* is used, a bare numeral is interpreted precisely. The speaker’s assertion of *about 50* then implicates that she is not in the position to assert (*exactly*) 50. This accurately captures the hedging feel of (1a). The negative case (1b) is different: since  $50_{EXACT} \subset 50_{COARSE}$ , it is necessarily the case that a speaker in a position to assert *not about 50* could also have asserted its better alternative *not 50*. Put differently, an implicature would be generated that contradicts the assertion; as a result, the sentence is blocked. When the approximator occurs in a comparative quantifier, the situation is reversed: *not more than about 50* in (2b) is felicitous (and implicates that *not more than 50* is not assertable); but since *more than 50\_{COARSE} \subset more than 50\_{EXACT}*, the positive (2a) is blocked by the better alternative *more than 50*.

**Beyond about:** The present framework generates for (1a) the weak implicature that the speaker does not believe that Bob has (exactly) 50 sheep, but crucially does not generate a true ignorance implicature (i.e. an implicature that she neither believes that he has exactly 50 nor believes that he doesn't have exactly 50). This correctly captures the facts: (1a) could be asserted by a speaker who knows Bob has (say) 47 sheep but chooses to ‘round off’ to the more salient value 50; however, it is less felicitous if the speaker knows that exactly 50 obtains. This rounding use is possible with a variety of approximators (e.g. *roughly*, *approximately*); but other approximating constructions have a stronger ignorance effect, an example being approximating disjunctions: *Bob has 40 or 50 sheep* is infelicitous if the speaker knows him to have exactly 47. This is also captured by the present approach, in a similar way to other accounts of ignorance implicatures of disjunction (e.g. Katzir 2007). The disjunctive sentence has both disjuncts *Bob has 40 sheep* and *Bob has 50 sheep* as alternatives (where in each case the numeral is interpreted approximately). These are better than the original disjunction, being both simpler and more informative. Thus assertion of the disjunction yields the implicature that the speaker does not believe that  $40_{APPROX}$  obtains and also does not believe that  $50_{APPROX}$  obtains. In the context of the assertion, the latter is equivalent to not believing that  $40_{APPROX}$  does not obtain, resulting in an ignorance implicature for  $40_{APPROX}$  (and similarly for  $50_{APPROX}$ ).

**Extensions:** The present account will be compared to other potential analyses of approximators and attenuating polarity items more generally. Israel (1996 & ff.) proposes that all polarity sensitivity derives from two binary lexico-semantic features, quantitative value (high/low) and informative value (emphatic/attenuating). While his theory is comprehensive and elegant, it fails to explain why the same sorts of items – including approximators – tend cross-linguistically to be attenuators. On the present approach, the behavior of approximators derives from their vague semantics, which makes them unable to strengthen relative to their unmodified alternatives, thus favoring a comparison in terms of structural simplicity. It will be demonstrated that a similar analysis can be applied to a range of other attenuators, and also accounts for cases where a single item exhibits variable polarity sensitivity (e.g. *\*much/not much money* but *much more than \$100*). Also to be considered is a theory based on obligatory exhaustification, per Spector (2014). I show that the intuitions underlying the present account can also be captured in such a framework, but only by incorporating some non-trivial modifications, in particular the inclusion of a covert doxastic operator (Meyer 2013), and the specification that *exh* is only obligatory wrt. the simpler alternative derived via deletion.

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