

ON THE LOGIC OF “FEW”, “MANY”, AND “MOST”

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1 *Introduction* The traditional relations of contradictoriness, contrari-ness, and entailment (of universal to particular) hold for the ‘square of opposition’ in (1), where (2) shows how “few” comes in.

(1)	affirmatives	negatives
nearly universal	A Most S are P	E Most S are not P
more than particular	I Many S are P	O Many S are not P

- (2) (Most S are P) if & only if (Few S are not-P)
 (Most S are not-P) if & only if (Few S are P)

“Little” and “much” should be substituted for “few” and “many” respectively, when the S-term is a mass noun or abstract singular rather than a count noun. The relationships portrayed hold for “most” taken in the sense of “nearly all” (i.e., the sense for which (2) does hold). The relationships do not hold for the generic sense of “most”, that wherein “Most S are P” means nothing more specific than that the number (or amount) of S that are (is) P is greater than the number (or amount) of S that are (is) not P.

These facts constitute the basic logic for “few”, “many”, and “most” in English. (I presume these facts will also obtain, with appropriate adjustments, in all other natural languages. It would be most surprising if they did not.) By ‘basic logic’ I mean the absolutely ground-level or baseline phenomena that any *further* logical or empirical account—such as an abstract formal system for these quantifiers with explicit (logical) semantics, or a method of natural language description incorporating semantic representations of these quantifiers—must build upon. The only purpose of this paper is to explain and defend the claim that (1) and (2) do present the basic facts. I shall do this by describing the genesis of the claim (my actual line of reasoning that led to these results) and detailing the qualifications necessary to defend it. (The important qualification,