

Sarcastic much?

Use of the X + *much* construction

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This presentation contributes to the hitherto limited research on the recent phenomenon of the X + *much* (*sarcastic much?*) construction. In this construction, X can be an NP, VP or AdjP, and is always followed by the adverb *much*. There may be another element after *much*, but the utterance always ends with a question mark, although it does not have the same function as a regular question.

- (1) - He owns three dealerships.
- God, Mom. **Brag much?**
- She's just being proud of me.

Previous studies have analyzed the use of the construction (Gutzmann & Henderson 2015, 2019) and have delved into the evolution of its function (Hilpert & Bourgeois 2020). The construction started out being used in dialogue as a critical response to a previous statement or behavior, as is shown in (1). Over time it has conventionalized enough for speakers of English to use it in written and monological settings (blog posts, TV show episode titles, etc.). At first, speakers only used it to convey a critical or sarcastic meaning, and although this continues to be the main reason for using the construction, it can now also convey a positive or neutral message. Although the construction has gained in popularity since the 1990s, it is still considered as slang and not part of Standard English.

For our research, we used the *Corpus of Contemporary American English* (COCA) to find instances of X + *much*. We will present five tokens per part of speech (NP, VP, AdjP) that represent our general impression of the data. This presentation aims at understanding the function of the construction, i.e., when and how speakers use it and what it does in an utterance, as well as its evolution over time.

Preliminary results suggest that in the majority of cases, speakers continue to use X + *much* for sarcastic or critical purposes, such as calling someone out on their behavior. Instances of this construction being used positively or neutrally are much rarer. Moreover, in recent years, the open slot allows for a lot more variation, and speakers can be very creative.

References

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