Strategic use of quantifiers in reporting statistics

People can construe quantities using a variety of different communicative strategies, including quantifiers such as "some", "every" and "none" (van Tiel et al., 2021). However, despite a recent shift of attention in the literature towards argumentation-based accounts (Moxey & Sanford, 2000), little is known about how such expressions are used strategically to frame quantities as either large or small. Here we experimentally investigate how English speakers use quantifiers to construe the outcome of a school exam either positively or negatively without blatantly lying. In Experiment 1, we asked 30 participants to describe pictures depicting different exam outcomes by filling sentences with two quantifiers and an adjective (i.e. "some of the students got all of the questions in the exam right"). In Experiment 2, we asked 30 participants to describe the same scenes by typing in their own descriptions. In both experiments we manipulated how the descriptions were to be framed, namely as depicting either a good or a bad outcome. The results of Experiment 1 show that people use informationally weaker expressions, such as "some" as opposed to "all," when having to frame a good outcome as a poor performance or a bad outcome as a strong performance. Experiment 2 replicates this general finding, which shows that people use informationally weaker expressions in cases of a mismatch between quantity and high/low framing even when the task is not forced choice.