

# The Utility of Vagueness: Does it Lie Elsewhere?

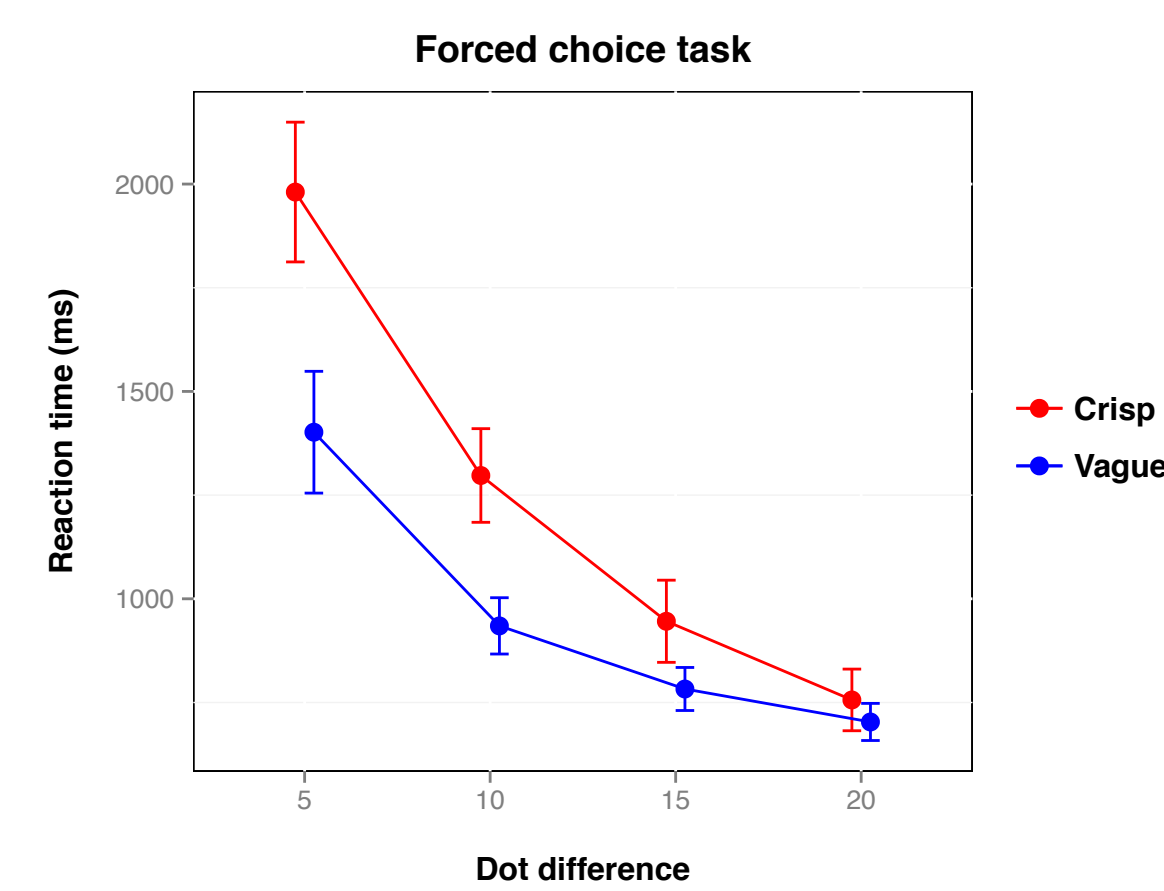
Matt Green and Kees van Deemter

Computing Science Department, University of Aberdeen, Aberdeen AB24 3UE, Scotland, UK

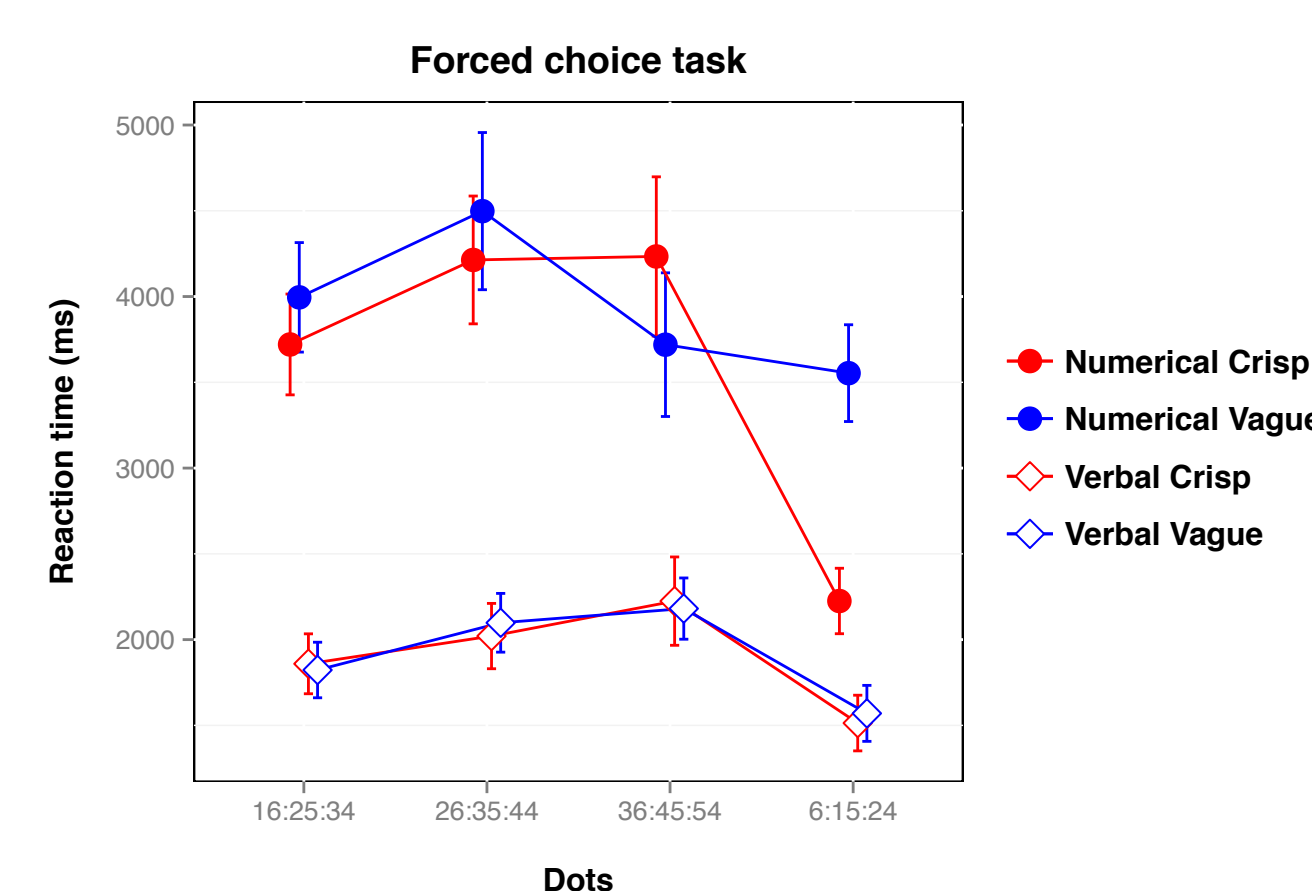
## Summary

- Vague expressions are highly frequent in many areas of language use. This has been taken to suggest that vagueness can sometimes be useful.
- Attempts to identify empirical benefits of vagueness suggest that the benefits that vague terms bring are due to other properties that the vague terms bring with them

## Earlier work



Vague instructions lead to faster and more accurate responses versus crisp alternatives



Instructions that avoid numbers and permit comparison tasks lead to faster responses, but there is no additional effect of vagueness

## Vagueness and other properties

### Vagueness:

- borderline cases
- fuzzy boundaries
- Sorites paradox

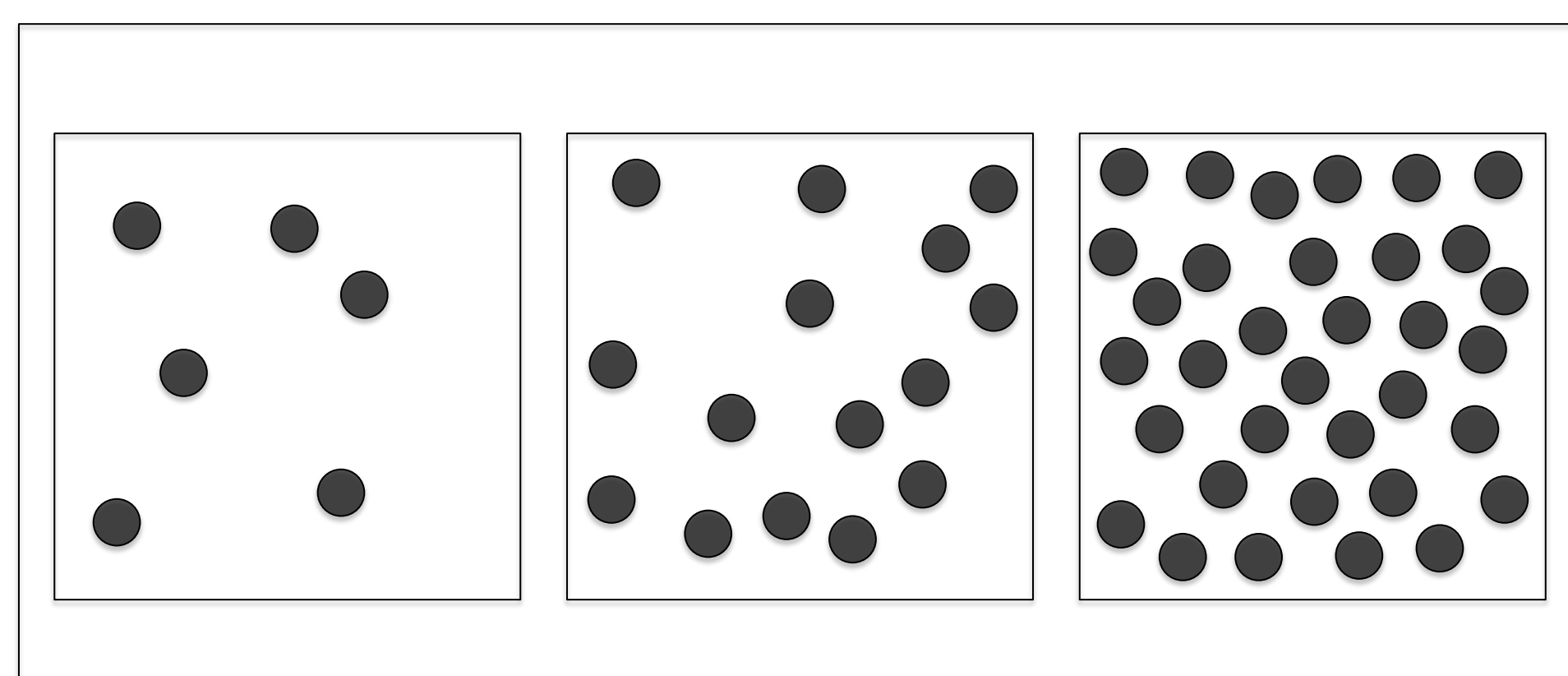
### Other properties:

- avoid numbers
- allow comparison

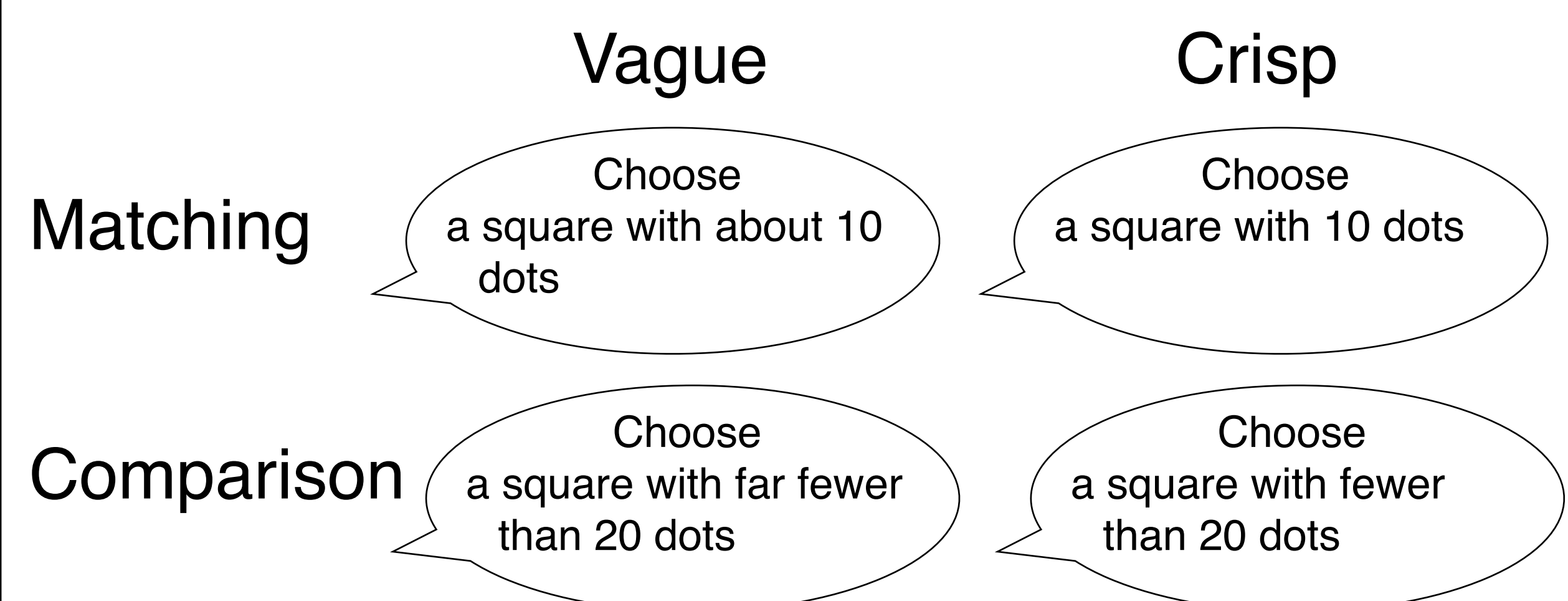
Next: Hold use of numbers constant and manipulate vagueness and selection task

## Current experiment

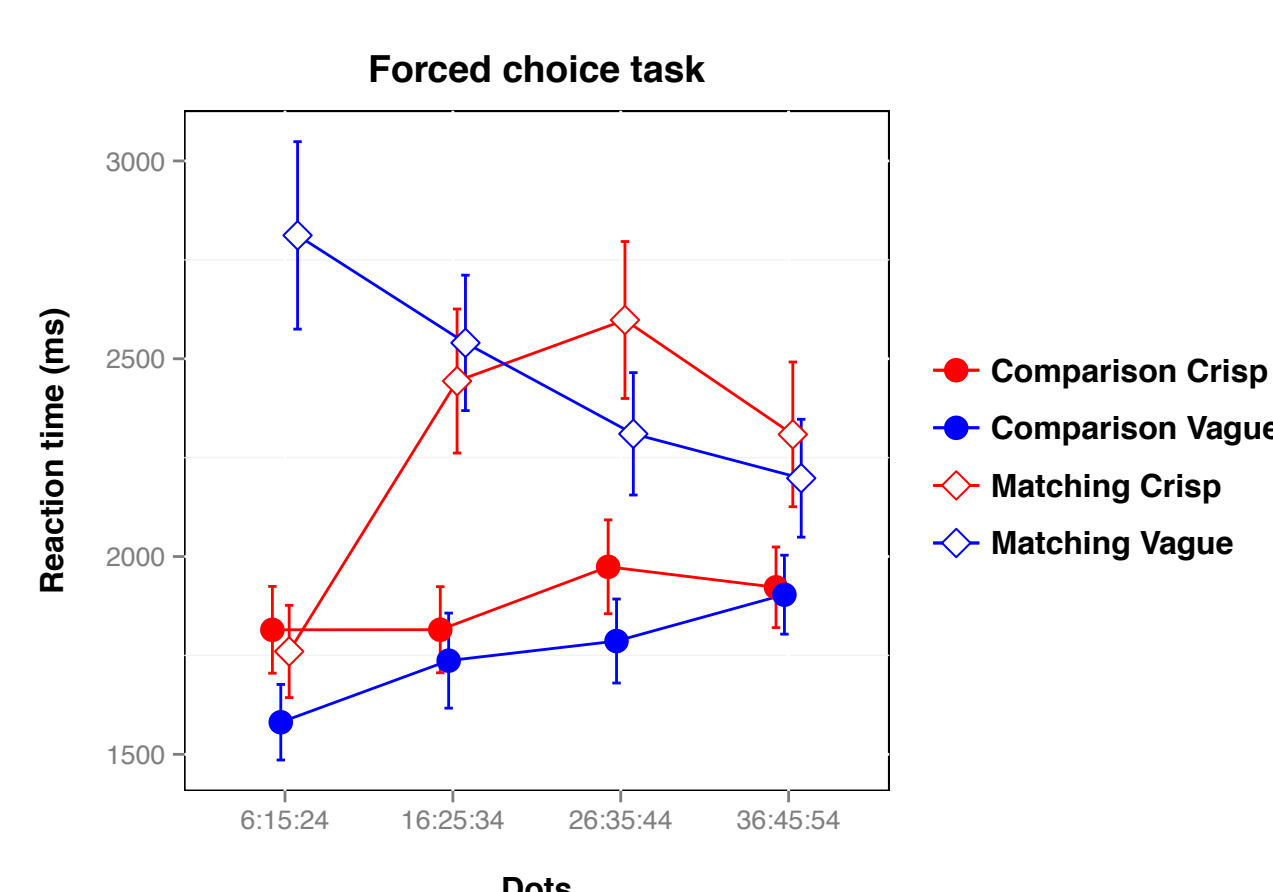
### Stimulus



### Manipulation



### Results



Vague comparison is easier than crisp comparison, but in matching, vagueness has no effect

### Discussion

- Vague and crisp forms were equally difficult on average.
- Comparison forms were easier than the matching forms.
- Vague comparison forms were easier than crisp comparison forms ( $p=.026$ ).
- Could the advantage for vagueness be due to number of valid targets?