

ABSTRACT:

The meaning of possessives varies notoriously in four respects:

* The relation of possession involved;

His sister didn't recognize him

Her paper was accepted for the conference

My bicycle has a flat tire

Your assignment was unsatisfactory

* The definiteness or indefiniteness of the possessive phrase;

#There were

There were at most two cars' tires slashed

* What fraction of the possessed objects the claim concerns;

Some cars' tires were slashed (though none of those cars had all its tires slashed)

The car's tires were slashed (#though one of its tires was not slashed)

and even

* How many of the possessing entities need be involved

Most people's grandchildren love them (even though most people don't have grandchildren)

Those people's grandchildren love them (#even though those people don't have grandchildren)

This talk will outline the analysis presented in Peters and Westerståhl (2006), showing how it accounts uniformly for this range of data and, in interaction with partitivity, explains the ambiguity of

Several of John's books' pages are stained

and similar cases, as contrasted with the unambiguity of

One of John's ex-wives' previous husbands {was a millionaire/were millionaires}