

# The Interpretation of Indifference Free Relatives

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**1. Introduction.** *-Ever* free relatives, as in (1a), can be contrasted with plain definites and plain free relatives (1b-c) on the one hand, and universal quantifiers (1d) on the other; it has been variously argued in the literature that they have universal quantificational force (Iatridou and Varlokosta 1998) and that they are definites with some added special property (Jacobson 1995, Dayal 1997, von Fintel 2000).

- (1) a. John read whatever Mary recommended.
- b. John read what Mary recommended.
- c. John read the book(s) Mary recommended.
- d. John read everything Mary recommended.

In this paper, I propose a modified version of von Fintel (2000)’s analysis of *-ever* free relatives, which I argue can account for their peculiar pattern of behavior.

1.1. IGNORANCE VS. INDIFFERENCE. Von Fintel (2000) distinguishes two types of *-ever* free relatives:

- (2) a. Whatever it is that Arlo is cooking has a lot of garlic in it. (ignorance)  
      ‘There’s a lot of garlic in the dish(es) that Arlo is cooking (and I don’t know what that is).’  
     b. Ignorance presupposition: the identity of the referent varies across epistemic worlds.  
           $\llbracket \text{whatever} \rrbracket = \lambda P. \lambda w. \lambda x. P(w)(x)$   
          Presupposition:  $\exists w', w'' \in F: \lambda x. P(w')(x) \neq \lambda x. P(w'')(x)$
- (3) a. Zack voted for whoever was at the top of the ballot. (indifference)  
      ‘Zack voted for the person who was at the top of the ballot; and if a different person had been at the top of the ballot, Zack would have voted for that person.’  
     b. Counterfactual presupposition: the sentence is also true in worlds that are like the real world except for the identity of the free relative.  
           $\llbracket \text{whatever} \rrbracket = \lambda P. \lambda Q. \lambda w. Q(w)(\lambda x. P(w)(x))$   
          Presupposition:  $\forall w' \in \min_w [F \cap \lambda w'. \lambda x. P(w')(x) \neq \lambda x. P(w)(x)]: Q(w')(\lambda x. P(w')(x)) = Q(w)(\lambda x. P(w)(x))$

The meaning of indifference *whatever* thus has two parts: a relation between two properties that makes reference to a maximal individual, and a counterfactual component.

**2. *-Ever* free relatives and ACD.** A well-known fact about Antecedent-Contained Deletion (ACD) constructions with quantifiers like *every* is that the size of the ellipsis determines the possible scope interpretations of the DP with respect to intensional operators:

- (4) a. John was willing to read every book that Mary did.
- b. John was willing to read every book that Mary was.

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If the smaller VP in (5a) is elided, the *every*-phrase can be interpreted either *de dicto* or *de re*; eliding the larger VP, as in (5b), forces the DP to move out of the scope of *willing*, in which case it can only have a *de re* reading.

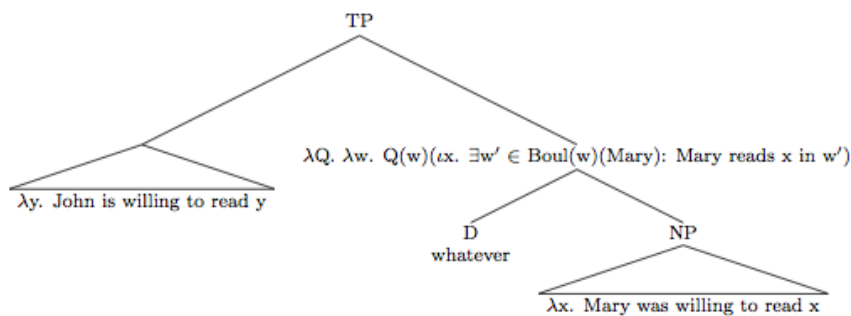
Definites, including plain free relatives, show the same effect. But with *whatever*, the sentence with non-local ACD is still ambiguous:

(5) John was willing to read whatever Mary was.

It has not only a *de re* ignorance reading (John and Mary were willing to read the same books, and the speaker doesn't know which ones), but also an indifference reading with what one might call a "*de dicto* flavor"<sup>1</sup>. On this interpretation, John was willing to read the books Mary was willing to read, but would have been willing to read other books if Mary's preferences had been different.

2.1. A "*DE DICTO*" READING FOR *WHATEVER*. Deriving a *de dicto* reading in the usual way is impossible, since the free relative has moved out of the scope of *willing* to undo antecedent containment.

(6)



The first argument of *whatever* is  $[\lambda x. \text{Mary was willing to read } x]$ ; the second is  $[\lambda y. \text{John was willing to read } y]$ . Using von Fintel (2000)'s indifference meaning from (3b), we predict that the sentence is true if and only if John was willing to read what Mary was willing to read (from the assertion), *and* in minimally different worlds where Mary was willing to read something else, John was willing to read that.

2.2. ANOTHER AMBIGUITY. Indifference free relatives do show scope interactions with quantifiers, but not the ones we see with *every*:

(7) Someone was willing to read whatever Mary was.

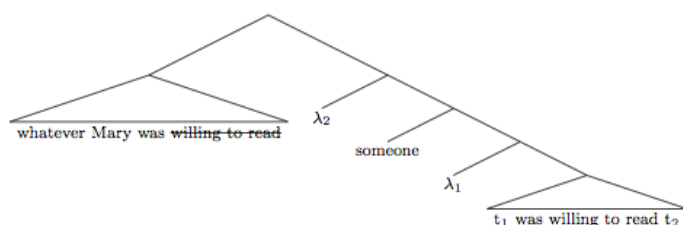
a. 'Someone was willing to read what Mary was willing to read; and if Mary had been willing to read different things, *someone* would have been willing to read those.'

b. 'Someone was willing to read what Mary was willing to read; and if Mary had been willing to read different things, *that person* would have been willing to read those.'

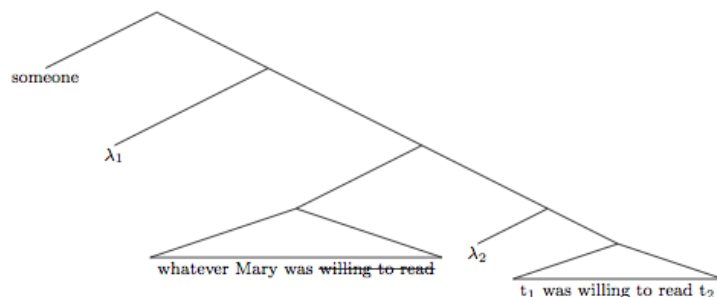
These two readings can be derived from the two possible scope orders: the free relative above the indefinite, as in (8a), and the indefinite above the free relative, as in (8b).

<sup>1</sup> Aside from the scope configuration, this reading differs from real *de dicto* readings in another way: it has a *de re* entailment (for the sentence to be true, John has to be willing to read the books Mary is willing to read in the actual world), and is thus not compatible with false-belief scenarios.

(8) a.



b.



In (8a), the second argument of *whatever* is  $[\lambda x. \exists y[y \text{ was willing to read } x]]$ , so the counterfactual component states that in worlds where Mary was willing to read something else, there exists a person in that world willing to read it – not necessarily the same person. In (8b), on the other hand, the subject trace has not yet been bound by *someone* when *whatever* takes its second argument. This results in the other reading, where some particular person is indifferent.

**3. Other scope interactions.** The example in (7-8) shows a difference between *-ever* free relatives and universal quantifiers: the ambiguity in *Someone was willing to read everything Mary recommended* is an entirely different one. *Every* can scope over an indefinite and get a distributive reading, which can also be forced by modifying the indefinite with *different*. This is impossible for *whatever* (and other definites).

(9) A different student will read every book. (Beghelli 1997)

- (10) a. A (#different) student will read whatever Mary recommends.  
 b. A (#different) student will read the books.  
 c. A (#different) student will read what Mary recommends.

*Every* can produce pair-list readings in *wh*-questions (Krifka 1992, Szabolcsi 1997); *whatever* and other definites cannot:

- (11) a. Which book did every student read? (pair-list)  
 b. Which book did the students read? (\*pair-list)  
 c. Which book did whoever took the class read? (\*pair-list)

**4. Intolerance to exceptions.** Despite the differences listed above, universal quantifiers and indifference free relatives do have one similarity: both require that all the individuals in the restrictor have the property in the nuclear scope.

- (12) a. Whoever was awake kept watch.  
 b. Everyone who was awake kept watch.

Both are incompatible with a scenario where someone is awake but not keeping watch.

Plural definites, on the other hand, are tolerant to exceptions (Schwarzschild 1996, Brisson 1998); this property is shared with plain free relatives (and ignorance free relatives). Adding *all* to a definite makes it intolerant to exceptions.

- (13) a. The villagers kept watch.  
b. All the villagers kept watch.

The von Fintel (2000) semantics for indifference free relatives does not predict the impossibility of a “team-credit” reading like (13a) has; something more is needed to capture the fact that this reading is not available.

4.1. WHAT *ALL* DOES. In the analysis of Brisson (1997, 1998), *all* blocks team credit, but is not a universal quantifier. Definites with *all* are also incompatible with pure totality predicates like *be numerous* and *elect a president*; this property is shared with indifference free relatives.

- (14) a. The first-year students are (\*all) numerous.  
b. \*Whoever has a desk in the first-year office (is/are) numerous.

*All* also resembles indifference free relatives with respect to the phenomena discussed previously:

- (15) a. #A different student read all the books.  
b. Which book did all the students read? (\*pair-list)

Brisson’s analysis of definites with and without *all* builds on Schwarzschild (1996)’s semantics for distributive and collective predication, whereby the context supplies a cover of the universe of discourse (which tells a distributive operator how far down to distribute). What *all* does, in this analysis, is to impose a “good fit” requirement on the cover, ruling out team-credit readings.

The similar behavior of indifference free relatives and definites with *all* suggest that this is the missing component that should be added to the meaning of indifference *whatever* to rule out team-credit readings. Thus, the initially somewhat puzzling behaviors of indifference free relatives result from the combination of two things: the good fit requirement that produces an intolerance to exceptions and an incompatibility with pure totality predicates, plus the counterfactual modality that gives them their *de dicto* flavor in non-local ACD contexts.

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