### Background

**Partitive possessives** are ambiguous between two primary parses:

**Left:** [two of the men's cars]  
"The cars of two of the men"

**Right:** two of [the men's cars]  
"Two of the cars of the men"

The possessive morphophonology is sensitive to the syntactic status of a regular plural host (Nevins, 2011, Blackwell Comp. to Phon.). When such a host heads the possessor phrase, poss is suppressed; when it is not head, poss may be realized. This should affect potential parses:

- **Suppression:** two of the boys' cars
- **Realization:** two of the boys' cars

Pragmatic reasoning over form-parse pairs may reduce the persistent ambiguity under suppression, though both parses are available and there is no overt cue to indicate which one is intended. Does this occur?

### Predictions

A **pragmatic parser** will reason from suppression that realization must not have been warranted; boys' will elicit more right-parse than men's.

A **non-pragmatic parser** will not be able to infer anything from suppression; responses to boys' and men's will be the same.

**Both parsers** predict fewer right-parse with boys'.

### Methods

**Task:** draw rectangles around possessives in a scene following a prosodically-neutral prompt.

**Trials:** suppression (boys') x6; realization (boys') x6; invariant (men's) x6; fillers x12.

**Stimuli** varied in: quantifier (two / three); possessee (teeth / keys / fingernails / cards / sisters / cars); possessee grouping (by possesor / all together).

**Participants:** 400, via Mturk → ~100 responses / cell.

### Results

A **default** right-parse bias was observed: all stimuli elicited more than 40% right-parse with men's.

**Suppression** strengthened the right-parse bias: more right-parse were seen with boys' than with men's. This bias grew with the amount of ambiguity under men's.

**Realization** induced no bias: responses to boys' and men's were the same.

### Discussion

The suppression right-parse bias supports the pragmatic parser.

**Q:** can the absence of an overt cue be meaningful for resolving parsing ambiguities?

### Conclusion

Listeners appear to draw information from the lack of an overt cue to reduce parsing ambiguity in partitive possessives. This suggests that the parser can reason over form-parse pairs, as in parallel models.

**Open questions:**
- Why was there no observed bias under realization? Is there really no bias, or was it simply masked by experimental design?
- Is the extent of the bias under suppression correlated with the listener's acceptance of poss-alternation in their own speech? Does the bias hold across speakers, including those who don't alternate?
- How widespread is this phenomenon? Are there other constructions where the lack of an overt cue may reduce parsing ambiguity?
- Do speakers leverage parsing biases in choosing a form?