To inherit everything. The generalized conversational implicature of quantifier ascription

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The paper focuses on the alternating interpretations of the universal quantifier "everything" depending on the verbal frames in which it appears. The behavior of the quantifier may at first seem somewhat idiosyncratic, a fact which is illustrated by the following examples. The sentences (1a-b) are descriptions of the same situation. They differ in terms of the perspective they take.

(1)   a. I inherited a million dollars from Dad.

        b. Dad bequeathed a million dollars to me.

The two sentences are mutually entailing logical equivalents linked by a converse relation. However, that equivalence disappears when the theme argument of the verb is not a concrete value but a universal quantifier.

(2)   a. I inherited everything from Dad.

        b. Dad bequeathed everything to me.

The interpretation of the quantifier is different in each case. In (2b), the quantifier is interpreted as "everything that Dad owned"; in (2a) the quantifier can mean either "everything that Dad owned" or "everything that I own now". A similar relation holds between sentences (3a-b) below, and indeed any other converse pairs expressing transfer of possession. In each such pair, the sentences containing a RECEIVE-type verb have a potential for ambiguity which is not found in the GIVE-type sentences.

(3)   a. We bought everything from Bell and Spencer Co.

        b. Bell and Spencer Co. sold us everything.

(4)   a. I've learned everything from Dad.

        b. Dad has taught me everything.

The problem posed by quantifier ascription involves the division of labor between semantics and pragmatics. How much of the meaning conveyed by the quantifier is encoded in its semantics, and how much is inferred based on contextual clues? Traditional approaches to quantifiers (focusing on quantifier *restriction*) have assumed that much of the meaning is reconstructed in specific situations depending on the relevant situational clues. This assumption will be shown not to apply to quantifier *ascription*, and it will be proposed that ascriptional meaning is semantic rather than pragmatic in nature.