

Focus, Scope and *again*-ambiguities

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There have been two recent approaches to explaining so-called *again*-ambiguities such as that found in (1): a structural account and a focus-based account.

- (1) The door opened again.
repetitive reading: ‘The door opened, and the door had opened before’
non-repetitive reading: ‘The door opened, and the door had been open before’

The structural account (discussed in Von Stechow 1995, Dowty 1979 and others) explains the ambiguity in terms of the scope *again* takes with respect to a decomposed predicate, as shown in (2).

- (2) a. [again [BECOME [the door open]]] *repetitive*
 b. [BECOME [again [the door open]]] *non-repetitive*

The structural account is said to straightforwardly account for the effect that word-order (namely the preposing of *again*) has on the availability of readings.

- (3) again, the door opened. *repetitive only*

The focus-based account proposed in Beck 2006 takes as its starting point the effect that sentential focus has on the availability of readings, as shown in (4).

- (4) a. The door opened AGAIN. *repetitive*
 b. The door OPENED again. *non-repetitive*

The two readings are then explained as resulting from the particular sets of alternatives introduced by the focus semantics for each reading. The focus-based account is not presented as an alternative to the scopal account; rather, the two accounts are presented as having different domains of application. Thus the scopal account, as Beck notes, does not explain the effect that focus has on reading availability, while the focus account does not (straightforwardly) explain the word-order facts. We are thus left with two independent explanations of *again*-ambiguities: a syntactic one and a focus-pragmatic one. It is, however, unclear exactly what is the domain of applicability of each of these accounts, and whether or not they interact.

The goal of the current research is to answer these questions, and thus to determine whether there is in fact a need for two separate accounts of *again*-based ambiguities. Through experimentally testing the effects of sentential focus on reading availability, an attempt will be made to determine how scope and focus interact; the goal is thus to provide a more unified account of *again*-ambiguities.

Beck, S. 2006. Focus on ‘again’. *Linguistics and Philosophy* 29:277-314.

Dowty, D. 1979. *Word meaning and Montague grammar*. Dordrecht: Reidel.

von Stechow, A. 1996. ‘The different readings of *wieder* ‘again’. *Journal of Semantics* 13:87-138.