

VP-Preposing and Relative Scope

Laura Rimell (NYU) and Thomas Leu (NYU)

In this paper we argue (contra Reinhart 1978) that so-called “VP-preposing” sentences can be derived in two distinct ways that yield identical surface strings in English. The two derivations give rise to distinct scope relations between a quantified subject and object.

In English, a VP-preposed sentence (1a) is ambiguous between a subject wide scope (2i) and an object wide scope (2ii) reading, exactly as its non-VP-preposed variant (1b) is.

1. a. Fond of every boy some girl is. (S>O, O>S)
- b. Some girl is fond of every boy. (S>O, O>S)

This claim is based on the judgments of 37 native speakers who overwhelmingly found that the scopal possibilities in VP-preposed sentences correlated with the scopal possibilities in their non-preposed variants. This correlation held for a variety of quantifiers in subject and object position. The availability of the object wide-scope reading is more apparent in examples in which the subject wide-scope reading is pragmatically odd (3). (The fact that VP-preposed sentences are generally judged marginal is not represented in the scope judgments given, for expository reasons.)

The fact that the non-VP-preposed sentence (1b) is ambiguous with regard to scope has received a great deal of attention over the past few decades; however, to our knowledge, no attention has been given to the ambiguity in VP-preposed sentences. The classical analysis of VP-preposing in English is Reinhart (1978), where (1a) is unambiguously interpreted as (2i), because the preposed VP contains the object, which is therefore scopally trapped, since it is unable to c-command the subject (4). We maintain this analysis for the subject wide-scope reading. However, since both scope readings are available, (1a) must have an alternative structure in which the object c-commands the subject.

In Swiss German, the two different scope readings correspond to different surface strings (5a-b). The V2 constraint in Swiss German identifies the material before the auxiliary as a single constituent. When the verb and the object are preposed as a single constituent (5a), only the subject wide-scope reading is available. This suggests that the object is scopally trapped within the preposed VP (as in Reinhart 1978). The object wide-scope reading results from leftward movement of the object, which can be followed by movement of the remnant VP (5b).

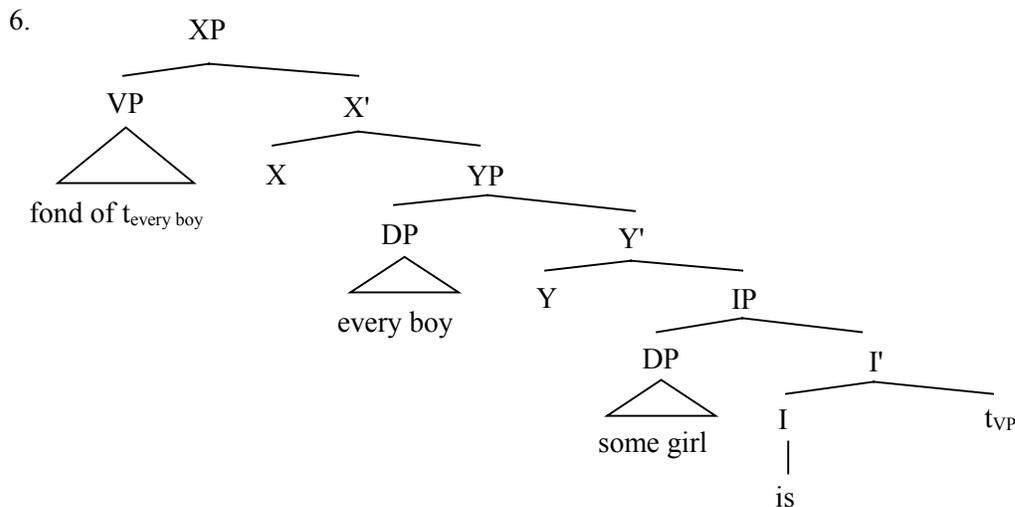
We propose that the object wide-scope reading in English is derived in a parallel fashion. The object moves leftward prior to (obligatory) movement of the remnant VP (6). Note that this analysis is compatible with a view of syntax that makes no reference to covert movement (Kayne 1998).

We note two additional observations that support our analysis. The first concerns the scope facts in VP-preposed sentences with an adverbial (7). *This year* can modify either the predicate *seen* or the object *Spanish movies* (cf. “...that came out this year”). For speakers who allow both interpretations of the modifier, the object wide-scope reading is available when the adverbial modifies the object, but not when it modifies the predicate. We attribute this to the fact that the verb, object, and adverbial prepose as a single constituent on the latter reading. Although preposing the adverbial, the object, and the remnant VP individually would derive the correct word order, this seems to be ruled out independently, as suggested by the fact that the analogous Swiss German order only has the object-modifying reading (8).

The second observation concerns pseudo-gapping sentences. In (9), two VP-preposed sentences are coordinated and the second conjunct exhibits pseudo-gapping. The sentence allows an object wide-scope reading. Assuming the ellipsis process to target one constituent, the object must be analyzed as not being inside the preposed VP. That is, the ellipsis in (9) witnesses the constituency that we propose for the object wide-scope reading in examples like (1a). This parallels the analysis of pseudo-gapping as an instance of VP ellipsis after object movement (cf. Lasnik 1995, Baltin 2003).

In conclusion, on the basis of the relative scopal possibilities between an object and a subject quantifier in so-called VP-preposed sentences in English and the overt constituency in corresponding Swiss German sentences we propose that the object wide scope reading is the result of object preposing followed by preposing of the remnant VP. The conclusion is supported by the interaction between scope and adverbial modifiers and by pseudo-gapping sentences.

2. i. For some girl it is the case that she is fond of every boy.
 $\exists y[\text{girl}'(y) \ \& \ \forall x[\text{boy}'(x) \ \rightarrow \text{fond-of}'(x)(y)]]$ (S>O)
 ii. For every boy, some (possibly different) girl is fond of him.
 $\forall x[\text{boy}'(x) \ \rightarrow \ \exists y[\text{girl}'(y) \ \& \ \text{fond-of}'(x)(y)]]$ (O>S)
3. Stationed in front of every tent a soldier is.
 a. % There is a soldier such that he is stationed in front of every tent. (S>O)
 b. Every tent is such that there is a soldier stationed in front of it. (O>S)
4. $[_{XP}[_{VP} \text{fond of } [_{DP} \text{every boy}]] \ X \ [_{IP} [_{DP} \text{some girl}] \ \text{is } t_{VP}]]$
5. a. [Schtolts uf jedä Buäb] isch sicher irgend es Mäitli. (S>O only)
proud of every boy is surely any a girl
 'Proud of every boy some girl (or other) surely is.'
 b. [Schtolts] isch sicher uf jedä Buäb irgend es Mäitli. (O>S only)
proud is surely of every boy any a girl
 'Proud of every boy some girl (or other) surely is.'



7. Seen every Spanish movie this year some NYU student has .
8. gse het sicher jedä spanisch Film das Jahr irgend en NYU Studänt
seen has surely every Spanish movie this year any a NYU student
 'Seen every Spanish movie this year some NYU student (or other) has.'
 ('movies that came out this year' / *'seen the entire set of Spanish movies this year')
9. Thoroughly examine every country in Europe some CIA agent did,
 and <thoroughly examine> every state in the US some FBI agent did.
 (ok O>S)

References:

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 Reinhart, Tanya. 1978. *Syntactic Domains for Semantic Rules*. Guenther F. & S.J. Schmidt (eds). Formal semantics and pragmatics for natural languages. Dordrecht.