

Zimmermann and Sternefeld (2013) *IntoSem*
Chapter 3: Structural Ambiguity

Exercises

Exercise 1: Sex with Boxes and Trees

In the film *Animal Crackers*, Groucho Marx says:

- (1) I once shot an elephant in my pajamas. How he got into my pajamas
I'll never know.

Let's focus on a more plausible example, from Steven Pinker's *The Language Instinct*:

- (2) Tonight's program discusses stress, exercise, nutrition, and sex with
Celtic forward Scott Wedman, Dr. Ruth Westheimer, and Dick Cavett.

Represent both readings – with box structures as well as with binary trees.

Exercise 2: Scope Reversals I

(3) and (4) are ambiguous as to the relative scope of the quantifier 'all' and the adverbial '(almost) never', but (3) prefers one reading and (4) the other. Which reading is preferred in which case? (The sentences are Norwegian.)

- (3) Jeg amma begge ungene, og alle er nesten aldri sjuke.
I breastfed both kids and all are almost never sick
- (4) Klostrene har ulike kviledager, så alle er aldri stengt.
monasteries have different restdays so all are never closed

Are the two readings logically independent, or does one entail the other?
Explain how the two readings come about. (Norwegian is a V2 language.)
(In fact, the subordinate clause in (5) shows the same ambiguity.)

- (5) ... sann at alle (nesten) aldri er sjuke / stengt.

But in contrast to German, Norwegian has a grammatical subject position.)

Exercise 3: Scope Reversals II

The sentence (6) is ambiguous in principle, but only one reading is natural. Describe the two readings, in terms of content and in structural terms.

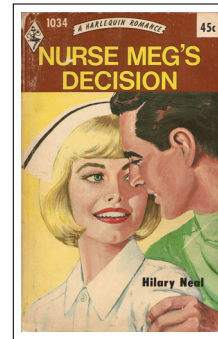
(6) I will inherit a piano from both my grandmothers.

Now note that (7) does not appear ambiguous. In fact, it seems implausible.

(7) When both my grandmothers die, I will inherit a piano.

How so? Can you think of a reason why a reading for *both my grandmothers* parallel to (6) is unavailable? – Perhaps you can take a cue from the pair in (8):

- (8) a. Nurse Meg has promised to marry both John, the doctor, and Lance, the patient.
b. Nurse Meg has promised that she will marry both John, the doctor, and Lance, the patient.



Exercise 4: Transparent and Opaque

The Norwegian verb *savne* (\approx miss) is **opaque**, so the indefinite *en kjæreste* ‘a boyfriend’ in the first panel of the below comic strip could have an opaque or a transparent reading. Which is intended?



And what about the response in the third panel – ‘Which one of them??’?