A Summary of Kuno’s ‘Remarks on Quantifier Scope’ (1991) Essay

SEL2089: Syntactic Theory

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In the article ‘Remarks on quantifier scope’, Susumu Kuno (1991) explains that May’s Quantifier Scope Principal is based upon a misconception, ‘that the contrast between (1a) and (1b) is a purely syntactic fact’ (Kuno 1991: 281). (1a) and (1b) being:

‘1.

a. What did everyone buy for Max?
b. Who bought everything for Max?’ (Kuno 1991: 261)

Kuno also asserts that Relative Quantifier Scope is complex, based on interaction with various other factors, and proposes to the reader eight factors which regulate these various elements and explains how they work.

Kuno (1991) finds four issues with May’s Scope Principle. The first issue is that May claims that the sentence ‘*Whom did John buy what for?’ is unacceptable because, in its Logical Form, path (i) and (j) overlap and the PP nodes are visible, thus violating the Path Containment Condition. Yet, if this is the case, in the Logical Form of the phrase ‘What did you talk about with everyone?’ path (i) and (j) also overlap and so this sentence is wrongly predicted to be unacceptable. Kuno explains that only by assuming that PP nodes are invisible for the purposes of the Path Containment Condition can we account for the acceptability of this sentence. The second issue Kuno (1991) finds with May’s Scope Principle is that May predicts sentences such as ‘Who did you give everything to?’ to be ambiguous yet Kuno claims this sentence seems to be unambiguous just like sentence (1b). (1b) is shown to be unambiguous due to the maximal projection boundary (VP) being between the quantifiers, allowing only the interpretation where ‘who’ can have wide scope over ‘everything’ due to ‘who’’s structural superiority to it. The third issue Kuno (1991) finds with May’s Scope Principle, is that while (1b) is unambiguous, many syntactically similar sentences appear to be ambiguous, yet May predicts them to be unambiguous. The fourth and final issue Kuno finds with May’s Scope Principle is that it finds both sentences in (12) to be ambiguous:

‘(12)

a. All of us have read many of these books with great enthusiasm.

b. Many of these books, all of us have read with great enthusiasm.’ (Kuno 1991: 267)

Kuno shows that May’s principle correctly predicts (12a) to be ambiguous yet incorrectly predicts (12b) to also be ambiguous, as it assumes that their Logical Forms are identical.

Kuno (1991) also states that quantifier scope is determined by the interaction of various syntactic and discourse based factors. Kuno’s first factor is that lefthand Q, Q meaning quantifier, tends to have wider scope than righthand Q (represented as lefthand Q > righthand Q). This factor means that a quantifier to the left of another is more likely to have wider scope. However, Kuno does note, that while he applies his factor to only surface word order, in some idiolects it may apply to underlying order. Kuno’s second factor is that subject Q > nonsubject Q, where the quantifier more closely linked to the subject has wider scope. His third factor is that more D-linked Q > less D-linked Q, standing for discourse-linked
quantifier, and meaning that the quantifier that is attached to the NP that is empathized with by the speaker is more likely to have wider scope. Kuno’s fourth factor is that logophoric Q > nonlogophoric Q. Logophoric Q refers to the quantifier attached to the NP referring either to the speaker or the hearer, another instance where empathy affects the scope of the quantifier. The fifth factor is the Quantifier Hierarchy. This hierarchy was assumed by Ioup (1975, in Kuno 1991: 273):

‘(28) Quantifier Hierarchy (Ioup):

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each > every > all > most > many > several > some ( +Np ) > a few
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The hierarchy attributes a value to the quantifiers, and shows quantifiers with wider subsets to be more likely to have wider scope over those with smaller subsets. However, Kuno notes that ‘some’ is an exception to this rule and seems to slot in between ‘each’ and ‘every’ on the hierarchy. The sixth factor is that a more human Q > less human Q, where Kuno assumes a quantifier attached to a human NP is more likely to have wider scope than one on an NP referring to a non-human entity. The seventh factor of Kuno’s is that a topicalized Q > nontopicalized Q, meaning that a quantifier that is syntactically made the topic of a sentence appears to always have scope over a nontopicalized quantifier. Kuno notes that this only applies to fronted wh-expressions when they are within a relative clause. Kuno’s eighth and final factor is pragmatic factors. Kuno explains that there are many different pragmatic factors that affect quantifier scope, the context of a situation for example.

Throughout his essay Kuno (1991) also asserts that these different factors are each weighted differently and this affects certain interpretations. For example, one speaker may find a quantifier that is both logophoric and on the right of another to have more scope, the logophoric Q > nonlogophoric Q factor being stronger in their idiolect and therefore overruling the lefthand Q > righthand Q factor. Another speaker, however, may find that same quantifier to have less scope, valuing instead the lefthand Q > righthand Q factor more and so the lefthand Q must have wider scope, even if the righthand Q was logophoric, overruling the logophoric Q > nonlogophoric Q factor. Also, while quantifiers can often be interpreted differently by different speakers, Kuno notes that, the more principles a quantifier adheres to that would allow it to have more scope, the more likely it is to be interpreted as having wider scope. For example, if a quantifier is topicalized, on the left of another quantifier, and is more D-linked, yet is not the subject of the sentence, then Kuno attributes to it a score of three to one, having three principles in favour of it having wider scope, and one against, thus this quantifier is more likely to have wider scope as more principles are in favour of this interpretation. Kuno still notes, however, that the principles themselves are still weighted differently depending upon the speaker and so if that one principle opposing the other three is strong enough in the idiolect then it can potentially overrule the others.

Kuno (1991) demonstrates in ‘Remarks on quantifier scope’ that May’s Scope Principle is incorrect due to it being based upon misconceptions, to combat this Kuno presents eight factors to account for the multiple elements that affect quantifier scope and explains how they work, demonstrating the many different factors that can affect quantifier scope.
References
