

Re- Again: A semantic investigation of restitutive *again* and *re-* in English

Structures modified by *again* are ambiguous, a fact much discussed in the literature (Dowty, 1979; Fabricius-Hansen, 1983; Stechow, 1996; Jaeger & Blutner 2000; Marantz 2007). We propose a scopal treatment of *again*, similar in spirit to Stechow (1996) and extend that treatment to *re-*. Crucially we explicitly assume that *again* and *re-* have identical semantics, a tacit assumption of much previous work.

Making such a strong assumption is theoretically useful, as it predicts that

1. The behavior of *again* and *re-* should be the same in many cases.
2. Where the semantic behavior of these two items differs, the difference must be a result of syntactic position.
3. Where the distribution of these items differs, the difference must be a result of the different status of *again* (a free morpheme) vs. *re-* (a bound morpheme).

This discussion will aim to demonstrate the first point, and then primarily focus upon the second.

We claim that *re-* due to its bound nature, maximally scopes over the verb phrase, and in this sense should be identical to restitutive *again*.

- (1a) John opened the door again.
(1b) John re-opened the door.

Thus the restitutive reading of (1a) is one in which the sentence asserts that John opened the door, and presupposes that the door had been open at some previous point in time. We claim that (1b) has this, and only this reading. From these data one might assume that restitutive *again* is the same as *re-*.

Certain sentences, however, seem to create problems for this hypothesis.

- (2a) ?The doctor built my knee again.
(2b) The doctor rebuilt my knee.

Verbs of creation indicate that *re-* seems to occupy a lower scopal position than *again*. That is *again* presupposes that a building process occurred twice, while *re-* only presupposes that some state was restored via a building process. This phenomenon is highlighted in constructions with secondary predicates.

- (3a) John painted the (burned) door brown again.
(3b) John repainted the (burned) door brown.

Crucially, (3a) presupposes that the door had been brown before, while it does not necessarily presuppose that the door had been painted before (e.g. assume that a naturally brown door is burned black, at which point John comes along and paints it brown), while (3b) exhibits the opposite behavior, the door must have been painted before though not necessarily brown. These data suggest that *brown* occupies a position outside of the maximal scope of *re-* but within the minimal scope of *again*. These data are problematic to any account which proposes that *re-* occupies a scope position equivalent to restitutive *again*.

These data coupled with our 'identical semantics' assumption allows us to use *re-* and *again* as probes into the VP structure. The results of this investigation make predictions regarding the position and licensing of small clause arguments and the interpretation of event structure in the lower VP.