

Generalizing von Stechow's Problem

Filipe Hisao Kobayashi

In a seminal paper, von Stechow (1996) observes that pied-piped material in wh-interrogatives must be interpreted de dicto. For instance, if “which boy’s mother” in (1) could receive a de re interpretation, the sentence should allow the reading paraphrased in (2), contrary to intuition.

(1) Ann knows which boy’s mother arrived.

(2) Ann knows which mother of a boy arrived.

The goal of this talk is to disentangle von Stechow’s problem from pied-piping. I argue that von Stechow’s observation is a special case of a more general constraint: any DP containing a wh-trace must be interpreted de dicto. I then propose a simple account of this generalization that rethinks how the components of Karttunen’s (1977) analysis of questions are put together. I conclude by discussing some consequences of this proposal.