

# Arguments about Ambiguity contd.

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## 4 The verb *have* and the ‘too many meanings puzzle’

Primary source:

Myler, Neil (2014) *Building and Interpreting Possession Sentences*.  
New York University dissertation.

A key passage:

This section has compared two major traditions in the previous literature on what I have called the too many meanings puzzle. The key division between these two traditions is whether HAVE itself has true lexical semantics of its own. I have argued that attributing even the vaguest lexical semantics to HAVE leads to problems if one is aiming for a unified analysis. Ultimately, more than one lexical entry for HAVE or special stipulated conditions on interpretation turn out to be needed in order to make analyses work when they include the assumption that HAVE has its own lexical semantics. [...] The further an analysis pushes the idea that HAVE is meaningless, the more successful it turns out to be.

Apparently many meanings – well, two or three at any rate:

- (1) Don Fernando has many cattle. (sortal, ‘true verb’, ‘possessive’)
- (2) Don Fernando has many enemies. (relational, ‘existential’)
- (3) Don Fernando has many things on his mind. (‘SC’)

Cross-linguistic evidence against ambiguity: Same pattern in ‘BE languages’:

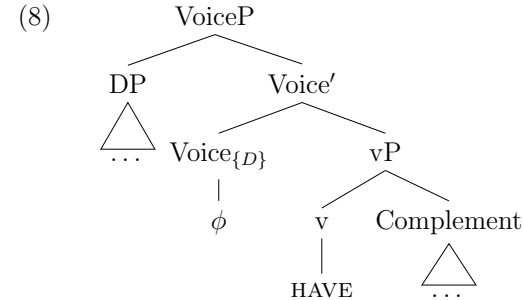
- (4) U nee mashina.  
P she-GEN car  
‘She has a car.’
- (5) U nee dve sestry.  
P she-GEN two sisters  
‘She has two sisters.’
- (6) U nee oba syna v armii.  
P she-GEN both sons in army  
‘She has both her sons in the army.’

Intralinguistic evidence against ambiguity (Partee 1997): Conjoinability:

- (7) John has piles of money and no living relatives.

### 4.1 Myler’s approach

HAVE is the spell-out of BE when Voice introduces an external argument and bears  $\phi$  features – it is the transitive form of BE (Hoekstra 1994).



The central claim is that the analysis of HAVE sentences schematized in [(8)], plus options for how to interpret Voice (i.e., expletively!) is enough to predict the many different interpretations that HAVE can have.

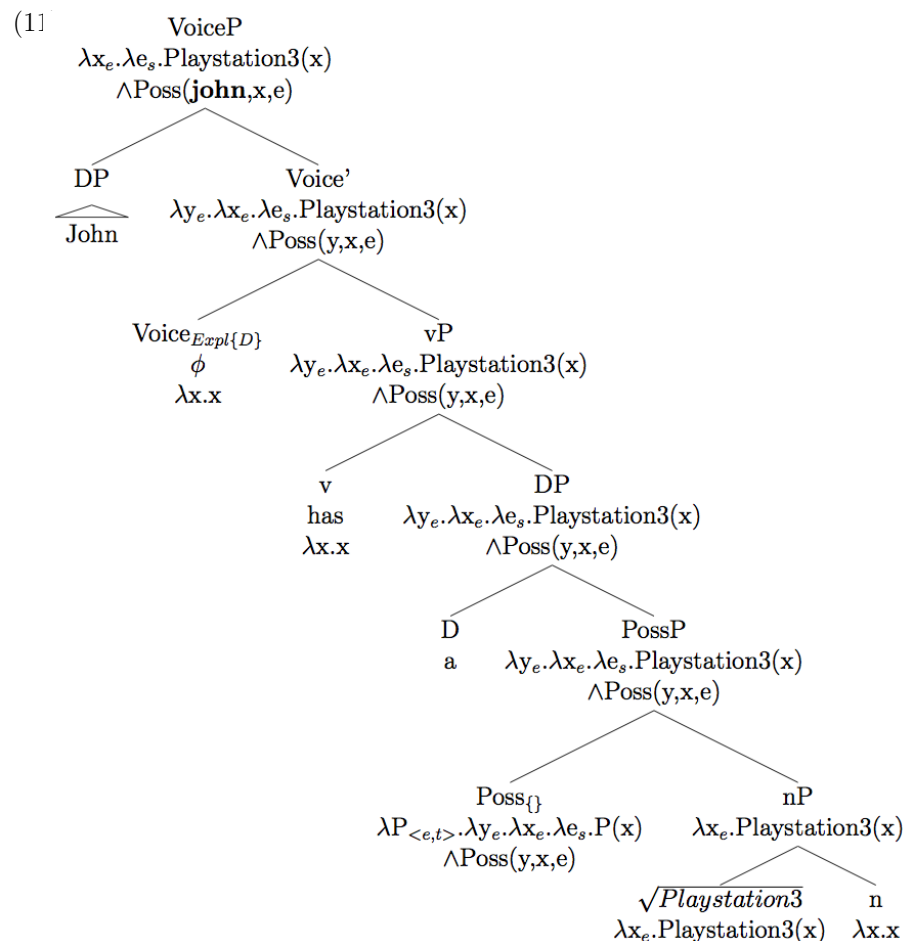
- (9) INTERPRETATIONS OF HAVE CONSTRUCTIONS
  - a. Cases where the meaning of a *have* sentence = that of *have*’s complement (if Voice = Expl)
  - b. Cases where the meaning of a *have* sentence = that of *have*’s complement+that of Voice (if Voice  $\neq$  Expl)

## 4.2 Voice = Expl

These cases comprise relational *have*, including ‘permanent ownership’ cases, ‘locative *have*’, and the bulk of ‘experiencer *have*’.

$$(10) \quad \llbracket \sqrt{\textit{sister}} \rrbracket = \lambda y \lambda x \lambda e \text{ female}(x) \wedge \text{ sibling-of}(y, x, e)$$

(11) is the derivation for a permanent ownership case; other relational cases are analogous save for the possessor role relation.



## Expletive Voice

“simply passes the denotation of its complement up the tree (Schäfer 2008; Wood 2012)”.

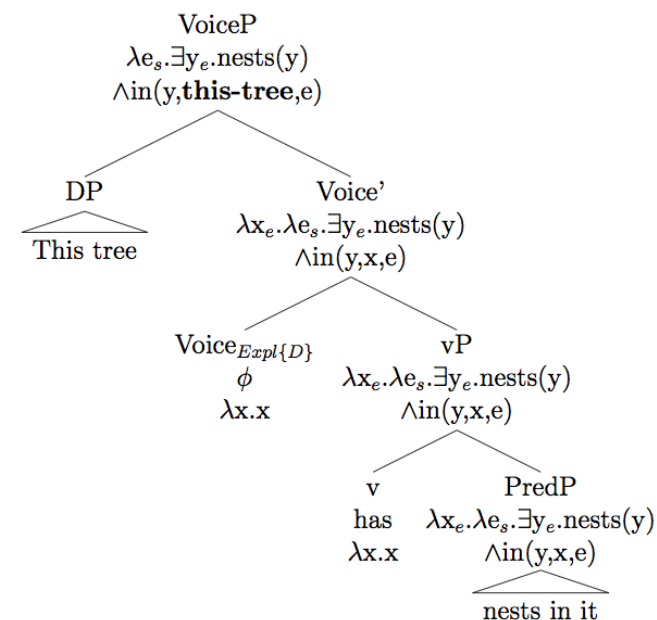
So does [<sub>v</sub> has]. Note that  $x$  in  $\lambda x.x$  is polymorphic, i.e., of any suitable sort and type – “*have* is a type-neutral identity function”.

It is unclear how to treat adjectives and determiners like *many*, as in

(12) Jane has many young friends.

(13) is the derivation for a locative case:

(13) This tree has nests in it.

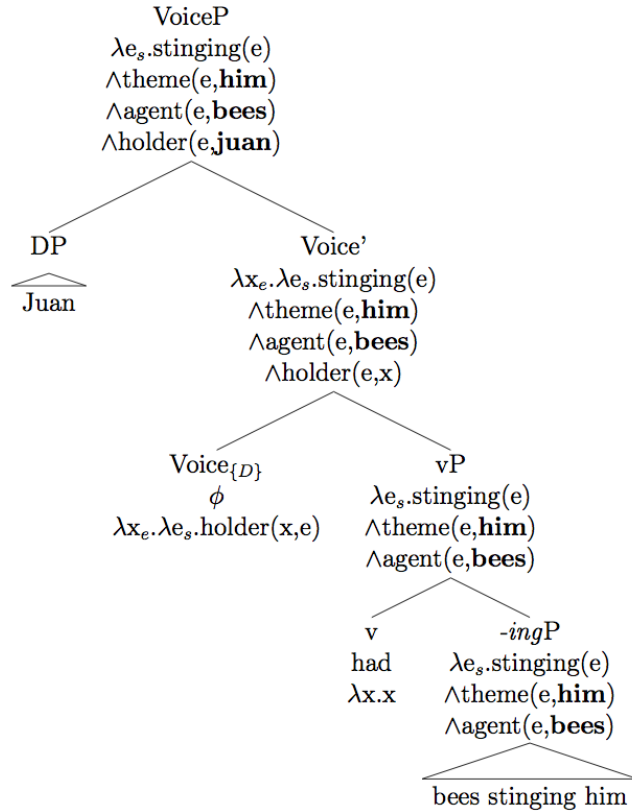


How binding of *it* is accomplished is not clear, and in fact, a standard procedure (as laid out by Heim 1998 or Buring 2004) would cause the composition to terminate: the subject DP or its trace would meet a set of eventualities.

### 4.3 Voice ≠ Expl

(14) is the derivation for an experiencer case:

(14) Juan had bees stinging him.

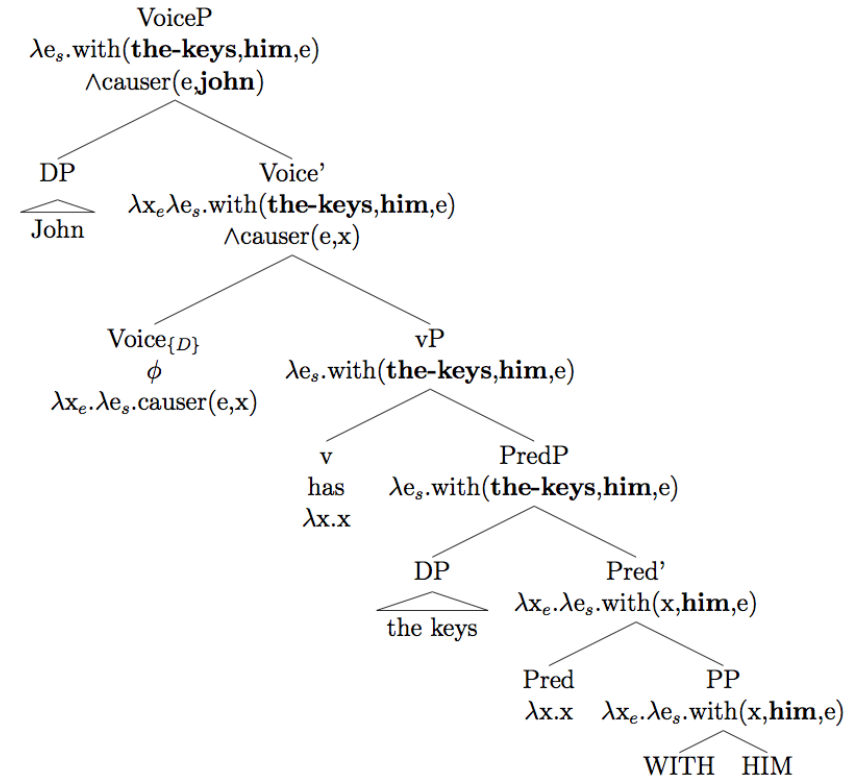


Here binding is not accomplished at all – though it could be; the result would be that Juan is both a theme and a holder (experiencer) of the stinging state. This is potentially problematic in view of cases like (15):

(15) Mesa has several glaciers eroding it.

Skipping light verb *have* and ECM *have*: causers, engineers and experiencers, (16) shows the derivation for a ‘temporary possession’ case:

(16) John has the keys.



The binding issue aside, the question is how plausible it is that the subject is a causer of its temporary possession of something.

(17) Before the police can be called, however, Lebezyatnikov, who has been watching, announces that Luzhin had planted the money on Sonya without her knowing.

“Of all the approaches discussed in this section, Sæbø (2009) is perhaps closest to mine in terms of how far it pushes the meaninglessness of *have* – all *have* does in this system is introduce a vacuous lambda abstract, whose only role is to trigger a QR operation which ultimately proves crucial in integrating the subject into the composition. However, since his focus is on the pertinence problem, it is unclear how Sæbø’s approach would extend to cases where such a binding relationship is less easy to motivate, as in causative *have* or light verb *have*.”

- (18) a. John had Bill wash the dishes.  
b. John had fun.

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