# Why possessives should not be discussed at this conference

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# Determiner-like possessives

(1)   a.    my house                                    [English]
      b.    Mary's house                                [English]

(2)   a.    mitt hus                                     [Swedish]
      b.    Maris hus                                    [Swedish]

# Adjective-like possessives

(3)   a.    la mia casa                            [Italian]
      b.    la casa mia                            [Italian]
      c.    la casa di Maria                    [Italian]
      d.    una casa di Maria                  [Italian]
      e.    un suo amico                          [Italian]

(4)   a.    a házom                            [Hungarian]
      b.    az én hazom                     [Hungarian]
      c.    nekem a hazom                  [Hungarian]
      d.    Marinak a haza                  [Hungarian]
      e.    Marinak egy haza                [Hungarian]

(5)   a.    a house of Mary's                 [English]
      b.    the house of Mary's that I visited yesterday     [English]

## Schoorlemmer's generalization

- Adjective-like possessives can be either definite or indefinite.
- Determiner-like possessives are always definite.

# Background on definiteness of determiner-like possessives

- Partee & Borschev (2003) say "the prenominal genitive in English seems to combine the 'basic' genitive [the post-nominal form] with an implicit definite article"; cf. also Kamp (2001), Vikner & Jensen (2002), Le Bruyn (to appear), i.a.

- Haspelmath (1999) is suggestive of an analysis in which this definiteness is just a statistical tendency.

- Peters & Westerståhl (2013) argue against inherent definiteness of determiner-like possessives, but analyze both determiner-like and (at least some) adjective-like possessives as inherently quantificational.

# Synopsis of this talk pt. 1

1. Definite and indefinite descriptions are predicative, type shifts do the heavy lifting (or lowering).
2. This simplifies the lexicon: indefinites make no semantic contribution, and definites only mark uniqueness.
3. A general preference for simple entity meanings is blocked for indefinites because of competition with definites.

# Synopsis of this talk pt. 2

5. There's no such blocking for argumental possessives, so they tend to undergo **iota** shift, which has a uniqueness presupposition.

6. To see whether possessives are definite, we must look at predicative uses where there is no type shift. Here there is no semantic uniqueness.

⇒ No evidence that adjective-like and determiner-like possessives differ semantically as a class; neither class is inherently definite or quantificational.

## Concepts

Predicative meaning The basic property denotation of a noun

Argumental meaning A denotation that can fill an argument slot

Definiteness marking morpho-syntactic, e.g. *a* and *the*

Definiteness requirement Presupposition of definiteness markers, e.g. uniqueness or familiarity

Determinacy term-like denotation, e.g. names

Nominal type shifts Here, shifts from predicative to argument meanings:
**iota** maps to determinate denotations,
**ex** maps to existential generalized quantifiers

## Predicative DPs

Strawson (1950, p. 320):

> [I]f I said, "Napoleon was the greatest French soldier"... I
> should not be using the phrase, "the greatest French soldier" to
> mention an individual, but to say something about an individual
> ....

(6)  a.  John is tall, handsome and the love of my life.(Fara, 2001)

   b.  #The love of my life is tall, handsome, and John.

- Relatedly, definite, indefinite and possessive descriptions can serve as arguments to verbs like *consider* and *find,* while names, *some*-indefinites and personal pronouns, cannot (c.f. Doron 1983; Partee 1986; Winter 2001).

(7)  a.    John considers this woman competent / a good teacher / the queen of the world / his friend.
     b.    *John considers this woman Mary / some particular queen / you.

## Our strategy

- Commonly (e.g. Partee 1986) argumental descriptions are considered semantically basic, and predicative meanings are derived.

- We go the other way.

- Another standard view is that (apparently) article-poor languages use type shifts (or inaudible articles) to map properties to suitable argument types, but that e.g. standard Germanic and Romance realize those shifts with overt articles. (E.g. Chierchia 1998)

- But if (in)definite descriptions are predicative, then the shifts are needed for standard Germanic and Romance just as for e.g. Russian or Mandarin.

- The trick is to get the right shifts: this is achieved through general principles of interpretation.

## Interpretative Principles

Maximize Presupposition  If two lexical items have the same ordinary content, but one has stronger presuppositions, use the stronger one whenever the context licenses it. (Heim 1991, Schlenker 2011, etc.)

Entities Rock  Prefer determinate interpretations, i.e. take the speaker to be talking about an individual rather than quantifying.

(Equivalent to the principles Chierchia 1998 uses)

## Blocking effects

- When uniqueness is guaranteed, **Max Presupp** blocks *a* (Heim 1991; Coppock and Beaver 2015):

(8)   the/*a only/worst talk at the conference

- Beaver and Coppock (2015) go further: novelty of indefinites is also a blocking effect:

(9)   I hear a dog$_i$. The/*a dog$_i$ is barking.

## The conflation of definiteness and determinacy

- Since **Entities Rock**, definites normally get determinate interpretations.
- Since the **iota**-shift needed for determinate interpretations has a uniqueness presupposition, indefinites are never determinate: they are blocked by definites, and so always get existential readings.
- It is because definites normally get determinate readings that we normally overlook the fact that what we term definiteness and determinacy are conceptually independent categories.

## The conflation of definiteness and determinacy

- There may be cases where definites do get non-determinate readings, involving relative readings of superlatives (cf. Liz on Wednesday), and definite exclusives:

(10)    We aren't giving the only talk about possessives.
    *(negated existential reading: there are other such talks)*

- A theory on which definites are inherently determinate would not predict the negated existential reading.
- Possessives give another motivation to separate definiteness and determinacy.

## No existence presupposition

(11)    Green card holders don't just take from the USA, nor do they make their only contribution through taxes.
(Implies green card holders make multiple contributions.)

(12)    The Grinch didn't make his only appearance when he attempted to steal Christmas. Dr. Seuss reprised the character in two more books: ...
(Implies The Grinch made multiple appearances.)

## No existence presupposition

(13)    That wasn't Mary's fault!

(14)    **A:** Is that your eighteen-wheeler that's blocking the entrance?
        **B:** No!

# No uniqueness presupposition

(15)  a.     Is that your bicycle?

        b.     Is that the bicycle you own?

        c.     Is that a bicycle you own?

(16)  Yes, and that one there is also mine.

       (OK followup with possessive and indefinite, bad with definite)

# No uniqueness presupposition

(17)   a.     This is the state's property, and so is that.
      b.   #This is the property that the state owns, and so is that.

(18)   a.     This is Jane's work, and so is that.
      b.   #This is the work that Jane did, and so is that.

## No uniqueness presupposition

- When conjoined with unambiguously predicative expressions, possessive expressions do not require uniqueness:
- It is possible for the speaker to have multiple cousins in (19).

(19) He is tall, dark, handsome, and my cousin (alas!).

# No uniqueness presupposition

- The *consider* construction is unambiguously predicate-taking.
- Again, the possessive does not require uniqueness, but the definite does:

(20)    a.      I consider this your problem.

        b.      I consider this the problem you have (to deal with).

# Why are determiner-like possessives usually taken to be definite?

- Since **Max Presupp** is normally restricted to lexical competition, or at least competition between similarly complex structures, possessives (*my cat*) don't compete with definites (e.g. *the cat of mine*).

- This then predicts:

1. All possessives, unlike indefinites, should be compatible with inherently unique descriptions.

2. Argumental possessives, unlike indefinites, can be familiar.

3. Argumental possessives, unlike indefinites, are compatible with **iota**-shift, and since **Entities Rock**, they should commonly be determinate.

## Why are determiner-like possessives usually taken to be definite?

All these predictions are borne out:

(21)  Her best/only talk was yesterday.

(22)  If a [cat of mine]$_i$ fights a dog of mine, my cat$_i$ wins.

(23)  a.     I gifted a car to Fred, and I gifted a car to Mary.
             (Everyone's a winner!)
      b.     I gifted my car to Fred, and I gifted my car to May.
             (Uhoh!)

- So it's easy to mistakenly think that possessives are definite!

## Conclusion

- We conclude that possessive descriptions are not inherently definite in the sense that they do not encode a uniqueness presupposition.
- The appearance of definiteness is caused by the fact that they commonly obtain determinate readings in argument positions.
- Therefore there is no need to postulate any inherent semantic difference between the class of determiner-like possessives and the class of adjective-like possessives: neither are inherently definite.
- Of course, this does not rule out the possibility of cross-linguistic variation: these considerations are compatible with individual languages realizing possessives that have uniqueness requirements...

## Possessives that should be discussed?

- Definite marking has been claimed (e.g. Haspelmath 1999) to be obligatory for Romanian possessives:

(24)  caiet-ul meu
      notebook-the my

(25)  *un caiet meu
      a notebook-my

- Indefinite possessives are possible, but use an additional morpheme (*al*, cf. English "of"):

(26)  un caiet al meu
      a book of mine

- Alternative view: a phonological adjaceny prohibition on repetition leads to *al*-deletion in certain syntactic configurations (Beavers & Teodorescu, in prep.; Ortmann & Popescu 2001).

- The condition is not simply definiteness:

(27) caiet-ul rosu al meu
the red notebook of mine

(28) un caiet rosu al meu
a red notebook of mine

- The generalization is that *al* must be omitted when adjacent to the definite *-ul*, not that the possessive can only co-occur with a definite.

## Dutch ellided possessives

- Dutch ellided possessives inherently co-occure with definite articles:

(29)  De mijne is de beste.
      Mine is the best.

(30)  *Een mijne is de beste.
      One of mine is the best.

# Dutch ellided possessives

- Of course, non-co-occurence with indefinites is not yet evidence of lexical definiteness.

(31)    De twee zijn gisteren samen gezien.
        The two were seen together yesterday.

(32)    *Een twee zijn gisteren samen gezien.
        Two (of them) were seen together yesterday.

- Even so, we accept that de mijne should indeed be discussed at this conference.

# Determinate definite description

$$e$$
$$\iota x \,.\, \mathbf{king}(x)$$
$$\Uparrow \mathbf{iota}$$
$$et$$
$$\lambda x \,.\, [\partial(|\mathbf{king}| \leq 1) \wedge \mathbf{king}(x)]$$

$$\langle et, et \rangle$$
$$\lambda P \,.\, \lambda x \,.\, [\partial(|P| \leq 1) \wedge P(x)]$$
*the*

$$et$$
$$\textsc{king}$$
*king*
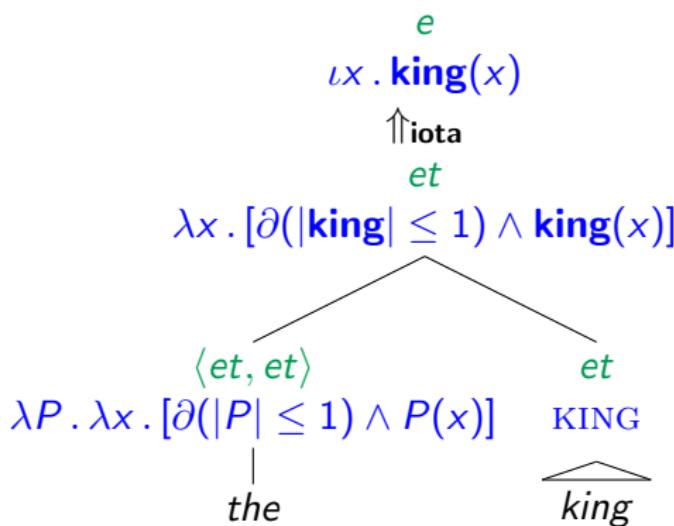
# Determinate definite description
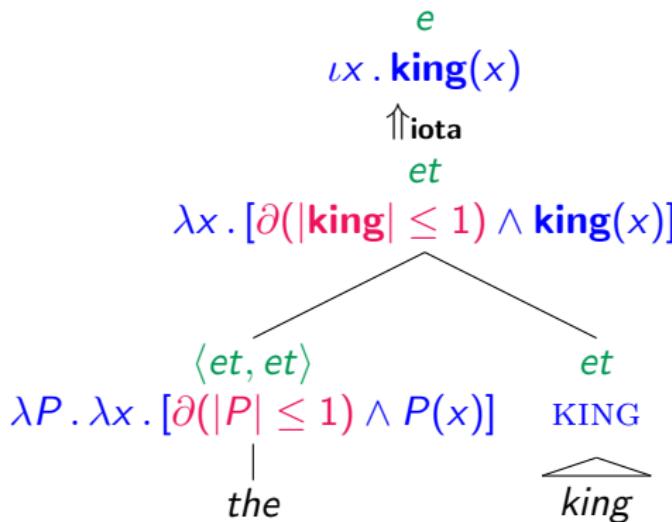
# Indeterminate reading of a definite

$\exists x \,.\, \partial(\textsc{talk}(x)) \,\wedge\, \neg\exists x[\textsc{talk}(x) \wedge \forall y[x \neq y \rightarrow \neg\textsc{talk}(y)] \wedge \textsc{give}(x)(\textsc{a})]$
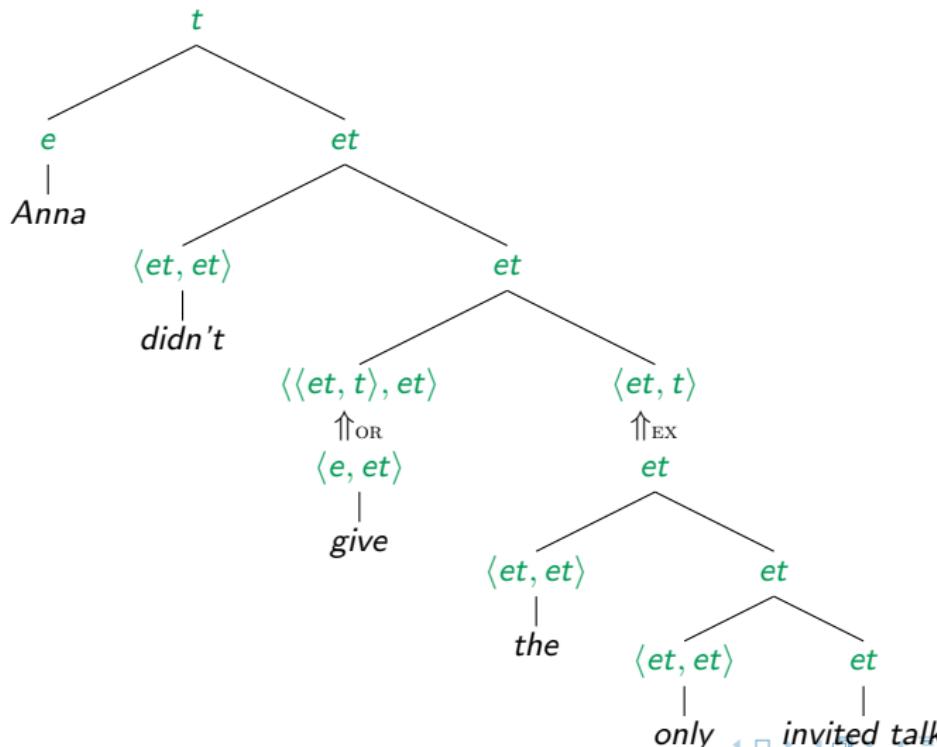
# Structure for possessives
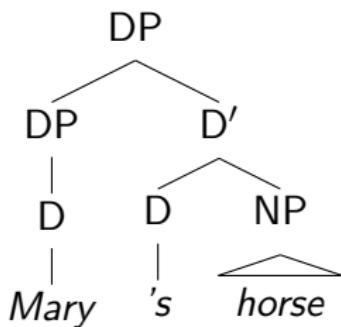
## Assumptions for possessives

**Lexical entry for Saxon genitive**
$'s \rightsquigarrow \lambda R_{\langle e, et \rangle} . R$

**Meaning shift:** Sortal to relational noun
$\mathbf{r} \equiv \lambda P . \lambda y . \lambda x . [P(x) \wedge \mathbf{poss}(x)(y)]$

## Predicative

$$et$$
$$\lambda x \,.\, [\mathbf{horse}(x) \wedge \mathbf{poss}(x)(\mathbf{m})]$$

$$e$$
$$\mathbf{m}$$

*Mary*

$$\langle e, et \rangle$$
$$\lambda y \,.\, \lambda x \,.\, [\mathbf{horse}(x) \wedge \mathbf{poss}(x)(y)]$$

$$\langle \langle e, et \rangle, \langle e, et \rangle \rangle$$
$$\lambda R \,.\, R$$

*'s*

$$\langle e, et \rangle$$
$$\lambda y \,.\, \lambda x \,.\, [\mathbf{horse}(x) \wedge \mathbf{poss}(x)(y)]$$
$$\Uparrow_{\mathbf{r}}$$
$$et$$
$$\mathbf{horse}$$

*horse*
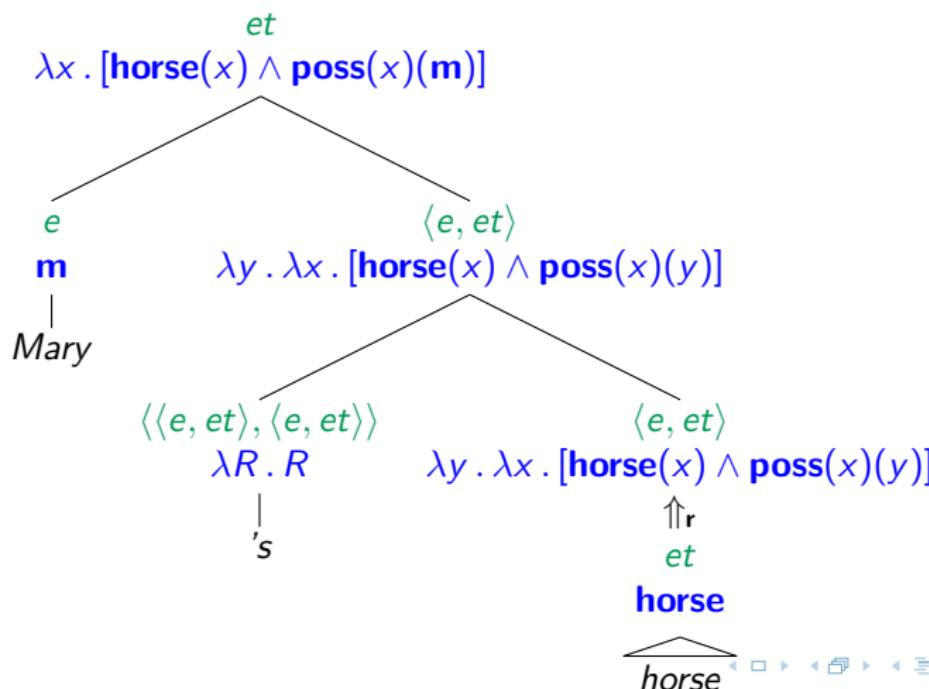
## Predicative to determinate

$$e$$
$$\iota x \,.\, \mathbf{horse}(x) \wedge \mathbf{poss}(x)(\mathbf{m})$$
$$\Uparrow \mathbf{iota}$$
$$et$$
$$\lambda x \,.\, [\mathbf{horse}(x) \wedge \mathbf{poss}(x)(\mathbf{m})]$$

$$e$$
$$\mathbf{m}$$

*Mary*

$$\langle e, et \rangle$$
$$\lambda y \,.\, \lambda x \,.\, [\mathbf{horse}(x) \wedge \mathbf{poss}(x)(y)]$$

$$\langle \langle e, et \rangle, \langle e, et \rangle \rangle$$
$$\lambda R \,.\, R$$

*'s*

$$\langle e, et \rangle$$
$$\lambda y \,.\, \lambda x \,.\, [\mathbf{horse}(x) \wedge \mathbf{poss}(x)(y)]$$
$$\Uparrow \mathbf{r}$$
$$et$$
$$\mathbf{horse}$$

*horse*
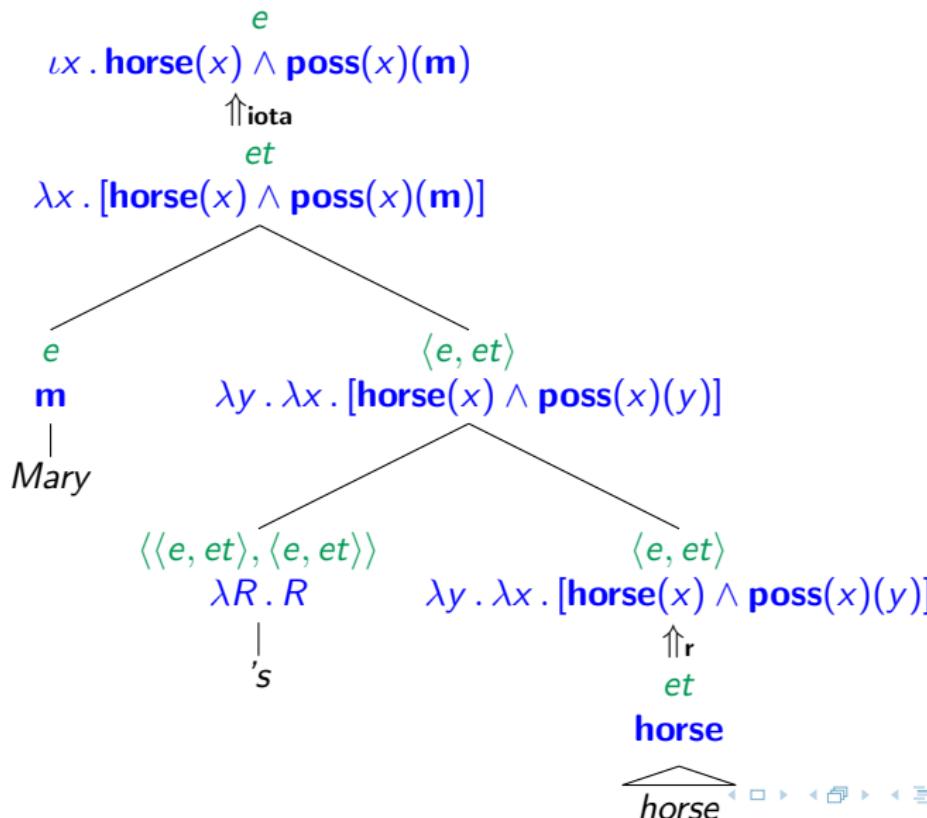
## Indeterminate argumental possessives

(33)  Green card holders don't just take from the USA, nor do they make their only contribution through taxes.
(Implies green card holders make multiple contributions.)

(34)  The Grinch didn't make his only appearance when he attempted to steal Christmas. Dr. Seuss reprised the character in two more books: ...
(Implies The Grinch made multiple appearances.)

$et$
$\lambda z \,.\, \exists x[\textbf{only}(\textbf{app})(x) \wedge \textbf{poss}(x)(v_i) \wedge \textbf{make}(x)(z)]$

$\langle\langle et, t\rangle, et\rangle$                    $\langle et, t\rangle$
$\Uparrow_{\textbf{or}}$                         $\Uparrow_{\textbf{ex}}$
$\langle e, et\rangle$                          $et$
$|$                  $\lambda x \,.\, [\textbf{only}(\textbf{app})(x) \wedge \textbf{poss}(x)(v_i)]$
$make$

$e$                          $\langle e, et\rangle$
$v_i$              $\lambda y \,.\, \lambda x \,.\, [\textbf{only}(\textbf{app})(x) \wedge \textbf{poss}(x)(y)]$
$|$
$he_i$

$\langle\langle e, et\rangle, \langle e, et\rangle\rangle$                $\langle e, et\rangle$
$\lambda R \,.\, R$            $\lambda y \,.\, \lambda x \,.\, [\textbf{only}(\textbf{app})(x) \wedge \textbf{poss}(x)(y)]$
$|$                          $\Uparrow_{\textbf{r}}$
$'s$                         $et$
$\textbf{only}(\textbf{app})$

$only \; appearance$
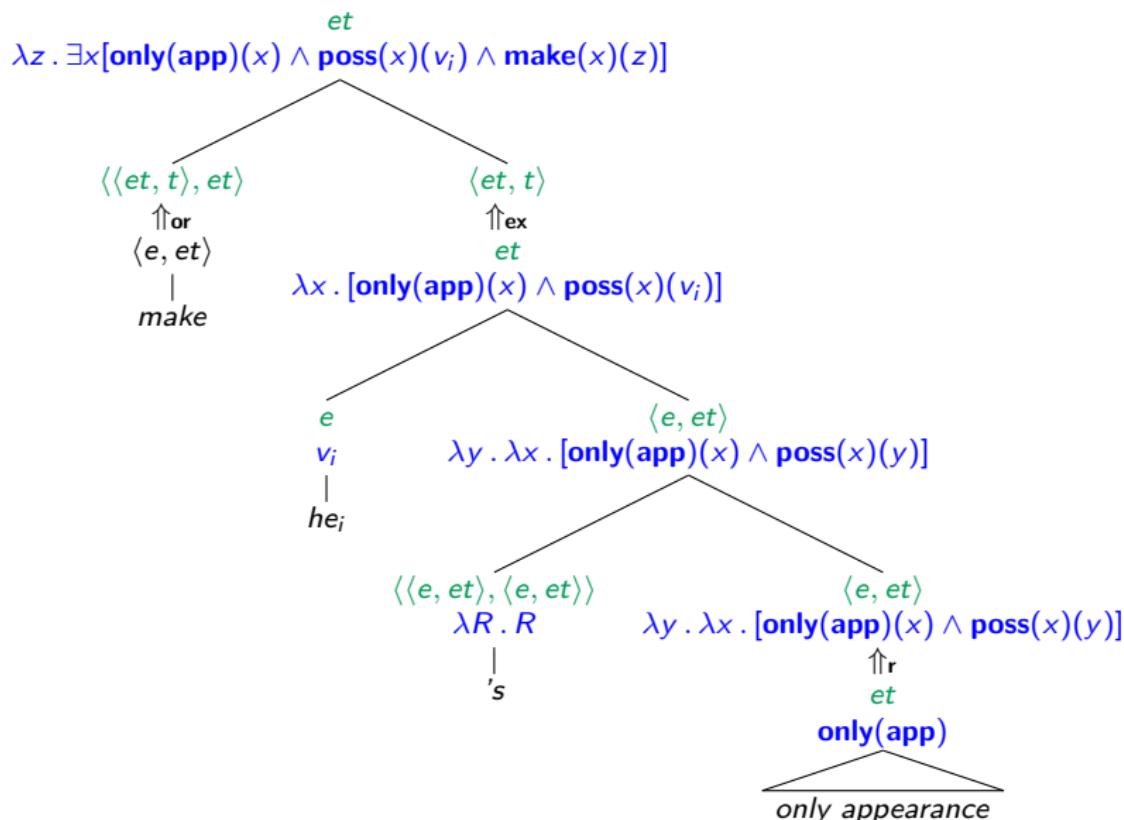
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