

# To want or to demand

## A polysemous clause-embedding verb in Zhuang

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- Zhuang clause-embedding *aeu* can mean both ‘want’ and ‘demand’.
- How do factors in the matrix and embedded clauses condition the available readings?
- How should we model this ambiguity in formal semantics?

### Introduction

The Zhuang verb *aeu* has a broad semantic range covering desire, acquisition, and related concepts. (Luo 2005: 8–10; Pan & Bodo 2012). *Aeu* can take clausal complements, yielding either a desiderative or mandative/directive reading. The latter reading is as yet unreported in the literature.

- (1) Daxmeh aeu gou ma ranz  
mother *aeu* 1SG return home  
Mother {wants, orders} me to come home.

It can also behave as a root necessity modal.

- (2) Gou aeu ma ranz  
1SG *aeu* return home  
I {must, want to} go home.

### Conditioning factors

Matrix degree → attitude reading

- (3) a. DaxGinh aeu hingz raixcaix  
Ginh *aeu* win much  
Ginh really {wants, #demands} to win.  
b. DaxGinh aeu hingz gvaq anq  
Ginh *aeu* win before have fun  
Ginh {wants, #demands} to win more than to have fun.

↪ Priority attitudes are scalar, speech acts are categorical.

Matrix progressive aspect → speech act reading

- (4) Daxboh cingq aeu de saug rug  
father PROG *aeu* 3SG clean bedroom  
Father {#wants, orders} him/her to clean (the) bedroom.

↪ Speech acts are dynamic, attitudes are static. (Özyıldız 2021)

Non-agentive embedded verb → attitude reading

- (5) De aeu fwn doek  
3SG *aeu* rain fall  
S/he {wants, #orders} it to rain.

Embedded ability modal → attitude reading

- (6) Lauxsae aeu gou guh ndaej vaiq  
teacher *aeu* 1SG do can fast  
Teacher {wants, #orders} me to be able to work fast.

Embedded counterfactual → attitude reading

- (7) Daxboh aeu dahVaz ngoenzlwenz saug rug gvaq  
father *aeu* Vaz yesterday clean bedroom already  
Father wishes Vaz had cleaned her bedroom yesterday.

↪ Lexical presuppositions of *aeu*-demand are contradicted.

*naeuz* ‘say’ after *aeu* → speech act reading

- (8) a. Lauxsae aeu *naeuz* gou yawj bonj saw neix  
teacher *aeu* say 1SG read CLF book this  
Teacher {#wants, tells} me to read this book.  
(#Teacher wants to say I read this book.)  
b. Compare the inverse order:  
Lauxsae *naeuz* aeu gou yawj bonj saw neix  
teacher say *aeu* 1SG read CLF book this  
Teacher says s/he wants me to read this book.

↪ *Aeu*-demand is lexicalized *naeuz*(*aeu*) + presuppositions.

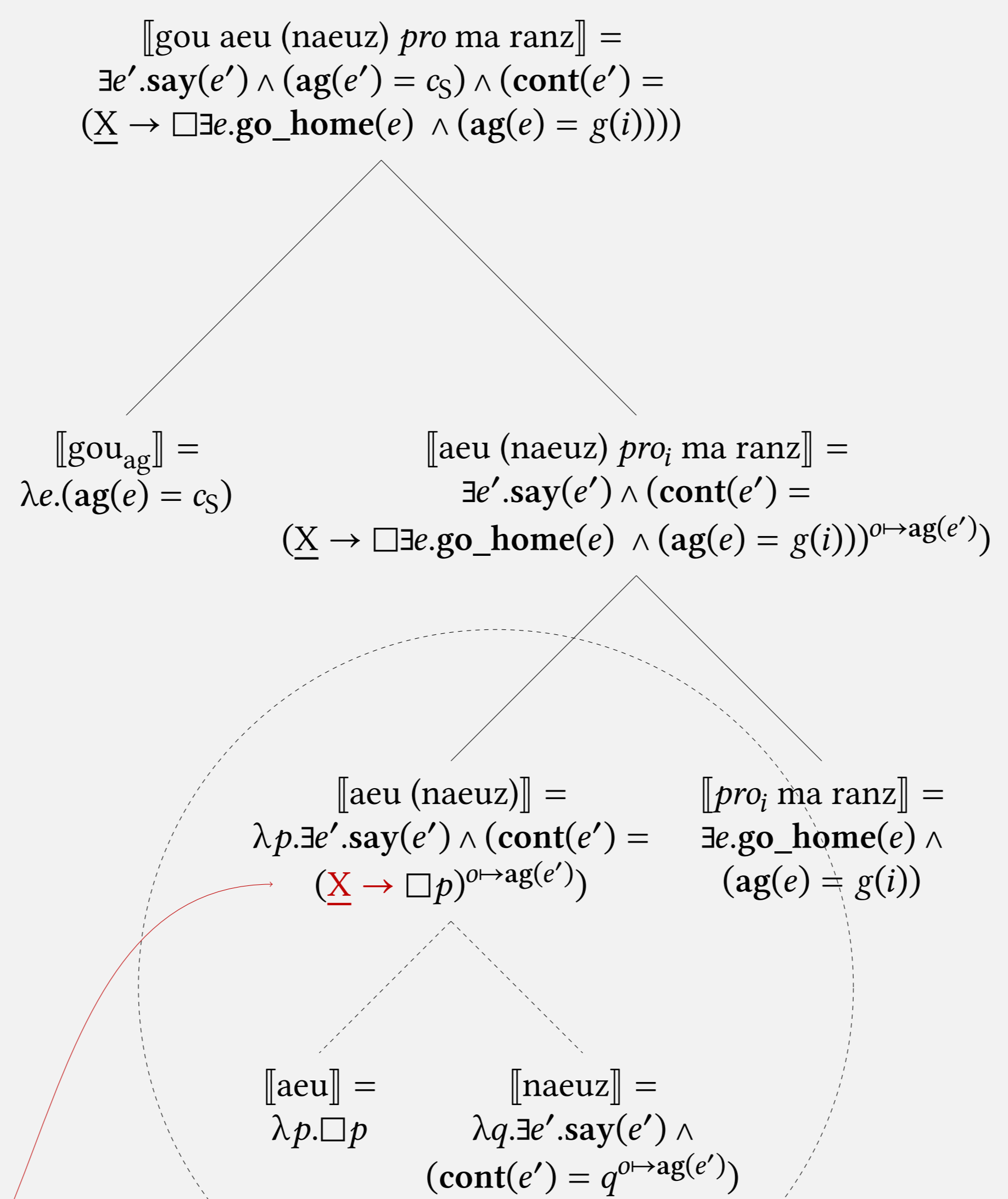
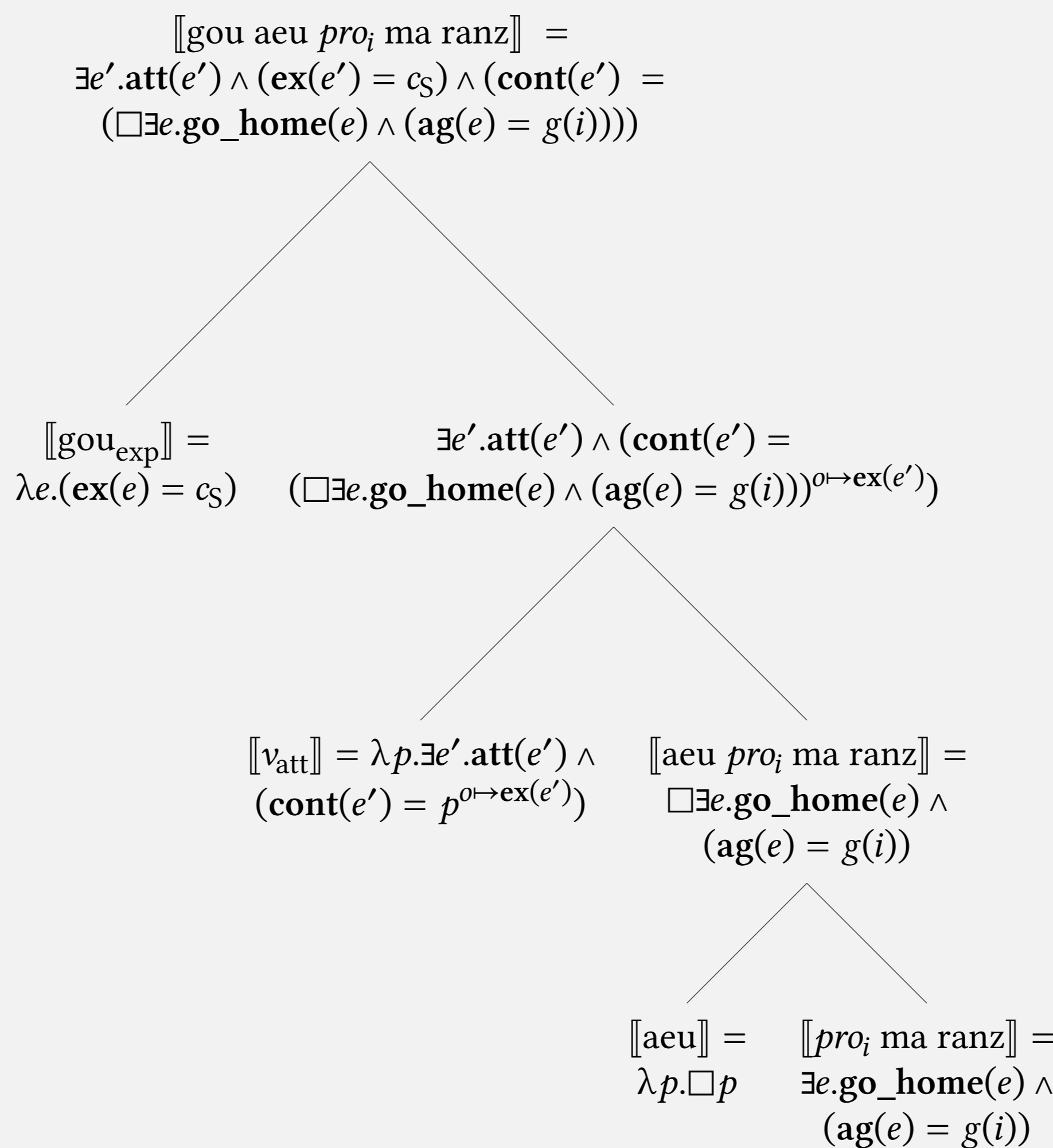
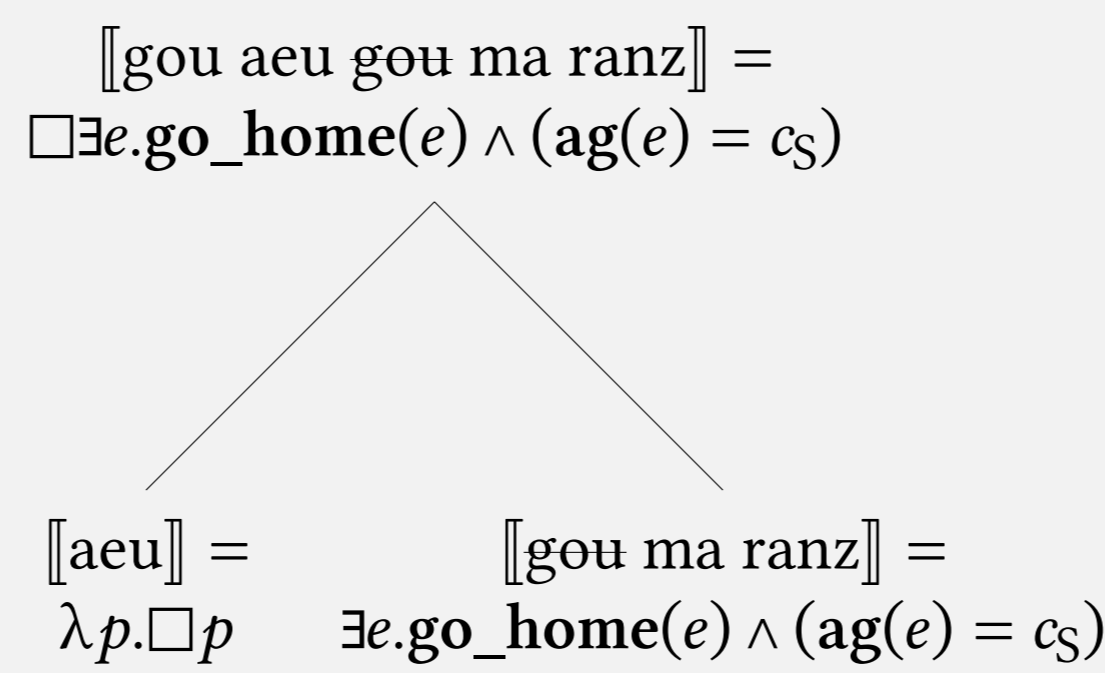
	attitude	speech
matrix	degree	progressive <i>naeuz</i>
embedded	non-agentive counterfactual ability modal	

### Modal and desiderative semantics

Following Heim’s (1992) analysis of desire predicates, we take desiderative *aeu* to be a strong priority modal whose base and ordering source are relativized to the logophoric center. Since *aeu*-want is compatible with counterfactual desire, we use the holder’s revised doxastic worlds as the modal base (ibid.: 205–6).

- (9)  $\square p := \forall w' \in \text{Dox}_o(w)$ .  
 $\text{Sim}_{w'}(\text{Rev}_p(\text{Dox}_o(w)) + p) <_{o,w} \text{Sim}_{w'}(\text{Dox}_o(w) + \neg p)$ ,  
where  $o$  is the origo parameter (Büring 2005: 64).

(Continued in column 3)



### MECORE Questionnaire extract

		‘want’	‘demand’
2.	(Anti-)veridicality w decl.	neither	neither
3.	Conjoined with not-P	OK	OK
3’.	Conjoined with P	OK	OK
4.	Projection/reversal thru neg.	typ. proj.	no
5.	Neg-raising	typically	no
6.	A. Likelihood	compatible	compatible
	B. Unlikelihood	compatible	compatible
	C. Equal likelihood	compatible	compatible
6’.	D. Certainty	incompatible	incompatible
	E. Counter-certainty	compatible	incompatible
	F. Equal uncertainty	compatible	compatible
6’’.	G. Preference	always	typically
	H. Opposition	incompatible	compatible
	I. Indifference	incompatible	compatible
7.	Focus sensitivity	yes	maybe?
8.	Gradability w decl.	yes	no

(Questionnaire from Özyıldız et al. 2023)

(Continued from column 1)

This semantics can account for both the modal and attitude readings. Outside of a logophoric context, the origo parameter points to the speaker, yielding a plain modal interpretation. The attitude reading arises in combination with an attitude-flavor  $v$  head, which introduces a speech event whose content argument is  $v$ ’s propositional complement, with the origo set to the speech event’s agent argument.

### Mandative semantics

We follow Burukina (2020) in analyzing mandative verbs, and namely *aeu*-demand, as a speech act verb embedding a priority modal. This decomposition is supported by morphological evidence: *aeu* can be serialized with the speech verb *naeuz*, forcing the mandative interpretation (6a). We take (apparently) simplex *aeu*-demand to contain a covert counterpart to *naeuz*.

This cannot be the whole story, though, since the meaning of *aeu* (*naeuz*)  $X$  does not match that of scope-transparent *naeuz*[*aeu*  $X$ ]; compare (6a) and (6b). We propose that the verb complex has been lexicalized with additional presuppositional content not present in the compositional semantics. We draw inspiration from propositional accounts of imperatives, in which imperative clauses contain a covert left-peripheral deontic modal, bundled with presuppositions which ensure the appropriate pragmatics (Kaufmann 2012; Condoravdi & Lauer 2012). One of the advantages of these accounts is that they can capture the pragmatic equivalency between imperatives and so-called performative uses of modals and attitude reports. In these accounts, illocutionary force is not a semantic primitive but rather derives from the propositional meaning and pragmatic context of an utterance.

- (10) a. Come home right now!  
b. You must come home right now.

Under the right circumstances, (10a–b) can have the same illocutionary force; according to propositional accounts of imperatives, this is because they have the same asserted content and the contexts that verify the presuppositions of (10a) are those in which (10b) is read as a demand. By the same reasoning, mandative verbs report speech acts which express modal necessity as well as satisfying certain contextual conditions. We represent these conditions as a bundle of presuppositions labeled  $\underline{X}$  in the definition of *aeu* (*naeuz*).

The relevant presuppositions should act as filters, ruling out the mandative interpretation in those contexts where it is actually unavailable (and not already otherwise excluded). Kaufmann (2012: 155–7) proposes that imperatives bear the presupposition that the embedded modal’s prejacent is not known to the speaker to be true or false. This is consistent with the unavailability of *aeu*-demand with counterfactual prejacent (see (7) and line 6E of the MECORE questionnaire, bottom center). Condoravdi & Lauer (2012: 46–8) point out that imperatives, beyond merely presupposing that the speaker is an authority on the asserted necessity (Kaufmann 2012: 147–61), must also presuppose that the speaker expects the speech act to suffice to bring about the prejacent. This constraint accounts for the infelicity of *aeu*-demand where the prejacent is out of the addressee’s control (5–6).

- Aeu* spells out a strong priority modal which can combine with a covert attitude verb to yield a desiderative.
- The mandative reading combines *aeu* with a speech verb and lexicalized presuppositions.

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