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On the representation of contain

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is suggested by Grinder's paper.

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On the Representation of *Contain*

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Expressions of the form *x has y in it* and *x contains y* seem to be synonymous in most of their uses:

- (1) a. This box has lentils in it.
b. This box contains lentils.
- (2) a. Organic cells contain DNA.
b. Organic cells have DNA in them.
- (3) a. This book has some good ideas in it.
b. This book contains some good ideas.

Although not in all:

- (4) a. His eye has a cinder in it.
b. His eye contains a cinder.

c. This desk has 3 drawers in it.
≠ d. This desk contains 3 drawers.
- (5) a. Please have yourself in you.
b. Please contain yourself.

Under certain conditions, however, *contain*, even in the sense of (1), is not permitted while *have . . . in* is:

- (6) a. I emptied the box that had something in it,
but I didn't see what.
*b. I emptied the box that contained something,
but I didn't see what.
- (7) a. I emptied the box that had something in it,
namely lentils.
*b. I emptied the box that contained something,
namely lentils.

These conditions have to do both with the notion of emptying

(*remove the contents of* has the same properties as *empty* in sentences like [6] and [7]), and with the non-referentiality of the direct object, as evidenced by (8 - 11) and (12), respectively:

- (8) a. This box has something in it, but I don't know what.
b. This box contains something, but I don't know what.
- (9) a. This box has something in it, namely lentils.
b. This box contains something, namely lentils.
- (10) a. I noticed a box that had something in it, but I didn't see what.
b. I noticed a box that contained something, but I didn't see what.
- (11) a. I noticed a box that had something in it, namely lentils.
b. I noticed a box that contained something, namely lentils.
- (12) a. I emptied the box which had lentils in it.
b. I emptied the box which contained lentils.

How, precisely, they are to be expressed (the distributions of the expressions in [6 - 12] rule out an "explanation" based on a simple arbitrary exception or selection feature), and whether they will account also for the lack of synonymy between (4a) and (4b) and between (4c) and (4d) remains a mystery.