

Davidson and Frege on the Unity of the Proposition: Some Remarks

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The paper explores the connection between truth and predication on the one hand, and between predication and the unity of the proposition on the other. The second part of the paper focuses on the question whether Frege's metaphor of unsaturatedness of the sense of the predicate expression helps explaining the unity of the proposition. It is argued that while appeal to unsaturatedness as such is of little help, Frege's conception contains many valuable insights. A more promising approach to the problem of the unity of the proposition should concentrate on Frege's Context Principle and on its bearing on the compositionality of linguistic meaning.

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Davidson's seminal paper of 1967, *Truth and Meaning*, opens with the question: How does the meaning of a sentence depend upon the meanings of the words that occur in it? This is possibly *the* fundamental question of the philosophy of language. If wonder is what sets philosophy in motion, this is the appropriate place for it to set in. In that paper Davidson already alluded to the problem of predication, for there he writes:

One proposal is to begin by assigning some entity as meaning to each word (or significant syntactic part) of the sentence; thus we might assign Theaetetus to 'Theaetetus', and the property of flying to 'flies' in the sentence 'Theaetetus flies'. The problem then arises how the meaning of the sentence is generated from these meanings. Viewing concatenation as a significant piece of syntax, we may assign to it the relation of participating in or instantiating; however it is obvious that we have here the start of an infinite regress. Frege sought to avoid the regress by saying that the entities