John Collins
The Unity of Linguistic Meaning.
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The main aim of the book is to shed light on the perennial philosophical problem of the unity of the proposition from the theoretical perspective of contemporary generative syntactic theory, or more precisely 'the unity problem as it arises for linguistic meaning' (ix), and the contribution of individual items of complex (linguistic) structures to a meaningful whole.

The book is composed of a short preface, seven chapters, references, and an index. The preface states the principal aim of the study, the first chapter introduces the main notions, the remaining six chapters fall into two parts: the 'historical' (or 'philosophical'), where Collins critically reviews a whole spectrum of relevant studies, and the 'syntactic', where Collins introduces and defends his own approach. The overall goal of the study is to apply a syntactic (formal) mechanism in order to solve a philosophical problem. Collins's philosophical bottom line is 'that judgement (or the proposition judged) is not the *given* in matters linguistic; rather, we should view structured linguistic meaning as the product of a general mechanism – Merge, but call it what you like – that is specifiable independently of any judgements at all, and which targets intrinsically complex items' (x).

Chapter 1, 'Thoughts, sentences, and unities', introduces the basic concepts necessary for further discussion and opens with the most general formulation of the unity problem: 'How is it that *many* can also be *one*, without the *many* losing their independent integrity?' (1). Collins opts for providing an answer to this question in linguistic terms, or at least, one of the possible answers, because, as Chapters 2–4 show, there are different ways at looking at the problem, or even different 'unity problem(s)'. Approaches and formulations of this problem are deeply rooted in the works of Frege, Russell, early Wittgenstein, and Ramsey. Collins devotes a considerable part of the first chapters of his book to a critical discussion of the views of these philosophers, with special focus on their relevance for contemporary research. From the very beginning, the discussion is couched in both the relevant philosophical tradition (with reference to Dummett, Davidson, Lewis, and also most recent studies), and contemporary linguistic thought, predominantly of generative provenance (though with some reference to Montague grammar). Collins convincingly demonstrates that linguistic unity is an empirical phenomenon and a feature of human cognition, and that 'the unity problem in the realm of language looks to be independent of the unity problem in the realm of states of affairs' (50), which is related to the fact the interpretive problem is explanatorily secondary to the combinatorial problem. Further on, Collins adds that the very idea 'that unity of structure of thought can be accounted for in terms of externalist causal relations strikes me as a misunderstanding of the problem. The problem is not why we utter what we do, but how the contents available to us to be linguistically expressed can be structured wholes of parts that have independent integrity' (87).

Important sections of Chapter 4 are concerned with unity and the copula. Collins discusses different aspects of Fregean semantics, including the seminal distinction between sense

and reference, and the more recent reanalysis offered by David Wiggins, according to whom unity is a function of the copula; he also presents Richard Gaskin's most recent views on the unity of the proposition. Collins furthermore shows that the 'philosophical' approaches 'get to the heart of the unity problem in that they recognize that some independent principle or synthetic agency (…) is required over and above the constituents that enter into the content of what is judged' (97–98).

The second part of the book tackles the unity problem from the methodological and operational perspective of contemporary generative syntax, with particular focus on the operation Merge. This technical (syntactic) tool, which originates in early transformational-generative grammar but is fully developed in recent versions of the Chomskyan Minimalist Program, might be interpreted as an operation that creates objects within objects, a single unitary operation combining structure building and movement. Collins has discovered the extra-syntactic potential of this operation and employs it for solving, or at least elucidating, a philosophical problem.

In Chapter 5, Collins explains the theoretical idea behind advocating syntactic means of the creation of objects; in Chapter 6 he presents a range of clarifications; and in Chapter 7 discusses (and dismisses) potential objections – philosophical, formal, and linguistic. The initial discussion is preceded by an overview of the relevant philosophical background, including a most interesting reference to the Kantian theory of judgement (one may also recall here Aristotle's views on unity and compounding, expressed in Book Zeta, ch. 17 of the *Metaphysics*).

Next, Collins posits three desiderata for a basic principle of combination: it should have an unbounded generative potential; it should be genuinely explanatory (i.e., it should be specifiable independently of the structures that are interpretable); and it should respect exclusivity by not looking for external explanation (105–106). After presenting early developments in generative grammar, the function of transformations, and the properties of concatenation, Collins suggests that the required combinatorial principle might be identified with the basic set theoretic operation called Merge. In simplified terms, Merge may be described as a recursive operation that targets two elements and creates a new object, where the merged objects are atomic or themselves products of Merge. At the same time Merge 'specifies a basic condition the mind/brain meets such that we understand linguistic material the particular way we do; it does not specify the process by which we speak' (108). Collins also stresses that the combinatorial properties of Merge are indifferent to interpretation: 'What makes a structure interpretable or not is the fit of the inherent properties of the lexical items that are merged, which creates familiar argument structure properties' (127).

In Chapter 6 Collins clarifies certain, mostly philosophical, issues connected with his point of view. He also assesses the internalism vs. externalism dispute in semantics and comes to the conclusion that 'the aims and methods of systematic inquiry (science and philosophy) are not served or constrained by our vernacular notions, whether they are coherent or not' (148). Chapter 7 is devoted to the linguistic status of Merge and to refutation of criticisms, especially the arguments voiced by Culicover and Jackendoff. Collins also provides an account of concatenative properties of Merge, pointing to some similarities and differences with Montague's generalization of type theory, and he argues for the semantic neutrality of Merge. In

the final section Collins discusses the relations between models and reality and mentions Higginbotham's remarks on issues connected with structure and structure interpretation (structures cannot substitute for interpretation), concluding that 'the model of merged structures is a way of understanding the parameters of the system of linguistic understanding without the ontological identification of propositions with structures' (178–179).

Collins' book is an ambitious attempt at integrating insights from philosophy, and philosophy of language in particular, with those deriving from contemporary linguistics, especially modern syntactic theory. The results are most interesting for both philosophers and linguists.

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