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The grammar of propositions

In semantic frameworks based on structured propositions, the meanings of sentences are usually taken to be set-theoretic entities. Yet, as Jeffrey King and Scott Soames have recently pointed out, it is unclear how such entities could have truth-conditions. Soames tries to overcome the problem by grounding his theory in something non-linguistic (cognitive event- or act-tokens), a strategy, which I argue does not yield an explanatory account. In contrast, King bases his approach on facts concerning language. Yet, I maintain that he introduces a difficulty by assuming too rigid a distinction between grammar and its meaning. I propose that the problem can be overcome by assuming a non-arbitrary relation between the syntax and semantics of natural language. I argue that such a strategy is suggested by the history of generative grammar: despite a widespread acceptance of a distinction between syntax and semantics in this tradition, motivations for assuming grammatical structure not visible on the surface, for example, often include the availability of some interpretations and the unavailability of others. In turn, what an expression can mean is (in part) explained by grammatical principles.