

Titel: A further note on identity, [36-52] 115-0240

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Anvendt udgave: Louis Hjelmslev og hans kreds

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Appendix I.

A Further Note on Identity (Prop. 17).

As we have seen, there is an apparent circle in the definition of identity in terms of equivalence, which in turn presupposes the identification of two separately encountered functions and thus implies the notion of identity. The reason is that, underlying the definition of equivalence, there is an assumption of very high generality which is not specific to glossematics but appears to be fundamental to all cognition, viz. the assumption that what is alike can be treated as identical unless there are special reasons to the contrary. We have already applied this assumption in the Principle of ~~Generality~~ Generalisation. Our definitions of equivalence and identity are, then, no more than rules for the application of this assumption: No. 16, the definition of equivalence, delimits the aspects in respect of which alone similarity shall be deemed to be significant, and No. 17 states the degree of similarity which shall be deemed necessary and sufficient for the assumption to come into force.

Stated thus baldly, this seems an appallingly dangerous belief to hold, and indeed history and literature are strewn with examples of the dire consequences of a too uncritical reliance on superficial similarity. Nevertheless, our ~~entire~~ whole mode of experiencing--the way of "selecting and grouping in attention" that is shared by all sane human beings-- is derived from this assumption. Without it, we should not be able to recognise ourselves, each other, or any part of our now familiar ~~to~~ surroundings. What we call memory would be impossible because there would be no way of selecting anything

to remember. Thinking, as we know it, would be impossible because nothing would be sufficiently definite to be thought about.

Still, the danger remains and is too obvious to need much comment. In a way the whole of life is a continued lesson in the conditions under which it is safe to act on the assumption, i.g. the criteria of recognising the "reasons to the contrary", and our success depends largely on our ability to learn this lesson. In a limited field, such as a science, the rules can be stated fairly simply; our two definitions are an attempt to formulate these rules as they apply within glossematics.