

***Making Sense of Reference: Sa skya Paṇḍita's Treatment of Designation and Designatum  
in the Works of Dharmakīrti***

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*abstract*

Following the 1892 publication of Gottlob Frege's "Über Sinn und Bedeutung" ("On Sense and Reference"), the distinction, as Frege characterized it, came to be of central importance for twentieth century philosophy of language and for analytic philosophy more generally. The relative neglect of the sense/reference distinction in work on Indian philosophy, therefore, invites the question of whether this reflects the absence or unimportance of the distinction in earlier Indian philosophy and linguistic theory, or whether this has merely been a blind spot in contemporary scholarship in these fields. Two important articles that both first appeared in 1986, by Tom Tillemans and Mark Siderits respectively, argued that the distinction was at least clearly implied in the work of the great Buddhist philosopher Dharmakīrti (ca. 600 C.E.), but the topic seems otherwise to have remained marginal in work on Indian views of language. (McAllister 2020 usefully summarizes the range of Indological scholarship bearing upon the issue.)

In the communication proposed here, based on the synthesis of Dharmakīrti's discussions of *abhidhāna-abhideya* (designation and designatum) that occupies the fifth chapter of the *Pramāṇayuktinidhi* (Tib. *Tshad ma rigs pa'i gter*) by Sa skya Paṇḍita Kun dga' rgyal mtshan (1182-1251), I argue that, while Frege's distinction seems strongly suggested, Frege's realism in fact obscures the true contours of Dharmakīrti's theory of reference as Sa skya Paṇḍita understands it. Sa skya Paṇḍita, the leading Tibetan Sanskritist of his day, was concerned to address the original texts directly and to elaborate his treatment of the issue on

the basis of the broad range of relevant passages in Dharmakīrti's works. Though guided generally by his analysis of the topic, I shall also follow his example by turning to the Sanskrit sources themselves.

### *Preliminary Bibliography*

#### *Primary texts in Sanskrit and Tibetan*

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