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PRAGMATICS AS A BY-PRODUCT OF LOGIC IN FREGE'S EARLY WRITINGS

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There used to be a popular interpretation of Frege's view according to which he harbors a philosophical contempt for pragmatic aspects of natural language. This interpretation was promoted not only by several formal logicians that followed the Fregean tradition in logic and truth-functional semantics (such as the first Wittgenstein, Tarski, Carnap, etc.) but also by ordinary language philosophers (such as the second Wittgenstein, Strawson, Austin, etc.). It depicts Frege as a dry Platonic logician, insensitive to the richness of fundamental non-truth-functional aspects of ordinary language and communication.

More recent scholarship by some linguists and philosophers (such as Karttunen (2016), Horn (2007), Sander (2021, 2021.a), and Neale (1999), among others) has shown that the popular interpretation is fundamentally wrong. A careful examination of several of Frege's remarks reveals a much more sophisticated perception of semantic and other pragmatic aspects of language than the one ordinarily attributed to him. These scholars bring to light many of Frege's insights on side-thoughts (*Nebengedanke*), coloring (*Färbung*), presuppositions (*Voraussetzungen*), illumination (*Beleuchtung*) etc., that appear in his writings from 1892 on (especially in “*Über Sinn und Bedeutung*” and “*Der Gedanke*”), and that are nowadays central to the field of pragmatics. From a historic perspective, these writings are from a relatively late stage of Frege's thought, a stage in which his notion of what belongs to logic and what belongs “only” to ordinary language and communication was already fairly mature and consolidated.

Less attention was given in this recent literature to his earlier writings in logic (from 1879 to 1882), especially to the *Begriffsschrift* (BS) and other texts from the same period. This is a crucial period of Frege's thought because, while outlining his very first formal language, he has to decide what belongs to logic strictly conceived (i.e., pure thought), and what must be filtered out, no matter how much it appears essential to thought and communication. In so doing, he must fight not just against our natural

inclinations as speakers but also against a well-established tradition in logic (a tradition coming from Aristotle and endorsed by the overwhelmingly neo-Kantian culture of his time) of analyzing judgements in terms of subject and predicate and of taking grammar as a guide to thought. (In the Preface of BS he describes the task of his book as the one of “break[ing] the power of the word over the human mind, uncovering illusions which through the use of language *often almost unavoidably arise* concerning the relations of concepts” (p. 106).)

As important as understanding the elements of natural language (such as variables, quantifiers, negation, etc.) that Frege decides to include in his first “language of pure thought” is understanding the elements of natural language that he decides to leave out and, even more importantly, the reasons he presents for doing so. Some elements expelled from logic are the active/passive voice, subject/predicate distinction, the difference between ‘and’ and ‘but’, the causal reading of implication, and the relevance of the order of antecedents in a conditional judgement. These are, in his words, “aspects of [ordinary] language which result only from the interaction of speaker and listener”, and so “have nothing corresponding to them in my formula language” (BS §3). Indeed, what we see in BS is a progressive elimination of grammatical categories (subject, predicate, object, etc.) and the substitution of ordinarily articulated contents by fully de-grammatized contents (what Frege calls “conceptual contents”). (As I intend to argue, the expression of this preliminary full de-grammatization is Frege’s horizontal stroke which, according to him, “ties the symbol which follow it into a whole” (§2).)

In this presentation I want to focus on these very early writings and relate to some aspects of contemporary pragmatics, especially to the notion of implicature, speech acts and presuppositions. First, I shall analyze passages in which Frege filters out grammatical aspects of language. As I intend to show, in fixing the limits of his logic he anticipates a very subtle—even if most of the time negative—characterization of the linguistic phenomenon of conventional implicature that would almost a century later be rediscovered by Paul Grice (1967), although Grice does not seem aware of the Fregean antecedents of the topic. Only Grice and Frege would understand the phenomenon as coming from different sources: while for Grice they are the product of principles of rational communication, for Frege they are the product of our psychology.¹

¹ “That is why we cannot give too many warnings against the danger of confusing points of view and switching from one question to another, a danger to which we are particularly exposed because we are accustomed to thinking in some language or other and because grammar, which has for speech a

Second, I shall discuss Frege's justification for introducing the assertion sign (BS §2) and the definition sign (BS §24) as logical symbols. As some scholars have pointed out (e.g., Vanderveken 1990, Ruffino et. al. 2021, and Ruffino 2022), Frege not only recognizes distinct illocutionary forces in logical assertions and definitions, but also wants to include a marker for those forces in the object-language of logic (indeed, as logical signs), going against a tradition before (and after) him of indicating illocutionary force only in the metalanguage. Finally, I shall make some remarks concerning Frege's notion of presupposition (*Voraussetzung*) in the BS and related articles. As it will become clear, what he has in mind at this stage of his thought is something quite different from the notion later presented in "*Über Sinn und Bedeutung*" and that became the center of attention of contemporary pragmatics (e.g., in Strawson (1950), Karttunen and Levinson). In BS and related articles, he has in mind incomplete reasonings with deductive gaps.

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significance analogous to that which logic has for thought, is a mixture of the logical and the psychological." ("Logic" (1879/91), PW p. 6)

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