

Two misconstruals of Frege's theory of colouring

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Many scholars claim that Frege's theory of colouring (Färbung) is committed to a radical form of subjectivism or emotivism. Some other scholars claim that Frege's concept of colouring is a precursor to Grice's notion of conventional implicature. I argue that both of these claims are mistaken. Finally, I propose a taxonomy of Fregean colourings: For Frege, there are (1) purely aesthetic colourings, (2) communicative colourings or hints, (3) non-communicative colourings.

Keywords: Fregean colouring, Fregean tone, Frege's pragmatics, conventional implicature

I. Introduction

According to Frege, the two sentences

(1a) It is true that Frederick the Great won the battle of Rossbach

(1b) Frederick the Great won the battle of Rossbach (Logik 153; FR 242)¹

have exactly the same sense (*Sinn*) as well as exactly the same reference or semantic value (*Bedeutung*). This is not to say that Frege would have thought their content (*Inhalt*) to be identical: for Frege, there are words, phrases or grammatical constructions which are irrelevant to the thought expressed by a sentence but which nevertheless have a specific linguistic meaning. Frege does not employ a uniform terminology for that aspect of content: sometimes he uses terms such as 'colouring' (*Färbung*) or 'scent' (*Duft*), sometimes he talks more neutrally about the wrappings (*Umhüllungen*) of a thought.² In what follows, I will stick to Frege's preferred term 'colouring' and use 'c-device' as an umbrella term for any linguistic device that affects a sentence's colouring without changing the thought expressed by it.

There are at least two reasons for carefully studying Frege's theory of colouring. The first

¹ In this paper, I shall use the following abbreviations when quoting from Frege's works: 'Logik' (Frege 1983); 'SuB' (Frege 1892); 'Ged' (Frege 1918); 'FR' (Beaney 1997).

² See, respectively, SuB 31, Ged 63, Logik 150.

reason is exegetic in nature. Nobody would deny that the concept of sense is essential not only to Frege's philosophy of language but also to his philosophy of logic. However, in spite of there now being a vast amount of scholarship devoted to that concept, the meaning of the term 'Sinn' is still rather elusive, and a more careful analysis of Frege's concept of colouring might help us get a better grip on his notion of sense. The distinction between sense and colouring is especially relevant for understanding Frege's treatment of indirect discourse: Frege claims that, in an indirect statement, we may substitute expressions with the same sense without altering the sentence's truth-value (SuB 37). Frege also claims that a pejorative term such as 'cur' has exactly the same sense as its neutral counterpart 'dog' (Logik 152). Once we consider sentence pairs such as 'A believes that dogs are adorable' and 'A believes that curs are adorable', it seems as though one of these two claims must be rejected (see Textor 2011: 145). Thus, the very distinction between sense and colouring becomes problematic. This issue, moreover, is closely connected to the general problem of whether Frege thought logical equivalence or some sort of cognitive equivalence to be the criterion for the identity of thoughts (see, e.g., Klement 2002: 92; Kühne 2003: 42-8; Kühne 2010: 648-9; Sander 2016; Textor 2018). While it is quite plausible that the two sentences 'A dog is howling' and 'A cur is howling' are logically equivalent, it seems equally plausible that they are not cognitively equivalent: you can have a specific belief about dogs without having a belief about curs. Thus, the phenomenon of colouring seems highly relevant for fully understanding the nature of Fregean thoughts. (Since a thorough discussion of all these problems and their theoretical connections would require too much space, I will, however, not attempt to tackle these issues here.)

The second reason is related to an ongoing debate in linguistics and the philosophy of language. Today, many scholars share Frege's intuition that, in the case of expressions such as 'but', 'cur' and many others, the conventional linguistic meaning of a word can transcend its truth-conditional content, though most of them will use Grice's term 'conventional implicature' to refer to that kind of surplus meaning. On the other hand, ever since Grice revived interest in that kind of content, many other scholars, at some stages of his career possibly even Grice himself, have been deeply sceptical about the concept of conventional implicature (see, e.g., Kempson 1975; Sperber & Wilson 1995: 182; Bach 1999; Stanley 2002). To be sure, Christopher Potts (2005) has presented a sustained defence of conventional implicatures. However, to mention just one problem, Potts's 'logic of conventional implicatures' is not applicable to terms such as 'cur': 'cur' seems to have a

truth-conditional or, as Potts prefers to call it, ‘at-issue content’ as well as some kind of expressive or ‘CI meaning’, and Potts’s logic is based on the fundamental assumption that no ‘lexical item contributes both an at-issue and a CI meaning’ (Potts 2005: 7; see also McCready 2010). As a result, his discussion of what he calls ‘conventional implicatures’ focuses on ‘supplements’ such as non-restrictive relative clauses on the one hand and on pure expressives such as ‘damn’ on the other. Thus, Potts is not really concerned with implicatures in Grice’s sense but rather with a speaker-oriented dimension of meaning.³ Since, as Potts (2005: 5) rightfully notes, the ‘history of conventional implicatures is rocky, their current status uncertain’ and since Fregean colourings are commonly thought to be closely related to conventional implicatures (see, e.g., Neale 2001; Williamson 2009; Copp 2009; Horn 2013), Frege’s approach clearly deserves a more careful analysis as a theoretical competitor to the theories advanced by Grice, Potts and other scholars.

In what follows, I will show that Frege’s theory of colouring is neither, as is often supposed, deeply flawed nor, as many scholars think, a mere precursor to Grice’s notion of conventional implicature. I shall proceed as follows. I begin, in section II, with a discussion of Dummett’s highly influential reading of Frege. Section III provides a reconstruction of Frege’s official (and purely negative) notion of colouring. Section IV highlights some important differences between Fregean colourings and Gricean conventional implicatures as well as a difference between Frege’s general notion of colouring and his more specific notion of hinting (*andeuten*). Section V then proposes a taxonomy of Fregean colourings and briefly discusses the general problem of taxonomizing non-truth-conditional meanings.

II. Dummett on Frege on ‘Tone’

Given the vast amount of scholarship devoted to Frege’s philosophy in general, it is somewhat surprising that his theory of colouring has not received much attention. For instance, in the *Cambridge Companion to Frege* (2007), a book of more than 600 pages, colourings are not even mentioned a single time by any of the 14 contributors. The reason for this neglect is not easy to identify, but I assume that Dummett’s seminal interpretation of Frege’s remarks on what Dummett prefers to call ‘tone’ played a crucial role in convincing most scholars that Frege’s approach is committed to a radical and implausible subjectivism about colourings and

³ See Bach 2006a: 492. In a way, this is even acknowledged by Potts (2005: 9) himself when he says that the term ‘implicature’ is ‘unfortunate’.

thus does not deserve closer attention. Here are two more recent statements that clearly betray the influence of Dummett's interpretation:

Dummett ... shows decisively that Frege's positive position on colouring is untenable, so I will spend no more time on it. (Neale 1999: 38; see also Neale 2001: 142)

As Dummett ... has pointed out, Frege failed to describe accurately the phenomenon to which he had called attention. (Picardi 2007: 500)

Given Dummett's impact on the subsequent debate (or rather non-debate), two things are quite surprising: First, Dummett pays very little attention to the exact wording and to the context of some of Frege's remarks. For instance, as will emerge below, some of Frege's rather idiosyncratic claims do not pertain to c-devices in general but primarily to their use in poetry. Secondly and even more surprisingly, Dummett is fully aware that there are passages in Frege that plainly contradict what he takes to be Frege's 'official' theory of colouring. On the one hand, Dummett claims that Frege's explanation of tone, in general, 'consists in a propensity which the use of a word has to call up certain mental images' (1981: 85). On the other hand, he notes that Frege does *not* try to explain the difference between 'and' and 'but' by subjective associations or the like: 'he says that by using the word "but" a speaker hints that what follows is different from what you might at first suppose. A hint is evidently not the production of a mental image.' (1981: 86) Thus, Dummett should have concluded that Frege is not committed to any kind of subjectivism about c-devices in general, especially so since in Frege's discussion of numerous other c-devices (such as the locution 'it is true that', the difference between active and passive voice, etc.) mental images or ideas do not play any role. Dummett, however, focuses almost exclusively on those passages that seem to fit his subjectivist reading of Frege and thus thinks that Frege's treatment of colouring is 'careless' (1981: 88).

Here is what I take to be the gist of Dummett's interpretation and critique:

[1] [Frege] accounts for tone as a matter of the association with a word or expression of certain 'ideas' (Vorstellungen), by which he means mental images. [2] This is not a particularly plausible explanation of the phenomenon: we indeed speak of words which carry the same sense as having different associations, but we should be hard put to it to describe the distinct images called up by hearing the words 'dead' and 'deceased' ..., still less by 'and' and 'but'. [3] Frege makes a poor explanation worse by suggesting that mental images are incommunicable in principle: no two people can ever know that they have the same mental image. It would follow that tone was a feature of meaning which was, in principle, subjective. (Dummett 1981: 85, numbers

added)

There is no need to dispute [2]; the fact that ‘but’ and ‘and’ have different lexical meanings is clearly incompatible with any form of subjectivism about the content of these items. What about [3]? Dummett’s claim that, from Frege’s point of view, mental images are incommunicable in principle is based on a short passage in *Über Sinn und Bedeutung*:

If two persons picture (*vorstellen*) the same thing, each still has his own idea (*Vorstellung*). It is indeed sometimes possible to establish differences in the ideas, or even in the sensations (*Empfindungen*), of different men; but an exact comparison is not possible, because we cannot have both ideas together in the same consciousness. (SuB 30; FR 155)⁴

Let us first note that Frege’s point is purely epistemological. He is not concerned with the question of whether two persons can share the same type of idea but rather with the question of whether I can know that somebody else experiences the same mental image as I do. Now obviously there are, as Frege concedes, some means of establishing whether two persons experience different ideas: one can describe the mental image one has when hearing, say, the word ‘horse’ as an image of a sturdy brown horse or as an image of a thin white horse. However, as Frege insists, there is no means of finding out whether, for instance, somebody else experiences *exactly* the same kind of red as I do. So, in this respect, Dummett’s reading of Frege is clearly correct. Accordingly, the only controversial part of Dummett’s interpretation is [1]. Dummett thinks that [1] is essentially what Frege says in his posthumous *Logik* (1897):

Thus the poet does not really paint anything, he only provides the impetus (*anregen*) for others to do so, furnishing hints (*Winke*) to this end, leaving the execution to the hearer (*die Ausführung dem Hörenden überlassend*). And because of these hints (*Und dieser Winke wegen*) it is useful to the poet to have at his disposal a number of different words that can be substituted for one another without altering the thought, but which can act in different ways on the feelings and ideas (*Vorstellungen*) of the hearer. We may think e.g. of the words ‘walk’, ‘stroll’, ‘saunter’. These means are also used to the same end in everyday conversations (*Gespräche*). If we compare the sentences ‘This dog howled the whole night’ and ‘This cur howled the whole night’, we find that the thought is the same. (Logik 151-2; FR 240)

The first thing to note is that Frege does not talk here about subjective *associations*; rather, he says that certain *words* act on the ideas of a hearer. Does that make the content of such words

⁴ All English translations are based on Beaney’s *Frege Reader*. Underlined passages indicate changes I have made.

subjective? Trivially, the idea being evoked by words such as ‘cur’ is subjective—it is an idea, after all. Less trivially, one may never know whether the idea in a speaker who is using the word ‘cur’ is identical to the idea to be found in the hearer. So, in these two respects, any act of communication that involves words such as ‘cur’ is indeed subjective: insofar as the word ‘cur’ serves to convey an idea into the mind of a hearer, you can never know whether you have succeeded in doing that.

However, exactly the same could be said about any normal word, i.e. about a word that is not a c-device. According to Frege, a speaker who hears and understands a word such as ‘horse’ ‘will probably have straightaway a picture (*Bild*) of a horse before his mind’ (Logik 151; FR 240). This picture is, of course, subjective, and as in the case of ‘cur’, I can never know whether my image of a horse is the same as your image. This, however, clearly does not show the content of the word ‘horse’ to be subjective. For another example, consider the sentence ‘Imagine a spider with hairy legs!’ This sentence might be a suitable means for evoking a vivid image in the mind of a hearer, but this fact is perfectly compatible with the claim that the sentence’s content is completely objective. Thus, the mere fact that, for Frege, words such as ‘cur’ have the *function* or *point* of evoking ideas in an audience does not commit him to the claim that the *content* of such words is a mere matter of subjective associations.

There is, however, another passage that seems to strongly support Dummett’s interpretation:

To the possible differences here belong also the colourings (*Färbungen*) and illuminations (*Beleuchtungen*) which poetry and rhetoric (*Dichtkunst und Beredsamkeit*) seek to give to the sense. Such colourings and illuminations are not objective, and must be evoked by each hearer or reader according to the hints of the poet or the speaker. Without some affinity in human ideas (*Verwandtschaft des menschlichen Vorstellens*) art would certainly be impossible; but it can never be exactly determined how far the intentions of the poet are realized. (SuB 31; FR 155)

First of all, Frege talks here about the ‘affinity in human ideas’. Since, evidently, communication that involves c-devices is not some kind of ‘guessing game’ (see Kortum 2013: 45) where the speaker associates some mental image with a word and the hearer then tries to find a corresponding image in her mind (without being able to determine whether she has succeeded in doing so), the stable and successful use of c-devices needs to be explained. Now one might assume that Frege tries to account for that stability by claiming that human beings have, to a large extent, similar ideas (for such a line of thought see Gabriel 1971: XXIV); the affinity in human ideas would then function as some kind of filter that restricts the

space of possible associations. But this cannot be what Frege had in mind since, plainly, this theory does not work: even if all human beings had just two different ideas of dogs (one idea of a dog ‘with an unkempt appearance’ (Logik 152) and another idea of a normal dog), the connection between the first idea and the word ‘cur’ as well as the connection between the second idea and the word ‘dog’ would still have to be accounted for, and the only plausible explanation for that connection seems to be some kind of convention, and it’s the convention or, as Frege put it, ‘common usage’ (*allgemeiner Gebrauch*) (Logik 152; FR 241) that does the work here, not the affinity.

Moreover, Frege simply does not say that the affinity in human ideas might explain the successful use of c-devices; what he says is that *art* would not be possible without some affinity of that sort. It is quite striking that all passages in Frege that seem to invite a radically subjectivist reading are passages in which he focuses on poetry or art in general (compare the above quoted passage from his *Logik*). This is no coincidence since Frege’s theory of art is extremely subjectivist. As a matter of fact, it is quite similar to what is now known as the Croce-Collingwood theory. For Frege, a work of art is neither a concrete object such as a painting nor an abstract object such as a text or a melody; the work of art proper is rather ‘a structure of ideas (*Vorstellungsbilde*) within us and ... the external thing – the painting, the statue – is only a means for producing the real work of art in us’ (Logik 144; FR 232), and this ontological subjectivity is also supposed to explain why *judgments* about art are subjective. Since, for Frege, sentences are suitable means for expressing thoughts but inappropriate vehicles for conveying ideas (Logik 143; FR 231), this means that poets, in contrast to painters or sculptors, have an invidious task: a poet must somehow transfer one of her mental images into the mind of a reader or listener, using a medium that is not particularly apt for this task. And if there were no affinity in human ideas, this task would not be difficult but impossible.

Note, moreover, that in ‘Über Sinn und Bedeutung’ Frege very briefly discusses colouring but does not present a single example. Since in that essay the word ‘Färbung’ (*colouring*) occurs for the very first time in Frege’s writings and since Frege, as noted at the beginning of this paper, was not particularly interested in establishing a consistent terminology for non-truth-conditional aspects of content, one might even wonder whether he was thinking of c-devices here. Maybe the non-objectivity of ‘colourings’ rather has to do with phenomena such as intonation, rhythm or the like (see Logik 151; FR 239; compare also a passage in Frege (Ged

63; FR 331) where he uses the terms ‘mood’ (*Stimmung*), ‘scent’ (*Duft*) and ‘illumination’ (*Beleuchtung*) for ‘what is portrayed by intonation and rhythm’ in a poem).

Note, finally, that when Frege claims that colourings (especially in poetry) are not ‘objective’, this does not necessarily amount to the thesis that c-devices do not have an intersubjective content. For Frege, the fact that a sign’s *sense* can be ‘the property of many people’ (*gemeinsames Eigentum von vielen*) (SuB 29; FR 154) is not to be explained by linguistic conventions but, ultimately, by the existence of objective thoughts or senses in general. Now some sort of platonism about concepts such as DOG might be taken to be a reasonably plausible thesis; the claim, however, that there is a Platonic form (or the like) corresponding to the word ‘cur’, but different from the form of the dog, appears ontologically bizarre. The word ‘dog’ expresses an objective concept which maps arguments to truth-values, and though the word ‘cur’ contains some additional ‘information’, it expresses exactly the same concept as ‘dog’. Thus, the specific content of c-devices may be determined by intersubjective linguistic conventions without being objective in Frege’s sense of that word.

Now even if one grants that my reading of Frege is essentially correct and that he is not committed to the claim that colouring is a matter of subjective associations, one may assume that his treatment of colouring amounts to some kind of emotivism, according to which c-devices have some stable and intersubjective emotive or expressive meaning. Even when read this way, Frege’s theory of colouring would still face some serious problems: while the difference between ‘dog’ and ‘cur’ might be explained in such terms, the difference between ‘and’ and ‘but’ (let alone the difference between the active and passive voice, the use of ‘it is true that ...’ etc.) does not seem to have anything to do with the feelings, broadly construed, a speaker wishes to express or to evoke. Frege’s theory, however, is neither subjectivist nor emotivist in general. Though, in his account of the use of some c-devices, he frequently talks about the mental states evoked in a hearer, he makes perfectly clear that this is not always the case:

An assertoric sentence often contains, over and above a thought and assertion, a third component (*ein Drittes*) not covered by the assertion. This third component⁵ is often meant to act on the feelings and the mood of the hearer, or to arouse his imagination. Words like ‘regrettably’ (*leider*) and ‘fortunately’ (*gottlob*) belong here. (Ged 63; FR 330, emphasis added)

⁵ The grammatical gender of the pronoun ‘das’ makes perfectly clear that it refers back to ‘ein Drittes’.

Assuming that Frege observed Grice's maxime of quantity (*avant la lettre*), he seems to claim here that *not all* c-devices have some kind of emotive meaning. Thus, it seems evident that his treatment of colouring *in general* is not a form of emotivism and thus a fortiori also not a form of subjectivism.

III. Frege's negative criteria

If, as I have tried to show, Frege's treatment of colouring is neither emotivist nor subjectivist, then what does his official theory of colouring look like? Ignoring everything he says about *specific* c-devices such as 'but', 'cur' or 'it is true ...', we are left with nothing but his remarks on how to distinguish colouring from sense. We will see, however, that his scattered thoughts on that issue contain the core of quite an interesting theory, consisting of four main tenets, which I shall call the four laws of inertia concerning colouring.

1) When Frege says that some sentences contain a 'third component' that is 'not covered by the assertion' (*auf das sich die Behauptung nicht erstreckt*) (Ged 63; FR 330), he is claiming that c-devices are assertorically inert. For Frege, there is a fundamental difference between merely hinting that something is the case and actually asserting or saying it.

All c-devices are *assertorically inert*: If Σ is an assertoric sentence that contains a c-device which hints that q, then uttering Σ does not amount to asserting q.

2) When Frege discusses the possible objection that a word like 'cur' might be seen as containing an entire thought (Logik 152; FR 241), i.e. the thought that the speaker has a poor opinion of the dog (or dogs in general), his reply amounts to the claim that c-devices neither contain nor modify thoughts and thus do not affect the truth-value of a sentence in which they are used. Accordingly c-devices are alethically inert.

All c-devices are *alethically inert*: If Σ is an assertoric sentence with the propositional content p that contains a c-device which hints that q, then the truth-value of q does not affect the truth-value of p or the truth-value of Σ as a whole.⁶

⁶ Since nothing seems to hinge on that issue here, I take propositions as well as sentences to be possible truth-value bearers.

3) The third tenet is not something Frege explicitly says, but rather a corollary from 2). If c-devices in general do not affect the truth-value of a sentence, then c-devices are logically irrelevant:

All c-devices are *inferentially inert*: If Σ_1 and Σ_2 are assertoric sentences with the propositional content p that differ only in colouring, then Σ_1 and Σ_2 are logically equivalent.⁷

Accordingly, if Frege had known Kaplan's (MS) claim that the sentence 'Kaplan was promoted' follows from 'That damn Kaplan was promoted' but not *vice versa*, he would have regarded this as seriously misguided. For Frege, by hearing a sentence that contains words like 'damn' or 'cur' you do not learn (*erfahren*) more than by hearing their neutral counterparts, though he would concede that a speaker who uses such words conveys (*äussern*) some kind of contempt (*Geringschätzung*) or the like.⁸ However, what a speaker conveys by some word does not necessarily affect the inferential relations between sentences containing that word.

4) Up to now, Frege's theory of colouring may seem to be a kind of precursor to Grice's notion of conventional implicature. This changes, however, when we look at the next and final tenet.

Some c-devices are *communicatively inert*: Not every c-device contains a hint (*Andeutung*) that q as part of its meaning.

So, for Frege, using a c-device is not ipso facto an act of communication; speakers may use c-devices without hinting or intimating that something is the case. And if he is right in this, this would show that there is a type of linguistic or lexical meaning that is neither some form of truth-conditional content nor some kind of conventional implicature. I shall discuss this issue thoroughly in the next section.

IV. Horn on Frege's 'Andeutungen'

In two of his papers, Laurence Horn (2007, 2013) has presented a reading of Frege's remarks

⁷ This should not come as a surprise if one sees Frege committed to a broadly truth-conditional perspective. Similarly, Karttunen and Peters (1979: 11-2) claim that 'Even Bill likes Mary' is equivalent to 'Bill likes Mary'.
⁸ See Logik 152; FR 241. Unfortunately, the English translation of this passage is not faithful to the original: 'äussert ... eine gewisse Geringschätzung' (*conveys some kind of contempt*) is rendered as 'speaks pejoratively'.

on colouring that is, in one respect, similar to the one I have been presenting here. According to Horn, Frege's theory is—pace Dummett—not subjectivist at all but rather a precursor to Grice's theory of conventional implicatures. In this respect, Horn is in line with many other scholars who also claim that 'colouring' and 'conventional implicature' are only different names for one and the same kind of content (see, e.g., Neale 2001; Williamson 2009; Copp 2009; Feng 2010). Horn's anti-subjectivist interpretation is based on the observation that Frege sometimes describes c-devices as 'hints' (*Andeutungen*) to a hearer without mentioning ideas at all:

When discussing the examples that have been most closely scrutinized, including the but vs. and distinction, the contribution of *noch* in *noch nicht*, or the nonreferential meaning associated with *cur*, Frege writes not of any *Vorstellungen* communicated here but rather of what the speaker *andeutet* ('suggests, hints'). (Horn 2013: 147)

Though I am highly sympathetic to Horn's reading, these claims are only partially correct. When Frege discusses the specific content of words such as 'but' or 'still' (*noch*) in *Der Gedanke* (64) he indeed does not appeal to ideas at all but rather talks about the hints (*Winke, Andeutungen*) that are effected by means of these words. On the other hand, in his posthumous *Logik* (1897), Frege seems to suppose that there is a close connection between hints and ideas, at least with respect to words such as 'cur'. Unfortunately, this fact is obscured by the English translation, according to which the word 'cur' 'puts us in mind ... of a dog with a somewhat unkempt appearance' (FR 240-1). In the original, Frege uses the verb 'vorstellen', which corresponds to the noun 'Vorstellung' (*idea*). Thus, according to Frege, it is the purpose of (the hint associated with) the word 'cur' to evoke certain mental images in the listener. As we have seen, however, that fact does not suffice to show that the *content* of words such as 'cur' is subjective. Thus, Horn's reading of Frege is clearly on the right track.

Now there is one seemingly unimportant difference between Horn's reading and mine. While I have been using the term 'colouring' (*Färbung*), which is well established in Frege scholarship, Horn prefers to talk about 'Andeutungen' (*hints*). This is not just a minor terminological issue. If I am right, hints are a proper subclass of colourings, and while one may plausibly equate hints with conventional implicatures, there are numerous examples of Fregean colourings that have nothing to do with implicatures in any normal sense of that word. What is the standard notion of implicature? All that matters for present purposes is that implicature, whether conventional or conversational, is supposed to be a relation between a

speaker S, an utterance u, a context c and a proposition q, where q is something the speaker means (in Grice's sense of that word) or intends to communicate.⁹ Accordingly, a genuine case of implicature must fit the following scheme:

(Impl) By uttering u (in context c), speaker S communicates [=implicates] that q.

If we insert two of Grice's well-known examples and what he takes to be the respective implicatum into that scheme (Grice 1961: 127-9), we get, in each case, a concise description of a certain act of communication:

- (1) By uttering 'She was poor, but she was honest', S communicates [=conventionally implicates] that there is some contrast between poverty and honesty (or between her poverty and her honesty).
- (2) By uttering 'Jones has beautiful handwriting and his English is grammatical' in context c, S communicates [=con conversationally implicates] that Jones is no good at philosophy.

Now clearly, *some* cases of colouring might also be construed as cases of conventional implicature:

- (3) By uttering 'The cur howled the whole night', S communicates [=conventionally implicates] that S does not like the specific dog (or dogs in general).¹⁰

However, as mentioned before, Frege's notion of colouring covers many cases that are not usually thought of as conventional implicatures. One such example is the difference between the active and the passive voice, already discussed in his *Begriffsschrift* (§ 3). According to Horn (2013: 147), however, this is also a case of conventional implicature: a sentence of the form 'B was murdered by A' contains the 'Andeutung' or F-implicature, as he calls it, that B is the topic of discussion. This seems inadequate as a *general* description of the contribution

⁹ Jennifer Saul (2002) has argued that, according to Grice, conversational implicature is not a species of speaker-meaning. However, I am not concerned here with Grice's original theory, but with the difference between Frege's theory and what is commonly called 'implicature'.

¹⁰ Since some scholars restrict the term 'implicature' to cases where the implicatum is a proposition or, more generally, a 'sharable content' (Bach 2006a: 493), one might claim that expressive c-devices such as 'cur' can never be means of implicating something (as opposed to expressing it). This would imply that c-devices and conventional implicatures are disjoint sets. However, other philosophers have no qualms about construing such pejorative terms as devices that carry implicatures (see, e.g., Williamson 2009: 145). Since a thorough treatment of that matter would require a lengthy discussion of the notion of expression as well as making a substantiated distinction between genuine propositions and mere 'propositional implications' (see Potts 2007: 178), I shall skip that issue here.

of the passive voice, but let us ignore that point here.¹¹ We may, for instance, imagine a linguistic community in which, for some reason or other, a sentence with the grammatical subject B can be uttered felicitously only if B is the topic of discussion. Would this be an uncontroversial case of conventional implicature? I don't think so, and here's why. The sentence

(4) By uttering 'Caesar was murdered by Brutus', S communicates [=conventionally implicates] that Caesar is the topic of discussion

strikes me as quite odd. That Caesar is the topic of discussion is, in our scenario, a condition that has to be satisfied if one is to utter the sentence 'Caesar was murdered by Brutus' without breaching the linguistic rules of our fictional linguistic community; it is not, however, something the speaker wishes to communicate. A condition for the felicitous use of a linguistic item is not necessarily an implicatum; the conflation of these two dimensions is actually one of Bach's 'top 10 misconceptions about implicature' (Bach 2006: 26). (Note that in the cases (1)-(3) these two dimensions actually coincide. Take (1) as an example: the belief or the fact that there is some contrast between poverty and honesty makes an utterance of 'She was poor, but she was honest' felicitous, and it is also something that is actually communicated by the utterance.)

In case you are not convinced, let us have a look at a second example.¹² Some scholars take the difference between formal and informal pronouns such as 'tu' vs. 'vous' in French or 'du' vs. 'Sie' in German to be particularly good example of conventional implicatures (Levinson 1983: 128-9; Horn 2013: 159; similarly Gutzmann 2013: 14). While I do think that Frege would have readily accepted this as a case of colouring, I do not think that it is a case of implicature. Horn, again, disagrees. Here is how he describes the overall linguistic meaning¹³

¹¹ Frege is well aware of the fact that there may be different 'stylistic and aesthetic reasons' (Logik 153; FR 242) for using the passive voice. Compare 'It will be argued that *p*' (vs. 'I will argue that *p*'). Clearly, a writer who prefers the first sentence does not think that 'it' is or ought to be the topic of discussion; rather, the passive voice is a means of eschewing the first person singular pronoun.

¹² Yet another example of the distinction between colouring and conventional implicature is what is sometimes called 'register' or 'style' in dictionaries ('dead' vs. 'deceased'; 'perspiration' vs. 'sweat'; more generally, archaic vs. formal vs. vulgar words, etc.). Though I agree with scholars such as Dummett (1991: 122) and Kortum (2013) that register is a paradigmatic example of Fregean colouring, I won't go into the details here, since my main point should become sufficiently clear by the other examples. Moreover, I don't think that Frege ever discusses pairs of expressions that differ *only* in register.

¹³ Iten (2005, 102) compares the case of tu/vous to social conventions concerning greetings and claims that the distinction is not a case of 'linguistic meaning proper'. If I am correct, Frege's notion of colouring makes it possible to describe the difference between 'tu' and 'vous' as a case of different linguistic meanings, without being committed to the claim that socially deictic items carry conventional implicatures.

of the French sentence ‘Tu es soûl’:

Thus in affirming ‘Tu es soûl’, my belief that a certain social relationship obtains between us *and* that you are male is not part of the thought or of what is said; both propositions are indeed *communicated*, but what is said is simply that you’re drunk. (Horn 2013: 159)

What Horn claims here conforms exactly to the scheme (Impl):

(5) By uttering ‘Tu es soûl’, S communicates that (S believes that) a certain social relationship obtains between S and H and that H is male.

While I do concede that our intuitions may be somewhat shaky in such cases, I nevertheless think that (5) is wrong: typically, S utters a sentence such as ‘Tu es soûl’ (as opposed to ‘Vous êtes soul’) because, among other things, there are certain social rules for using the word ‘tu’ and because S intends to abide by these rules, but S does not thereby communicate to H (or to somebody else) that a certain social relationship obtains between S and H. Similarly, it would be odd to say that by using the masculine form ‘soûl’ (vs. ‘soûle’) S is communicating to H that H is male or that S believes H to be male. From a Gricean point of view, the term ‘communication’ should be roughly equivalent to ‘non-natural meaning’, and it seems obvious to me that in Horn’s example the core condition for non-natural meaning is not satisfied: S can only mean or communicate something by ‘tu’ if S intends her use of ‘tu’ “to produce some effect in an audience” (Grice 1989: 220). But what effect might that be? That H believes (that S believes) that a certain social relationship obtains between S and H? That does not sound plausible in ordinary cases: when S is talking to H, who is an old friend of S, and thus uses the appropriate word ‘tu’, S certainly does not wish to communicate to H anything about the relationship between S and H, especially so when S uses ‘tu’ repeatedly in a long conversation. Compare this to c-devices such as ‘cur’ or ‘but’: it seems plausible that a speaker S communicates her dislike of a certain dog (or dogs in general) whenever S is using the word ‘cur’; and it seems equally plausible that every single occurrence of ‘but’ conveys the speaker’s belief that there is some contrast between two things.¹⁴

My claim that words such as ‘tu’ and ‘vous’ do not function as instruments of communication

¹⁴ One might be tempted to explain the difference between ‘tu’ and ‘vous’ by some additional conversational principles such as principles of style and politeness (for such principles, see Davis 1998: 93). However, it is hard to see how one could account for a difference in lexical meaning by some conversational maxime (broadly construed). Of course, this is not to deny that speakers may conversationally implicate something by ‘tu’ or ‘vous’, especially when using the inappropriate pronoun.

might be seen as being based on a rather narrow and idiosyncratic concept of communication. Isn't there an intelligible reading of the term 'communication' according to which you can say that a speaker communicates by using formal or informal pronouns? Since there are many concepts of communication, I readily concede that point. What I've been trying to show here is, however, that relative to the Gricean 'mainstream doctrine' (see Geurts MS: 13) on communication, according to which communication necessarily involves communicative intentions of the Gricean sort, using formal or informal pronouns is not a case of communicating and thus also not a case of conventional implicature.

If we want to reserve the term 'communication' for the Gricean standard concept, we need an alternative way of describing the relation between 'tu' or 'vous' and the belief or the fact that a certain social relationship obtains between S and H. Since a certain type of social relationship is just what makes a sentence containing one of these two words appropriate or felicitous, correctly using such a sentence *conveys* the speaker's belief that a certain social relationship obtains between S and H (on the difference between conveying and communicating, see Stanley 2002: 327). Alternatively, we might say that, by using 'tu' or 'vous', a speaker *displays* her knowledge of the rules for speaking French felicitously. This also suggests that the best way of describing the specific content of socially deictic items and similar linguistic devices might be a broadly Wittgensteinian 'semantics of use' (Kaplan MS) or the notion of 'use-conditional content' (Gutzmann 2015). However, for lack of space, I shall not be able to defend that claim here.

If I am right, then, Frege is committed to the existence of a kind of linguistic meaning that is neither a form of truth-conditional content nor some kind of conventional implicature. This interpretation is strongly supported by Frege's actual use of the term 'hint' ('*Andeutung*' or '*Wink*'). Frege employs these terms *only* when he discusses c-devices by means of which speakers can attain a specific communicative effect. In the case of 'cur', the effect is a certain image in the mind of a hearer (Logik 152); in the case of 'Alfred has *still* not come', the speaker hints that Alfred's arrival is expected (Ged 64); and when using 'but' instead of 'and', a speaker intimates that there is some kind of contrast between two things (Ged 64). When, in contrast, Frege discusses c-devices that do not carry conventional implicatures, he does not talk about hints. In the case of 'It is true that Frederick the Great won the battle of Rossbach' vs. 'Frederick the Great won the battle of Rossbach', he just says that 'we have ... the same thought in different verbal form' (Logik 153; FR 242); he does not try, however, to specify

the content of ‘It is true ...’ by indicating what a speaker intends to communicate with these words. Similarly, when discussing the difference between active and passive voice, he stresses that ‘M gave document A to N’ and ‘Document A was given to N by M’ express the very same thought (Logik 153; FR 242) and adds that speakers may have different (stylistic or aesthetic) reasons for using one or the other. However, a reason for preferring one way of expressing a thought to another is not necessarily something a speaker intends to communicate.

V. Taxonomizing non-truth-conditional contents

In the preceding section, I tried to show that Frege is committed to a distinction between two kinds of colourings: communicative colourings or hints on the one side, non-communicative colourings on the other. In section II, I pointed out that Frege’s term ‘colouring’ also covers cases of a purely aesthetic kind: by employing poetic or rhetorical devices such as rhyme, rhythm, rhetorical figures and such, one does not, in general, change a sentence’s content. By combining these two ideas, we then seem to get a neat taxonomy of Fregean colourings:

(TC)

α) Colourings without content (purely aesthetic phenomena)

β) Colourings with content

i) Communicative colourings or hints (‘but’, ‘cur’, ‘unfortunately’ etc.)

ii) Non-communicative colourings (‘tu’ vs. ‘vous’, ‘it is true that ...’, double negation etc.)

Now the question is this: Is (TC) a taxonomy that cuts linguistic reality at its joints, or is it a mere ‘rhapsody’ (in Kant’s sense of that word)? If there were a principled and uncontested classification of non-truth-conditional content, this question would be easy to answer. There is, however, no such taxonomy, which is no surprise since, quite generally, non-truth-conditional content is not very well understood.

For purposes of illustration, let us have a brief look at one recent proposal for taxonomizing non-truth-conditional contents (Tonhauser et al. 2013). One of the most interesting aspects of that paper is that the authors offer a taxonomy of ‘projective content’ in general, covering both linguistic devices that have been discussed under the heading of ‘conventional

implicature' and devices that are usually classified as presuppositions. Another noteworthy feature of that theory is that the proposed taxonomy consists of four categories, none of which is strictly identical to traditional categories such as conventional implicature; accordingly, the four classes are labelled neutrally as A, B, C, and D. The taxonomy is based on two properties of contents, called 'strong contextual felicity' (STC) and 'obligatory local effect' (OLE). Since STC is irrelevant to the point I shall be making, I will focus exclusively on OLE. The basic idea behind OLE becomes clear by considering reported speech. Compare the following two sentences, both uttered by some person A:

- (1) B believes that C is poor but honest.
- (2) B believes that the cur was howling the whole night.

In both sentences, a linguistic device whose content is not exhausted by its truth-conditional meaning occurs in the scope of a belief operator. There is, however, a striking difference between the projection behaviour of 'but' and 'cur'. By uttering (1), A commits herself to the claim that B believes that there is some sort of contrast between poverty and honesty (or between C's poverty and honesty). In contrast, when A utters (2), the negative attitude expressed by the word 'cur' can be ascribed to B but also to A herself. Thus, genuinely expressive terms such as 'cur', 'damn' and others seem to be scopeless (see Potts 2005: 42) or, to put it more cautiously, seem to admit of a scopeless reading. Thus, in the taxonomy proposed by Tonhauser et al. the words 'but' and 'cur' belong to different categories (B and C), while Frege would regard both of them as 'Andeutungen'. So Frege ignores an interesting distinction between non-truth-conditional contents, and this might be thought to show that Dummett was ultimately right in calling Frege's notion of colouring a 'ragbag'.

Frege himself anticipated such a line of attack:

It is just as important to ignore distinctions that do not touch the heart of the matter, as to make distinctions which concern what is essential (*das Wesentliche*). But what is essential depends on one's purpose (*Zweck*). To a mind concerned with the beauties of language, what is indifferent (*gleichgültig*) to the logician may seem to be just what is important. (Ged 64; FR 331)

What Frege claims here, in effect, is that there is no such thing as carving linguistic reality at

its joints; depending on your theoretical purposes, there are numerous properties of linguistic devices that might be relevant for devising a taxonomy. Frege's own home-made toolbox for analysing language, which includes (in its pragmatics compartment) the concepts of colouring, presupposition and side-thought, was devised primarily for logical purposes, so, admittedly, Frege ignores some properties linguistic devices may have. However, Tonhauser et al. ignore some properties, too. Here is a short, and surely incomplete, list of some additional properties that might be philosophically important (Σ is being used as a variable for sentences, δ for linguistic devices, and c for a propositional or non-propositional content):

- a) Expressiveness: Does δ express a conative attitude or some kind of belief? ('unfortunately' vs. 'but')
- b) Hybridness: Does δ have a truth-conditional as well as a non-truth-conditional content? ('cur' vs. 'damn')
- c) Projection behaviour in general: Which linguistic contexts function as 'plugs' and as 'holes'? (Compare the projection behaviour of existential presuppositions and expressives, when embedded in conditionals)
- d) Truth-sensitivity: Is c relevant to the truth of Σ ? (existential presuppositions vs. 'unfortunately' etc.)
- e) Communicativeness: Does δ function as means of communication? (see above)

Let me elaborate by briefly discussing two examples. Take non-restrictive relative clauses (NRRCs) such as

(3) Ames, who stole from the FBI, is now behind bars. (Potts 2005: 13)

as a first example. From Frege's logical point of view, (3) simply expresses two thoughts, one of which might be labelled a side-thought, and thus has nothing in common with expressive c -devices such as 'cur' or 'damn', which, according to Frege, have the 'value of an interjection' (Logik 152) and thus do not express thoughts at all. Potts's theory of conventional implicature, in contrast, is essentially a formal semantics for what he calls "CIs", a class which includes NRRCs as well as expressive terms such as 'damn'. Since the 'scopelessness' (Potts 2005: 114-9) of these linguistic devices is just what makes them unamenable to being treated in a formal semantics of the ordinary truth-conditional kind, Potts's classification is essentially based on the projection behaviour, i.e. on property c) from above. Thus, we seem

to have two different but equally reasonable taxonomies.

As a second example, consider the three words ‘but’, ‘cur’ and ‘regrettably’, all of which are *Andeutungen* or hints in Frege’s sense. These three words differ, of course, with respect to properties a) and b). Intuitively, ‘cur’ is expressive and hybrid, ‘but’ is hybrid and non-expressive, while ‘regrettably’ is a non-hybrid or pure expressive term. From Frege’s logical point of view, there is, however, no need to make such fine-grained distinctions since the specific non-truth-conditional content of all these words is irrelevant to the expression of thoughts. Now consider, in contrast, a recent trend in meta-ethics that goes under the name of hybrid expressivism. Hybrid expressivists claim that, when using thin moral terms such as ‘bad’, speakers thereby express beliefs as well as desires, and typically, hybrid expressivists will appeal to pejorative terms such as ‘cur’ as a linguistic model (see Boisvert 2008; cf. Sander 2016a), less typically to expressions such as ‘but’ (Schroeder 2009: 307). So with respect to the current debate in metaethics (and, needless to say, also with respect to current work on ethnic slurs), two properties of linguistic devices become relevant that are irrelevant from Frege’s point of view. Once again, there seem to be different taxonomies that are equally reasonable relative to a specific theoretical purpose.

This means, in effect, that calling a linguistic category such as colouring a ‘ragbag’, as Dummett does, could only be justified by showing that there is no significant theoretical purpose relative to which the category makes useful distinctions. However, I do not see any reason why Frege’s taxonomy should be inappropriate with respect to his theoretical goals. Frege’s conceptual toolbox was intended by him as a means of describing the relation between the realm of pure thought on the one hand and what he frequently calls the ‘language of (everyday) life’ (*Sprache des Lebens*) on the other. Thus, he legitimately ignored a couple of interesting distinctions that are relevant not to the logician but rather to the literary critic, the linguist or the meta-ethicist.

VI. Conclusion

I have been trying to show in this paper that two common readings of Frege’s treatment of colouring are misconstruals. The first misconstrual amounts to taking his theory of colouring as a radical form of subjectivism or, somewhat more plausibly, as some kind of emotivism. As we have seen, however, Frege explicitly denies that all c-devices have some kind of emotive meaning; and neither is Frege committed to the even more bizarre claim that

colouring is just a matter of subjective associations between words and ideas.

Given the fact that Grice uses, in part, the same examples as Frege in order to illustrate his notion of conventional implicature, the second misconstrual is more understandable. The claim, however, that ‘colouring’ and ‘conventional implicature’ are only different names for one and the same linguistic phenomenon (or at least for extremely similar phenomena), does not fit with many of Frege’s examples. While ‘but’ and ‘cur’ are c-devices as well as words that carry conventional implicatures, many of Frege’s standard examples such as the difference between active and passive voice cannot be easily accounted for on the model of Gricean conventional implicatures since there is no implicatum, and this seems to be also true of linguistic phenomena such as the tu/vous distinction, the locution ‘it is true that ...’, the difference between active and passive voice etc. Thus, for Frege, there are types of lexical or linguistic meaning that are neither truth-conditional nor some kind of conventional implicature (and which, I think, might be best described by some kind of ‘semantics of use’).

Finally, I have offered a brief sketch of the relation between different theoretical goals and different proposals for taxonomizing non-truth-conditional meanings. I think that these considerations suffice to show that Frege’s category of colouring (as well as the other terms that form part of his ‘pragmatics’) does not deserve being called a ‘ragbag’. However, a much more thorough treatment of these issues seems to me to be a highly important area for future research.¹⁵

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