ASSERTORIC LANGUAGE & ESOTERIC LANGUAGE

Or: What the encounter of a logician and a transcendental empiricist might teach us about language.

Aidan Un
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Haverford College
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“It seems to me a mistake to think that our experience in general can be communicated by precise and literal language and that there is a special class of experiences (say, emotions) which cannot. The truth seems to me the opposite: there is a special region of experiences which can be communicated without Poetic language, namely, its ‘common measurable features,’ but most experience cannot. To be incommunicable by Scientific language is, so far as I can judge, the normal state of experience. All our sensuous experience is in this condition, though this is somewhat veiled from us by the fact that much of it is very common and therefore everyone will understand our references to it at a hint. But if you have to describe to a doctor any unusual sensation, you will soon find yourself driven to use pointers of the same nature as Asia's enchanted boat.”

C. S. Lewis, Christian Reflections (1967)

INTRODUCTION

What might the encounter of a logician and a self-proclaimed “transcendental empiricist” teach us about language? This question is the refrain that motivates and traverses this paper. The choice of comparing two thinkers from such different intellectual backgrounds as Gottlob Frege and Gilles Deleuze is on the one hand an invitation to compare, to find similarity, to abstract, with the intention of uncovering some truth about the nature of language. On the other, it is meant to show the profound and, at times, irreconcilable differences separating two conceptions of language stemming from differing and perhaps inimical ways of thinking. The importance of such a comparison and contrast should not be neglected, as the study and development of formal languages currently plays an important role in linguistic research and computer science. To better understand how natural language and formal language are related might offer valuable insight into the possibilities of “formalizing” natural language. Moreover, such a comparison might also prove useful in better understanding how formal languages work and what they do for the practitioner, in particular Frege’s Begriffsschrift, which has largely been misinterpreted over the past century. If I have chosen Deleuze’s conception
of language as a counterpoint to Frege’s *Begriffsschrift*, it is because his method of “transcendental empiricism” allows for diverse and intimate insights into the workings of natural language that most philosophies of language cannot account for: we have only to look at the examples, or empirical base, he uses to develop his concepts.

In order to understand both thinkers’ conception of language, it is essential to understand the greater logical and philosophical contexts in which they are working, as their common interest in language is not hermetic but rather is intimately tied to their wider projects: the furthering of the science of logic for Frege and establishing the ground for a complex and difference-affirming understanding of life for Deleuze. The first section of this paper thus lays out these contexts and their metaphysical bases, such as to show exactly where each thinker’s interest in language is situated. In the second and third sections, I sketch out the two concepts of language with the intent of bringing out their main characteristics. The fourth section establishes the potential points of similitude between the two out of which grows an idea for a possible relation between Frege’s *Begriffsschrift* and natural language as conceptualized by Deleuze.

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**I. The Eternal Return: Frege and *Being*, Deleuze and *Becoming***

(A) Frege’s Metaphysic or an Implicit Philosophy of Being.

Although Frege never published specifically on the topic of his metaphysical understanding of the world (after all, he was more mathematician than philosopher), the body of his work is pervaded with remarks concerning the nature of reality and how
humans experience it. From these comments it is possible to reconstruct the metaphysical presuppositions that are implicitly built into his primary project of furthering mathematical and scientific truth in general, but which subsequently also had great repercussions in the realm of philosophy. In fact, his work is widely seen to have shaped what we today refer to as ‘analytic philosophy’ ¹, as it commends a steadfast use of analytical reasoning, akin to that found in mathematics and logic, in our philosophical endeavors to discover truth about the world. In this regard, Frege’s philosophical work must be approximated to scientific and mathematical inquiry: His aim is to discover the laws of truth, to discover what can objectively said to be true about the world. This positing of objective truth arises from a picture of the world in which humans are endowed with intellectual faculties (mind) which may result in subjective cognition (wavering, psychological states), but which, when used correctly, give access to things and objective knowledge about the world. It is essential to Frege that this objective knowledge is grasped, rather than produced, in the sense that true thoughts exist whether we think them or not. In the preface to his seminal “Grundgesetze der Arithmetik” (1893), Frege writes:

> If we want to emerge from the subjective at all, then we must conceive of knowledge as an activity that does not create what is known but grasps what already exists. (Frege, 1983, ¶ XXIV)

And in the conclusion to his essay “Logic” (1897), we find:

¹. Colin McGinn in *The Making of a Philosopher: My Journey through Twentieth-Century Philosophy* (2002), defines analytic philosophy as a “tradition [that] emphasizes clarity, rigor, argument, theory, truth. It is not a tradition that aims primarily for inspiration or consolation or ideology. Nor is it particularly concerned with ‘philosophy of life,’ though parts of it are. This kind of philosophy is more like science than religion, more like mathematics than poetry -- though it is neither science nor mathematics."
Unlike ideas, thoughts do not belong to the individual mind (they are not subjective), but are independent of our thinking and confront each one of us in the same way (objectively). They are not the product of thinking, but are only grasped by thinking. In this respect they are like physical bodies. (Frege, 1897, ¶ 160).

The insistence on the distinction between subjective-states and mind-independent objectivity offers a reading of Frege as a metaphysical realist, such that the things that compose the world he is interested in (mathematical objects, laws, truths) possess ontological reality separate from our cognition.

This is where the specificity of Frege’s project becomes interesting to both the mathematician and the philosopher of language: His concern not only lies with what is true, or what may objectively be discovered about the laws of truth, but more specifically how we may grasp them. Frege’s wants to give us the laws of thought that will lead to discovering truth about the world, the truth about truth—logic.

We must assume that the rules for our thinking and for our holding something to be true are prescribed by the laws of truth. The former are given along with the latter. Consequently we can also say: logic is the science of the most general laws of truth.”(The Frege Reader, “Logic”, ¶ 139)

Hence his project lies in determining the specific ways in which one might grasp objective truth about the world, specifically in his case truths of the mathematical world.

Frege’s project might thus be elucidated by the following hypotheses: (i) there is such a thing as mind-independent, objective truth about the world; (ii) this truth can be grasped through the mind under specific conditions; (iii) the study of the conditions that give rise to truthful thought must be explored to ensure success in (ii) and constitutes the domain of logic. Given this representation of the world and how we relate to it, which I claim to
be Frege’s, this gives us a better context for understanding why Frege was so interested in logic and how this eventually translated into an interest for language.

(B) Deleuze or the Explicit Philosophy of Becoming.

Where Frege’s project unambiguously aims at truth and objective knowledge about the world from the outset, the object of Deleuze’s philosophy seems less well defined to the uninitiated reader. Indeed, several confluent problems seem to be at stake for him, resulting in a philosophy with little regard for the modern philosophical distinctions between metaphysics, epistemology, ethics and aesthetics. But if Deleuze’s philosophy of difference is truly a “multiplicity”, some aspects of it are of more interest to us than others in light of the present project. To allow us to advance to the focus of this thesis, namely language, we must find a way into Deleuze’s philosophy which will most successfully achieve this. We will therefore begin here:

Where to begin in philosophy has always – rightly – been regarded as a very delicate problem, for beginning means eliminating all presuppositions. (Deleuze, 1968, p. 129)

This opening sentence to the chapter “The Image of Thought”, in Difference and Repetition (1968), widely regarded as Deleuze’s metaphysical opus, presents itself as an optimal way into the complex and intertwined nature of his philosophy as it alludes to the central and omnipresent theme of ‘problem-posing’ in philosophy. ‘Problematizing’ holds a central role in Deleuze’s thought as he claims that it is only in light of problems that we come to use the faculty which most philosophers take for granted: thinking.

It cannot be regarded as a fact that thinking is the natural exercise of a faculty, and that this faculty is possessed with a good nature and a good will. ‘Everybody’ knows very well that
in fact men think rarely, and more often under the impulse of a shock than in the excitement of a taste for thinking. (Deleuze, 1968, p. 132)

We are thus able to extract the first important difference between the philosophies of Frege and Deleuze: Whereas thinking for Frege is an act of grasping objective truth (as in being intimately persuaded and convinced), the same word designates an entirely different faculty for Deleuze, who holds it to be a problem-driven, inspired, moment of creativity: *Thinking* is a breach into the unknown (or, perhaps, the unknown breaching in), it is the creation of concepts, affects or percepts that may allow us conceive the world anew. (Already we sense the ambiguity, or overflowing, of meaning at work in natural language: “thinking” could designate this or it could designate that…)

We must expand this concept of “thinking” to the thought of Deleuze himself. If thinking does not play a representational role, meaning that it does not simply paint a correct picture of the world, but is rather an act of creation, meaning that it brings the actuality of this picture into being, we must see philosophy itself as the creation of order in the world. In a reality solely comprised of difference, the value of philosophy is not determine by ‘the true’, but rather by aesthetic or ethical appeal, depending on what motivates it, *what the problem at hand is*. Truth, in other words, loses its quality of objectivity and speaking of truth at all becomes misleading. “*It is the same in philosophy as in film or a song: no correct ideas, just ideas [pas d’idées justes, juste des idées]*” (Deleuze & Parnet, 1987, p. 9). The criteria for valuing philosophy are now entirely different.

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2. “So concepts do not label or systematize reality, for reality in itself has no order or fixed being; concepts *create* this order.” (Colebrook, 2002, p. 18)
It is only by letting go of the idea that thought is meant to simply paint the picture of a reality that exists in itself that we will become more creative, as new, unthought-of possibilities will arise. And this, in essence, is the problem at the center of Deleuze’s philosophy: How might one be creative? How might one do something new?

It is as if the struggle against chaos does not take place without an affinity with the enemy, because another struggle develops and takes on more importance – the struggle against opinion, which claims to protect us from chaos itself. (Deleuze, 1991, p. 203)

This problem begins to interest us where we have set it up to do so: in language. How might Deleuze help us conceive of language differently? Language, so intimately tied to thought, must equally be freed of its representational and universal character if the philosopher truly wishes to think anew. But how does language overflow itself to become more than mere representation? What role does language play in a philosophy of difference and how can it do so without betraying itself? How does one differentiate between the voice of critical thinking and “opinion”?

(C) A Linguistic Point of Confluence

Although the philosophical differences between the projects of Gottlob Frege and Gilles Deleuze are vast and numerous, we begin to discern what we could call a meta-point of confluence: As I have hinted towards, both of these thinkers will come through channels specific to their respective projects to attribute a certain importance to language. Frege’s interest in language will grow out of the crucial role it will come to play in his view of the world, namely as medium between the subjective realm of the mind and the objective world. For Deleuze language will also play the role of medium, but in the sense of a creative medium. It is important for him to understand how this medium operates,
what it allows for and what its limitations are. Language is thus a point of confluence for these two thinkers and their relationship to it is influenced and determined by their conceptions of the world – objectively true for Frege, multiple and malleable for Deleuze. In what ways do these metaphysical backgrounds shape these thinkers’ conceptions of language? In the following sections I will show what a language of being and what a language of becoming could look like and what relations exist between the two.

II. A Language of Being: Frege’s Begriffsschrift

Frege’s logical language, or Begriffsschrift, was developed for the specific purpose of performing proofs and formulating arguments in a systematic manner that would ensure valid reasoning in the areas of human intellect that require such rigorous and consistent rule-governed thinking as is demanded in mathematics and logic, for which the language was chiefly prescribed. It was Frege’s view that these sciences, governed by their desire to discover (uncover) the “true”, were fettered and made fallible through their reliance on natural language as an instrument of the logically rational mind, as the latter seemed to be pervaded with the most undesirable kinds of ambiguity, imprecision and subjectivities.

I found an obstacle in the inadequacy of language: however cumbersome the expressions that arose, the more complicated the relations became, the less the precision was attained that my purpose demanded. Out of this the need came the idea of the present Begriffsschrift. It is thus intended to serve primarily to test in the most reliable way the validity of a chain of inference and to reveal every presupposition that tends to slip in unnoticed, so that its origin can be investigated. The expression of anything that is without
significance for logical inference has therefore been eschewed. (Frege, “Begriffsschrift”, ¶ IV)

Hence though natural language seems as though it could serve instrumentally in the practice of pure reason, it could only do so in a clumsy way, which, in the context of intellectual endeavors that measure success in precision and consistency, is akin to failure. The clumsiness of natural language in doing mathematics and logic must therefore be seen as detrimental to their advance, in the sense that though it is expressive, it is not so in a satisfactory manner and thus what could initially be seen as mere clumsiness of expression must really be re-evaluated as being erroneous expression.

I believe I can make the relationship of my Begriffsschrift to ordinary language clearest if I compare it to that of the microscope to the eye. The latter, due to the range of its applicability, due to the flexibility with which it is able to adapt to the most diverse circumstances, has a great superiority to the microscope. Considered as an optical instrument, it admittedly reveals many imperfections, which usually remain unnoticed only because of its intimate connection with mental life. But as soon as scientific purposes place great demands on sharpness of resolution, the eye turns out to be inadequate. The microscope, on the other hand, is perfectly suited for just such purposes, but precisely because of this is useless for others. (The Frege Reader, “Begriffsschrift”, ¶ V)

The creation of Begriffsschrift should be seen as solving two interconnected problems. The first, stated above, was the creation of a language that could perform better than natural language with respect to the criteria imposed by the disciplines it would serve (precision, consistency, etc); the second was of conceptualizing exactly what a language
which would be aimed at the true should look like. The interconnectedness of the two problems is revealed in the fact that the former sheds light on the possibility of the latter and the latter finds its necessity in the former. The separate nature of these two problems should be noted: It is not the case that Frege saw a logical language embedded within the richer, but clumsier, utterances of natural language. The inherent form of natural language is not inherently logical and, hence, to establish a logical language is also to discover what this form is. It is not simply an operation of stripping down natural language to its barest, most formal aspect. The idea that a language whose goal is to discover mathematical and logical truth would have a particular form should not surprise us: The true is, after-all, rule governed in the sense that it obtains from sound inferences, for which there exists a finite number of rules, and accepted starting points (perhaps only determinable through natural language itself). A language directed at uncovering the true would thus render these inferences expressed and expressible such that they would be materialized, made manifest, more tangible and thus easier to manipulate. Conversely, any language that fails to be expressive of all that is necessary for truth to be discovered does not properly play its role as an instrument of the truth-seeking mind. The problem is one of expression:

[Then Euclid’s proofs are not enthymematic, deductively gappy as Russell thought; they are instead expressively gappy. Euclid should have explicitly stated in advance […] all the inference rules, whether formal or material, that he employs in his proofs. Because he does not, his system does not meet the demand “that all propositions used without proof [which include ‘all methods of inference employed’] be expressly declared as such, so that we can see distinctly what the whole structure rests upon” (GG 2). Euclid’s failing, as Frege understands it, does not lie in the poverty of his logical resources but instead in his not fully realizing the ideal of a system. (Macbeth, 2005, p. 11-12)
The goal of Frege’s *Begriffsschrift* was thus to provide a language that could fully and properly express all the necessary elements involved in making valid inferences and thereby obtain truth. This language was meant to aid in the discovery of mathematical truths, to serve as an extension of the mind such that the inferential processes of the mind would be made manifest in the form of the language such that it might, virtually, *think for us*. We must thus see intent in the very form of *Begriffsschrift* and moreover take as evident that it is a language entirely based in written form and not designed to communicate with others, but rather to express or make manifest for oneself. The form of *Begriffsschrift* in this way satisfies an epistemological need.

How does *Begriffsschrift* ensure this consistency and rigor of thought? The answer is in the question, as *Begriffsschrift*, in Frege’s own mature understanding of it, would be conceptualized as nothing less than the expression of pure thought.

As Frege himself comes to see, a sentence of *Begriffsschrift* is a picture of a thought whose parts correspond to the parts of that thought. “We can regard a sentence as a mapping of a thought: corresponding to the whole-part relation of a thought and its parts we have, by and large, the same relation for the sentence and its parts” (*PW* 255). “The structure of the sentence can serve as a picture of the structure of the thought” (*CP* 390). Thoughts so conceived are variously analyzable for the purpose of judgment and inference, and are perspicuously expressed only in a two-dimensional written language of the sort we have learned to read as Frege’s *Begriffsschrift*. (Macbeth, 2005, p. 141)

We must remember that the cognitive content that is a Fregean thought is mind-independent. *Begriffsschrift*, then, plays the essential role of medium for the mind as it gives access to the objective truths revealed through thoughts. The distinction of Sinn and *Bedeutung* played a crucial role in this conception as it permitted for the notion of “meaning is to be split into the thought expressed by a sentence and the truth-value
designated” (Macbeth, *Frege’s Logic*, p. 178). It provided an extremely valuable insight, namely that truth is imminent to sense and thus sense (expression) acts as the medium of truth. This idea that the medium is, also, the message is essential in grasping the relevance of *Begriffsschrift*:

If we found ‘\(a=a\)’ and ‘\(a=b\)’ to have different cognitive values, the explanation is that for the purpose of acquiring knowledge, the sense of the sentence, viz., the thought expressed by it, it is no less relevant than its *Bedeutung*, i.e. it’s truth value.” (Frege, “On Sinn and Bedeutung”, p. 171)

The distinction between *Sinn* and *Bedeutung* was crucial for the development of Frege’s logical inquiries as it permitted him to move entirely beyond a predicative understanding of his logic. The recognition that his logical language did not merely give pictures of reality, which could be judged to be true or false, but rather expressed a thought which when grasped required judgment in order to assert truth-value radically changed Frege’s understanding of his own language and of what that language did.

Frege’s language was developed for the specific purpose of furthering scientific knowledge, mathematical in particular. Such advances take the form of discovering mind-independent truths or immutable beings in the world. These truths are in fact the content of thoughts, which are atomically composed of sense (expressing other thoughts) and that require an analytical understanding in order to be grasped, thus allowing for a judgment and assertion. If thoughts are, in effect, ‘compositions’, then the way in which these are presented (expressed) matters if the logically-fallible mind of the thinking subject is to succinctly and unambiguously analyze them, such that they might be grasped. Moreover, if thoughts are mind-independent, then their composition will answer to laws that are equally mind-independent, namely the laws of logic. Thus, we find that
the syntax of a language that may allow for thoughts to be expressed and analyzable will
reflect the composition of the thought and as such, is rule-governed in its ability to
signify. In this sense we may say that the *Begriffsschrift* is a language of *being*: It is a
medium designed in the image of what it seeks to mediate (the truths manifest in
thoughts), such that the rules of its syntax are the same as those which govern the value
of the true. It is through the particular expressions of *Begriffsschrift* that one may literally
see the image of a Fregean thought, analyze it and correctly judge it. Of course it is
crucial here that Fregean “thought” be well defined as everything is dependent on the fact
that thoughts are mind-independent and thus may be arrived at through logical reasoning,
since “we must assume that the rules for our thinking and for our holding something to be
ture are prescribed by the laws of truth” (The Frege Reader, “Logic”, p. 139). This
language is a language of *being* as in seeking to express being (the immutable truths), it
makes the form of truth manifest in its own expression (as truth necessitates complete
expression) and in the process, inextricably combines the medium and the message.

III. Language of Becoming: Language as re-conceptualized by Deleuze

The problem Deleuze faces in language is inherently different from that faced by Frege.
Whereas Frege’s conception of language is one of *accessing* the world in the sense that
language is the medium to mathematical truths and thus that language finds itself
primarily serving the mind (i.e eye-microscope analogy), the problem in Deleuze’s
conception of language is not so much that of accessing the world, but rather of
preserving it in its complex entirety, of preserving all its potential possibilities and its richness in speech such that language subordinates itself to the world and its multiplicity of meanings, rather than simply serving the mind. Todd May, in his commentary on Deleuze’s philosophy Gilles Deleuze, writes:

“Matter and life cannot be represented; their dynamism overflows the stable identities with which representation would shackle them. Whatever we see, whatever we say, there is more – always more. How can language say this more? Or, if not say it, at least not violate it when it speaks?” (May, 2005, p. 95)

Hence Deleuze too is concerned with the ability of language to be expressive, though this concern is ethical rather than epistemological, as it is in Frege. We will return to this idea later, but for now, we should note that this difference is indicative of another fundamental difference between Frege and Deleuze: Whereas Frege is interested in a very specific kind of language (mathematical language), Deleuze is interested in the totality of language, Frege’s included, since each and every possibility of expression is expressive of something in the world. Thus, it is not that Deleuze sees no value in the basic functions of language as communicative or informative, etc, but rather that he sees language as playing a far greater and more complex role:

“Under no circumstances should this be taken to mean that Deleuze’s philosophy is opposed to the use of language as a communication tool or as a support for understanding. Rather, it means that such functions should not be seen as the only proper role of language, or goal for language, or sufficient basis explaining the relation of language to events” (Williams, 2008, p. 29-30).

Let us remember that for Deleuze reality is not objective (is not composed of objects), but rather is a multiplicity of events that are all connected to each other, in multiple ways.
In thinking of reality in terms of events rather than objects we are thinking of the becoming of things rather than their being. Moreover, there are potential connections between all events: This infinite potentiality is what Deleuze designates as the virtual: “real without being actual, ideal without being abstract”. Adrian Parr, in his work *The Deleuze Dictionary* writes:

> Frequently when discussing the virtual, Deleuze quotes Marcel Proust’ adage in relation to memory: “real without being actual, ideal without being abstract’. Virtual multiplicity, then, is real without being necessarily embodied in the world. And, rather than expressing abstract alternative possibilities, virtual multiplicity forms something like the real openness to change that inheres in every particular situation. (Parr, 2005, p. 177)

The virtual is in fact the pure form of sense, which cannot be limited to the domain of language or even human rationality. In attempting to conceptualize a language of becoming, Deleuze wants to multiply the number and quality of way to actualize potential relations between events: He wants to give the possibility for the expression or actualization all different kinds of sense.

Hence what is said to quite literally “make sense” is the actualization of a potential relation between events, which is precipitated by the intensity that the resonance of these events generates. Already we see how Deleuze is attempting to dig deeper into the logic of sense itself. How does anything have meaning for us? It is not a matter of events inherently possessing meaning, but a literal “making of sense”: It is as if we were given a series of events and asked them to connect them in a way: Making sense would be the path, or the connections, that we chose to relate all the events into a coherent destiny, as it were. Of course the way in which we make these connections would in no way be
entirely arbitrary and would depend on who was doing it, when it was happening, under what conditions, etc. We begin to see the important interdependency between sense and event: Because I have made sense of the various events which compose my life in a certain way, the kinds of events that will resonate intensely with me and which I will thus have to make sense of as time goes by will be different from those which resonate intensely with somebody else. Any similarities in the way I make sense of events and somebody else does is not due to an event’s inherent and generative property of sense but rather a similar conditioning, which might be caused by shared religious beliefs, economic context, racial identity, etc and hence makes for an approximate sameness in intensity, though it can never be said to truly be the same, since though we may share a particular disposition, say religion, we will most certainly differ in our other pre-dispositions, thus bringing about slight variations. To invite the recognition of these variations, however slight they may be, is for Deleuze an ethical, epistemological and esthetic matter and will ultimately be the way in which we might allow for novelty and creativity to flourish.

Though the fact that what determines sense is events but sense is first required for events to arise (to be intensive) may seem confusing and paradoxical, it seems to capture an essential, dynamic process in our ability to understand things given our pre-dispositions. Since sense (a particular destiny of events) and events (what will be made sense of) are in a dialectical, co-determining relationship, we have two possible consequences: To understand what makes sense in a particular instance, one must understand the events that have generated this sense; and to understand events, or what kind of events are relevant (make sense), one must understand the context of sense in which they arise. Thus,
Deleuze’s idea of sense and its relation to events brings about the only universal claim which we can posit about sense: There is no all-encompassing theory of sense: Sense must be pragmatically determined, and the only way to make sense of sense is to study cases and determine, individually, the conditions that make sense possible. What may ensue are various general patterns, which we must not confuse as being actual: A bulk of Deleuze’s work consists in creating new possibilities of sense, of offering ways out of these general patterns which we have come to imagine as actual and immutable: For example, the way in which language works according to good and common sense conceptions of it, i.e. theory of reference, universal grammar, etc.

What is language in this philosophy of the sense-event? If language is not reflective but rather transformative, as a thing of and in the world, it has the power, through its own event (my utterance), to offer potential senses, or intensify senses:

Sense expresses not what something is actually but its power to become. This is why language is one way in which life produces sense, for words allow us to take a thing and place it in virtual connections with other things. Sense is a power of incorporeal transformations; whether I refer to the cut (actual) body as ‘injured’, ‘scarred’, ‘punished’ will alter what it is in its incorporeal or virtual being. Sense is an event producing new lines of becoming. […] When a court refers to a body as a ‘criminal’ or when a social scientist ‘discovers’ a new class or personality ‘syndrome’, then new histories become possible. Sense allows certain powers of becoming to be given being; it is sense that produces national, racial and sexual identities. (Colebrook, 2002, p. 60)

Language is an intensive medium since it can precipitate, hinder, halt or speed up sense, by its “power of incorporeal transformation”. If language possesses this power to “make sense of things” we must not take this power lightly as the transformations which happen
at the level of sense have very tangible consequences on the realm of events: As Colebrook’s example points to, the denomination of “criminal” or, say, “schizophrenic” is not without actual, bodily effects. We must thus ask, in speaking of language, what sense is Deleuze trying to give it and why? In other words, how must language be problematized to make sense in the way he deems interesting? In James Williams’ brilliant commentary of Deleuze’s “Logic of Sense”, we find:

Paradoxes, such as Alice’s growing bigger while growing smaller, demand extensions of to what we understand language to be. These additions are not designed to solve the paradoxes; instead, paradoxes are signs indicating and generating the necessity of complementary but irreducibly different aspects of language in relation to events. The second consequence of his investigations into events is therefore that Deleuze does not view language as separate from events, as if it were designed to comment on events and judge them rather than participate in them. He is not trying to construct a new technical language, for example one that is able to maintain validity in formal arguments or one appropriate for a set of specific tasks such as well-defined kinds of communication […] It is to construct language so that events, and thought in line with events, are not excluded by the form of what we take language to be. (Williams, 2008, p. 29-30)

The problem here is clearly articulated: The common sense conception of language we are working with, perhaps inherited from Frege’s tradition, is inadequate to attest to the richness of events, which means, by the relation of events to sense, that we are constricting our realm of sense in ways that could be undesirable. Moreover, as Williams states, paradoxes, which we might extend to logically meaningless problems

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3. To take up the example of Wittgenstein, to constrict meaning to those propositions which have truth-values and hence discarding questions of religion and ethics as meaningless may be harmful in that the value, or meaningfulness, of these questions may not lie in their definite answers, but rather in the linguistic processes of posing them, answering them, debating them etc, which involves real, social relationships such as those which take places within and surrounding, literally and figuratively, mosques, temples or churches.
(yet having actual consequences), are meant to show the inadequacy of language governed by good and common sense. Deleuze, in stating that events are primary to sense, wants to show us exactly how much of our own prejudice is imposed on how we make sense. To say that I am growing up seems to make sense evidently, whereas to say I am growing younger seems evidently wrong: However, if the object of interest is the event of my *becoming*, then we cannot conclusively state in which way it makes more sense to say that I am growing without, for example, the prejudice that causality is the only way in which things make sense and that the advent of an inherent direction of time is inherent to causality. Is this simply a technicality that has no real consequences or counterpart in our lives?

Among others, parents will recognize Deleuze’s arguments and their relation to powerful emotions in the tensions collected in seeing a child grow up, between the senses of loss at the younger child growing smaller, and receding, and the sense of joy at the older version of the same child growing up and shedding its younger self. (Williams, 2008, p. 29)

We begin to better understand the importance and tremendous depth of Deleuze’s conception of language. Language, if it is to be able to account for the multiplicity of events and these events’ own multiple senses, as James poignantly described in the aforementioned example, must be freed of the kind of common sense that we imagine (impose) it to make. To determine a *logic of sense* is crucial if we are to think of events in the most encompassing way possible and hence speak them in language, since sense is the “essential relation” between events and language:

“*it is the characteristic of events to be expressed or expressible, uttered or utterable, in propositions which are at least possible.*” (Deleuze, 1968, p. 12)
Deleuze’s approach to sense is wholly empirical: For him, our impossibility to predict with certainty what will make sense in what context should be sufficient proof that language does not make sense in a generic way, but rather that sense makes language in very particular ways, which must be individually explored in order to be understood.

Thus we find that the examples Deleuze uses to illustrate his concept of language and sense, and that are at the same time at the origin of this concept (these being the kinds of usages of language that an extended concept of sense must be able to account for), are many, heterogeneous and esoteric. From Lewis Carroll and Zen-koan in developing an ironic and serious logic of sense, to Marcel Proust in his study of signs, by way of Kafka in developing the concept of a major language and a plethora of other minor (in his sense) and esoteric authors in his “Essays: Critical & Clinical”, a work exploring the conditions for sense in works by the like of Herman Melville, Walt Whitman, D. H. Lawrence, T. E. Lawrence, Samuel Beckett, Leopold von Sacher-Masoch, Alfred Jarry, James Joyce, Antonin Artaud etc. James Williams himself, in his commentary of “Logic of Sense” recurrently makes use of E. E. Cummings’, apparently nonsensical, poetry to illustrate the concepts he extracts from Deleuze’s philosophy:

Sense is therefore also an effect of that stating or saying, it is produced, but it is also latent prior to that production – hence the insistence of replaying, re-enactment and counter-acutalisation in the production of sense. Cummings’ poems are remade each time because their sense and hence all else is allowed to float and drift in them:

not so

hard dear

you’re killing me

(e e cummings, ‘raise the shade’, 1994)
(Williams, 2008, p. 72)

The concept of sense is thus extended to take into account these esoteric, yet evidently sense-ful usages of language and in so doing frees language of its “common and good sense” ability of meaning, since there is in fact no privileged form of expression of sense. Though we might say that, much like Frege, Deleuze has “conceptualized a medium in the image of what it seeks to mediate” (the multiplicity of meaning in the world), we cannot say that this yields a language of being since,

[...] to say that being is difference is not at all like saying that being is identity (or identities) [...] The term “difference” is not another concept designed to capture the nature of being or the essence of what there is. It is a term he uses to refer to that which eludes such capture. (May, 2005, p. 82).

Deleuze, in giving us a conception of language that accounts for “difference”, gives us a language of becoming, as becoming is itself the difference of being.

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**IV. Being as an Actualization of Becoming**

We thus find in Frege’s *Begriffsschrift* and Deleuze’s idea of language as related to the sense-event two possible conceptions of language: respectively a language of *being* and a language of *becoming*. Yet, there are some striking similarities between both conceptions, e.g. the ideas of *medium, sense* and *expression*, which should lead us to question exactly what kind of relationship exists between the two. Can we establish a relationship on the basis of a translation between a philosophy of being and a philosophy of becoming, in which we could find correspondences between the essential ideas structuring each conception?
Let us start with Frege’s language of being. I have shown that the subject matter of Frege’s language was initially intended to be constituted by real, well-defined mathematical objects, such as numbers and functions, and that the goal of such a language was to exhibit and explore the relationships between these real mathematical entities, which take the form of unvarying truths and laws. In turn, these truths could themselves serve as subject matter, such that each truth could systematically be built on the basis of other truths. In order for this to be possible, the language, which is responsible for the organization and expression of the elements of such a system, must itself be consistent to ensure homogeneity of expression and rigorous organization, both necessary for a proper systematization. We must imagine that if *Begriffsschrift* formulae are like easily assemblable lego-blocks, they are so only in virtue of the smaller building blocks (the lattice of plastic buttons and grooves) that compose them and are subject to a similar linear organization to that of the macro-blocks. It is in fact this micro-level of organization that dictates what happens on the macro-level by setting the rules of assemblage, as assemblages can only happen in certain configurations of grooves and buttons. This homogeneity of expression will in turn ensure that every formula is similarly intelligible, thus securing the further homogeneity of the system. Such a language must therefore be created on the basis of an entirely rule-governed syntax: in the case of *Begriffsschrift*, we have seen that the syntax was itself determined such that the ensuing expression completely met the requirements of the rules which govern the overall system – namely, the laws of logic. Hence we have that Frege’s language, in expressing *being*, must itself take on the form of what it expresses: *Begriffsschrift* is well-
defined and unvarying in character, much like a geometric figure is well-defined and, in its idea, unvarying in character.

But isn’t it the case here that it is not Frege’s language that imitates being, but rather Frege’s language which imposes being? Indeed, *Begriffsschrift*, and Frege’s project of logicism in general, sought the reduction of mathematics and possibly other sciences to logic. We should think about his language not as simply securing consistent relationships between unvarying objects, but rather as presenting the objects themselves as consistent relationships, or logical entities, which could then be put into further, more complex relationships. The most primordial of these relationships are the rules of logic themselves and this is where we should look for a genesis of being, according to Deleuze.

Why is logic incapable of giving a logical account of itself (cf. Lewis Carroll’s “What the Tortoise said to Achilles”, Gödel’s concept of “incompleteness”, etc)? We should see the most basic laws of logical thought, i.e. the law of identity, the law of excluded middle, the law of non-contradiction and modus ponens, as constituting not only the primacy of being but more importantly the possibility of being in the world at all. Let us put forward this possible definition of “being” in this context: *Being is the conceptual order of any reality born out of a number of speech-acts which impose rules, or constraints, on the very thought-process which gives rise to that conception.*

If we are to take the laws of logical thought as constituting a possibility or condition for a certain kind of sense in the world, but such that they cannot give an account of themselves, it becomes evident that Deleuze’s project of founding a *logic of sense* such as the one we have described previously becomes necessary. Williams writes:

The stakes of Deleuze’s logic of sense are shown well here. He is claiming that the realm of sense is the condition for the realm of signification (the realm of identified meanings
according to the principle of non-contradiction) and for the realm of denotation (identified actual objects). However, this use of condition takes it as a real condition, that is, not as what is possible in the actual words and worlds it will be expressed in, but as related to them through mutual determinations […] put simply, sense conditions the intense significance of actual things and words, whereas the expression of sense in them gives it a determinacy allowing it to avoid a descent into chaos.” (Williams, 2008, p. 72)

And:

The interest of the determinations of signification lies in the fact that they engender the principles of non-contradiction and the excluded-middle, instead of these principles being given ready-made; the paradoxes themselves enact the genesis of contradiction and exclusion in the proposition stripped of signification. (Deleuze, 1968, p. 69)

Deleuze wants to palpate the idea of a sense prior to rules, a sense not governed by formal laws, as is the sense in Frege’s language. Deleuze deems that rules and laws of thought such as the law of excluded middle or modus ponens constitute general patterns of sense, which should in no way be neglected, but that in themselves cannot account for the totality of sense in the world, beginning with their very own. As concerns our two languages, let us then suggest that the type of rule-governed sense that determines Begriffsschrift and is perpetuated by it, is only one possible sense-making function of language amongst many others, which in their open-ended totality constitute the possibility for sense in and through language as a whole. Deleuze, rather than focusing on a particular way in which language can make sense, values the potential of language to make sense in multiple and at times unforeseeable ways. Again, we find in Williams:

Like his intuition that treating a change in abstraction from others is a false restriction, he counsels that any formal language or technical one is only ever a cut in a wider language
that cannot be captured in formal rules or practical and empirical guidelines. (Williams, 2008, p. 30)

Thus we may establish this first relation between the language of being of Frege and the language of becoming as conceptualized by Deleuze: the strict notion of sense as presented in Frege’s conception is a particular actualization of the notion of the more general and complex sense presented in Deleuze’s conception:

- **Frege’s sense:** The sense of language includes the mode of presentation of the thing expressed. In *Begriffsschrift* this mode of presentation is determined by rules and strict syntax, which allows it, according to the definition of a Fregean thought, to successfully express a thought as it makes manifest its inner workings and renders them analyzable for judgment. Sense is thus entirely rule-governed and subordinate or at least inherent to language (sense varies according to variations in language).

- **Deleuze’s sense:** The sense of language is “inseparably the expressible or the expressed of the proposition, and the attribute of the state of affairs […] But it does not merge with the proposition which expresses it anymore than with the state of affairs it denotes.” (Deleuze, 1968, p. 22). So, as in Frege, sense is what is expressed by the proposition, without merging with the thing denoted (*Bedeutung*). Yet, unlike Frege, sense does not merge with the proposition either. Whereas for Frege difference of sense in language is the product of expressions differing in cognitive content, such that “Aidan Un” and “Sun Un’s son” refer to the same thing without expressing the same sense, for Deleuze, the difference of sense in language is the product of the different encounters of language with the world: This allows, unlike Frege, for the very same words to express a different
sense at different times. For example: “You are so smart!” expressed in a tone of admiration or, of complete sarcasm.

It is important to note that for Frege a sentence may express a sense that does not necessarily have a truth-value. Hence we find that truth is immanent, but not reducible, to sense, which is compatible with Deleuze’s view:

The genius of Frege and Russell was to have discovered that the condition of truth (denotation) lies in the domain of sense. In order for a proposition to be true (or false) it must have a sense; a nonsensical proposition can be neither true nor false. Yet they betrayed this insight, Deleuze argues, because they—like Kant before them—remained content with establishing the condition of truth rather than its genesis. In Logic of Sense, Deleuze attacks this problem, first developing the paradoxes that result from the structure of sense and then sketching a theory of its genesis. (Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy, “Gilles Deleuze”, 2008)

Frege, in the context of his logical work, explicitly states that his interest, and that of a logical language lies, with those sentences that do have a truth-value (that have a Bedeutung). My suggestion that the kind of sense presented in Frege’s Begriffsschrift is a particular actualization of the notion of the more general and complex sense explored in Deleuze’s conception is thus partially confirmed. The difference seems then to rest in the fact that Deleuze is interested in the “genesis of sense” itself rather than a genesis of truth. Thus, in the same way that Frege finds interest in assertoric language to develop his logic of truth, Deleuze bases his concepts in all kinds of esoteric usages of language to found a logic of sense. Why does Frege seem to be as uninterested in establishing a logic of sense as Deleuze is in establishing a logic of truth?
It seems that Frege’s notion of sense in the context of his logical language, relies strongly on the nature of its counterpoint, its *Bedeutung*. Sense in Frege deeply relies on a theory of reference: Language makes sense in virtue of the real entities (whether things or concepts) it refers to in the world. In mathematics, a theory of reference seems sufficient since the entities composing the domain form an ideal space in which everything is well defined and unvarying. However, in natural language this is far from being the case, as many of the things, events and processes in the world it attempts to make sense and speak of do not possess the sharp boundaries of mathematical entities. An interest in truth is then epistemological, whereas an interest in sense is deeply ethical. How do we come to define things that do not have strict bounded realities in the world?

Whereas the world that Frege’s *Begriffsschrift* comes to comment upon, participate in and uncover is *immutable* and *well-defined*, the world that Deleuze’s conception of language is concerned with is *constantly* changing and *overflowing* with sense. We have then that Frege’s language of being serves as a medium between a subjective mind and the mind-independent realm of truth (a world of being); as opposed to Deleuze’s language which serves as an intensive medium between two particular *becomings*, perhaps myself and a friend, or a text and a scholar, a philosopher and the world, etc. Let us then put forward this possible definition for “becoming” in this context: *Becoming is the pure multiplicity and overflowing of sense, which necessitates speech-acts in order for particular sense(s) to be made of the world and in the world.*

Given the definitions of being and becoming established let us also suggest that: *A “being” (or static sense) can be seen as the actualization of a specific sense that is part of a more complex (overflowing with sense) world of becoming.* This is how we should
see Frege’s conception of language as standing in relation to that of Deleuze. The conception of language as an instrument of logic, in which language is at the service of the true, cannot account for the total reality of language. We should remember that Frege’s development of *Begriffsschrift* stemmed from two interconnected problems: The imprecision of natural language in performing logic and the search for a pure logical language. I argued that a distilled natural language did not present the sought-after pure logical language and that its form had to be discovered, in the manner of any other scientific discovery. Natural language does not possess a pure logical backbone and, thus, a logical language is not an abstraction of natural language but rather an actualization.

If there is no logical language at the core of natural language and if language simply has the ability to be logical without being inherently logical (the possibility to respond to rules, rather than being governed by rules) then language does not work inherently because it is logical. This is what is meant in saying that language is not an abstraction of natural language but rather an actualization. To say that *Begriffsschrift* is an abstraction of natural language would be to overlook much of the richness of language and to conceptualize of it in a very limited way. If *Begriffsschrift* is to be thought of as an abstraction of natural language, then we must think of it as an abstraction of particular function of natural language: It is not in *Begriffsschrift* itself that Frege brings about a different conceptualization of language, but rather with the idea that language can serve as a tool to gain knowledge in the first place. *Begriffsschrift*, then, is the pure form of such a function of language. Hence, the technical language *Begriffsschrift* is but the purified version of a special version of language that Frege is concerned with: assertoric language.
Hence, the error would be to think that Begriffsschrift, or any other formal language, is in fact an abstraction of the totality of natural language, rather than an abstraction of a particular quality of language, or function of language, and thus to imagine that it stands for the core and meaningful part of language. To think of natural language as a reified formal language is to neglect the sheer complexity of life and on-going processes that natural language is a part of: a logical language, established according to certain criteria such as precision, clarity and homogeneity, can only account for those things in the world that are themselves precise, clear and of similar nature. As I have said, the mathematical world seems to respond well to this demand; the world as a whole does not.

Thus, the world as it appears mediated by Begriffsschrift is as precise as it is limited: it is a great intellectual achievement as it allows for a well-defined operation, but one restricted in scope. In understanding the concept of Frege’s Begriffsschrift, we are led to understand an idea of how meaning works for a language that speaks of the world, in the way specified. As such, he succeeds in showing us how important language is in giving us access to the world. Deleuze, on the other hand, wants to give us an idea of how meaning works for a language that speaks in the world. His concern lies with the question of what language may do. Of course, one of the things language may do in the world is contemplate the world and as such, we should not see the two projects as wholly antagonistic. However, to understand this difference is to also to see how these projects could be deeply inimical: the respective methodologies and criteria for ‘successful thinking’ rigorously held by both thinkers are as divergent as the respective motivating purposes of their intellectual work (undoubtedly in a correlated manner). As such, we might be tempted to judge one through the other’s criteria, but this would be missing the
point. What we may expect, as I hope to have shown, is that by having looked at
*Begriffsschrift* and Deleuze’s conception of natural language side by side, we are in a
better position to understand what the relation between a formal language and natural
language is, namely that a formal language such as *Begriffsschrift* actualizes and
intensifies certain potentials of natural language. This actualization is not the discovery of
a transcendental language, or *ur*-language, but on the contrary, it is the assemblage and
creation of a language immanent to natural language that could only have grown and
developed from it.

*In short, there are no syntactically, semantically, or logically definable propositions that
transcend or loom above statements. All methods for endowing language with
universals, from Russell’s logic to Chomsky’s grammar, have fallen into the worst kind of
abstraction, in the sense that they validate a level that is both too abstract and not
abstract enough. Regimes of signs are not based on language, and language alone does
not constitute an abstract machine, whether structural or generative. The opposite is
the case. It is language that is based on regimes of signs, and regimes of signs on
abstract machines, diagrammatic functions, and machinic assemblages that go beyond
any system of semiology, linguistics, or logic. There is no universal propositional logic,
nor is there grammaticality in itself, any more than there is signifier for itself. “Behind”
statements and semioticizations there are only machines, assemblages, and movements
of deterritorialization that cut across the stratification of the various systems and elude
both the coordinates of language and of existence. That is why pragmatics is not a
complement to logic, syntax, or semantics; on the contrary, it is the fundamental
element upon which all the rest depend.* (Deleuze & Guattari, 1980, p. 148)
Conclusion

The idea that Frege’s *Begriffsschrift*, and potentially any formal language, is the actualization of a particular sense of natural language, rather than being an abstracted form of natural language, in the sense that it would be a meaningful skeleton of natural language, has thus been arrived at from both thinkers’ perspectives. In the case of Frege, I have shown that if his logical language is to be correctly understood, then we must see it as giving us the sense of thoughts, that is the content relevant to logical operations, in such a manner as it may be favorable to judgment and easily associable with other formulae presenting the sense of Fregean thoughts. Such thoughts are contained within expressions of natural language, but are intertwined with other of its features, which renders logical operations quasi-impossible, or at least, highly inefficient. Thus, the conception of a language whose purpose is to be the language of pure thought that natural language could never be is necessary in order to make logical advances. *Begriffsschrift* is in this way a medium of access to the realm of logical, and by extension, mathematical and scientific truths, which constitute, in their ability to be expressed in such a language, a world of being. Such a world is also the actualization of a world of becoming, a potential sense or way to “see” a world that could be seen in many different ways and through many other logics. As such, Deleuze attempts to conceptualize language in such a way as to be able to express the sense of all these compossible worlds. The sense Frege’s language exhibits is one such possible actualization. What Deleuze reminds us, however, is that it is by no means the only possible one.
I have opposed Frege and Deleuze, questioned them individually, brought them together in comparison and found some similarities amongst many difference. Certain patterns seem to come to light: the idea that thinking, in whatever sense we may attribute to the word, seems to be wholly inseparable from expression and as such, from language; the centrality of the problem of sense in language; and, finally, the notion that language, even though it may speak of the world, does not simply represent the world but is an active medium between the practitioner of language and reality. Within these general ideas, both thinkers vary widely in the “how?” and the “why?” and yet, both thinkers offer views which when explored offer a coherent insight into the workings of language. What seems to differ most explicitly is in how these ideas are internally constructed and how they are meaningfully related to one another. Logic, for Frege, is as much the goal as the procedure. One may arduously follow the rigorous inference: from the objectivity of thought, to the language of pure thought, to the Sinn and Bedeutung distinction, to the inner workings of Begriffsschrift. For Deleuze, the inference is of different sort, the passage from one idea to another sustained by a rhythm, interspersed with the constant refrain of his philosophy: Thought must serve life, life should not serve thought. To understand why natural language and a language such as Begriffsschrift are deeply irreconcilable in many ways is to understand, to grasp, this refrain. Launanguage must be seen as serving life first, for it is only after we understand this that we might find in what way the converse may also be true.
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