I LOVE ME SOME DATIVES:
EXPRESSIVE MEANING, FREE DATIVES, AND F-IMPLICATURE

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1. Introduction

In addition to introducing the very successful product line of conversational implicatures, Paul Grice and his successors have assembled an arguably inchoate class of phenomena under the trade name of CONVENTIONAL IMPLICATURE, whose reception in the scholarly marketplace has been somewhat bridled. A conventional implicature associated with expression $E$ is a non-cancelable contribution to the content of an expression whose falsity does not affect the truth conditions of $E$. This construct has evoked much recent skepticism—Bach (1999) has consigned it to the dustbin of mythology, while Potts (2005 et seq.) has undertaken a pyrrhic rehabilitation via redefinition—but Grice's admittedly sketchy device for treating aspects of content that are irrelevant to the truth conditions of an asserted proposition has a rich lineage.

In delineating meanings that do not “affect the thought” or “touch what is true or false”, Frege (1892, 1897/1979, 1918) directly prefigured Grice’s conventional implicature. While much recent scholarship has followed Dummett (1973) in dismissing Frege’s positive proposals in this area as representing a confused, subjective notion of “tone”, this fails to do justice to Frege’s intention and practice. For a range of connectives, expressive particles, pronouns, and syntactic constructions, some proposed for the role by Frege and/or Grice and others not considered by them, such an approach remains eminently plausible.

2. The Fregean Landscape of Sub-Sense Relations

In addition to the presupposition (Voraussetzung) of reference for proper names in sentences like Kepler {died/didn’t die} in misery (Frege 1892: 40), Frege also allows for the weaker relation of “side-thought” (Nebengedanke) of existence for universally quantified statements, an essentially pragmatic
relation which involves material neither meant nor presupposed as admitted (Frege 1906: 306–307). The former constitutes a necessary condition for an assertion to be made; the latter does not. (See Horn 2007 for elaboration.)

But this does not exhaust the inventory of Fregean relations for implication beyond—or below—the domain of sense and reference. In fact, the issue arises for Frege in the \textit{Begriffsschrift}, before the distinction between \textit{Sinn} and \textit{Bedeutung} is even drawn:

The difference between ‘and’ and ‘but’ is of a kind that has no expression in this Begriffsschrift. A speaker uses ‘but’ when he wants to hint [\textit{einen Wink geben}] that what follows is different from what might at first be supposed. 

(Frege 1879: 63)

Similar hints or suggestions recur elsewhere. Considering a spectrum of linguistic phenomena ranging from particles like \textit{although}, \textit{but}, \textit{yet}, \textit{still}, and \textit{already} to active/passive alternations and word order, Frege devotes several passages throughout his works to describing such expressions and constructions that “aid the hearer’s understanding” without, however, affecting the propositional content—or, in Fregean parlance, the thought. Here is Frege in “Über Sinn und Bedeutung” on the meaning contributions of adversative particles (here and below, boldface is added):

Subsidiary clauses beginning with ‘although’ [\textit{obgleich}] also express complete thoughts. \textbf{This conjunction [...] does not change the sense of the clause but only illuminates it} in a peculiar fashion (footnote: Similarly in the case of ‘but’ \textit{[aber]}, ‘yet’ \textit{[doch]}.) We could indeed replace the concessive clause without harm to the truth of the whole by another of the same truth value; but the light in which the clause is placed by the conjunction might then easily appear unsuitable, as if a song with a sad subject were to be sung in a lively fashion. 

(Frege 1879: 167)

Crucially, then, the difference between \textit{p} and \textit{q} and \textit{p although q} does not affect the truth conditions of the proposition involved, a claim that appears correct. Imagine I bet you $100 that Robin will marry Chris although Chris is extremely poor and it develops that Robin does marry Chris, but precisely because of, not in spite of, Chris’s impecuniary state. Then the \textit{although}-condition is not satisfied, but it is clear (to me!) that I have won the bet, for which all that matters is the two parties wed.

Frege provides an inventory of phenomena lending themselves to similar analyses in “Der Gedanke”, beginning with the choice between the neutral \textit{horse} \textit{[Pferd]} and its evaluatively laden counterparts like \textit{steed} or \textit{nag} \textit{[Roß, Gaul, Mähre]}: