ABSTRACT. In an unpublished manuscript of 1914 titled ‘Logic in mathematics’, Gottlob Frege offered a rich account of the paradox of analysis. I argue that Frege there claims that the explicandum and explicans of a successful analysis express the same sense and that he furthermore appreciated that this requires that one cannot conclude that two sentences differ in sense simply because it is possible for a (minimally) competent speaker to accept one without accepting the other. I claim that this is shown by Frege’s suggestive remarks about a cloudy grasp of a sense. I then argue that this fact calls into question a key assumption behind Frege’s master argument for the sense/reference distinction.

Many have found it natural to attribute to Gottlob Frege the following criterion of difference for the senses of sentences.

Accept: If it is possible for an agent competent with two sentences, $s_1$ and $s_2$, to sincerely and reflectively accept $s_1$ as true while not accepting $s_2$ as true, then $s_1$ and $s_2$ have different senses or express different thoughts.\(^1\)

Despite the near universal attribution of such a thesis to Frege, I argue that Frege could not have held such a principle after 1914. My reasons for this derive from Frege’s mature, most considered, and, in my opinion, most promising views on the paradox of analysis, as expressed in his wonderful (Frege, 1914).

I have three aims in this paper. The first is to offer an interpretation of the view of conceptual analysis presented in the above-mentioned paper. Unlike most interpretations, on my view Frege requires that a successful conceptual analysis preserves sense.\(^2\) The second aim is to show that this account of conceptual analysis is incompatible with Accept. I offer a revised version of that principle, compatible with the account of the paradox of analysis I ascribe to Frege, in its place and speculate that it is this revised principle, not Accept, that
Frege should be seen as holding after 1914. Finally, I consider the effect these points have on Frege’s master argument for the sense/reference distinction. Although not inconsistent, I shall try to argue that there is a tension. In particular, I shall show that Frege is forced to explain away apparent instances of the very sort of phenomena that the master argument simply takes as given. This then sets precedent for anti-Fregeans to similarly explain away the phenomena driving Frege’s master argument for the sense/reference distinction, draining the argument of its force.

The paradox of analysis concerns the puzzling relationship between the explicandum (the expression to be elucidated) and the explicans (the complex expression in virtue of which the explicandum is elucidated) of a successful conceptual analysis. On the one hand, it is tempting to say that the relationship must be that of synonymy, so that the two expressions express the same sense. After all, what we seek in a conceptual analysis is an account of what the expression means. So it is tempting to say that conceptual analyses must preserve sense. On the other hand, it is tempting to deny the sense preservation requirement. After all, some analyses are hard to discover and are not always immediately accepted by all parties; mere reflection typically doesn’t suffice. And false analyses are all too frequently accepted. If synonymy were to relate the explicandum and the explicans in a successful analysis, merely understanding the expressions would suffice, it would seem, for recognition of their truth and the business of conceptual analysis wouldn’t be a fruitful adventure. In short, the claim that a successful analysis requires preservation of sense seems at odds with the fact that many philosophical analyses are intellectual achievements. They can be intellectual achievements only if they are teaching us something new and they are teaching us something new only if the explicandum and explicans express different senses, for it is only then that a conceptual analysis can be seen to forge new conceptual relations not already in place prior to the analysis.