SOME ANCIENT AND MEDIEVAL SEMANTIC CONCEPTS AND THEIR IMPACT ON MODISTIC GRAMMAR

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One of the fundamental assumptions on which the Modistae based their grammatical theory was the belief in a common reality existing objectively and being reflected uniformly in the cognitive structures of the human mind. The formal features of language were in turn viewed as being derived from and mirroring the corresponding conceptual reality. This model is never really challenged in the modistic works. Rather, it is almost taken for granted and it serves as a proof for grammar being universal and as a base for the theory of *modi*. In fact, it is not at all an original conception which would prompt the grammarians toward verification but a generally accepted view supported by an influential tradition of philosophical thought. It is our task now to look at a few instances of this development and connect the modistic ideas we have examined thus far with their earlier models.

One of the starting points of this tradition is certainly Aristotle's view on language, best exposed in his *Peri hermeneias*, known in Latin as *De interpretatione*. There is still considerable disagreement among scholars as to whether Aristotle really had any consistent theory of language. The short passage in *De interpretatione* devoted to linguistic problems[1] and a few references scattered in his other books still create difficulty for commentators. However, leaving aside the problem of correct interpretation of Aristotle's ideas as not quite relevant to our questions, we can safely assert that the few issues he raised had an enormously far-reaching influence on the development of lingustic thought. Whatever Aristotle really meant to say in *De interpretatione* and what was attributed to him by the misinterpretations of later translators and commentators, the steady tradition of the text and the unquestionable authority of the Philosopher ensured a long-lasting interest in the treatise itself and the problems it discussed. Boethius' translation and commentaries (sixth century) originated interest in this very concise book in the Latin West. During the Middle Ages, many great thinkers had commented upon the text: Peter Abelard, Robert Kilwardby, Albert the Great, Thomas Aquinas, John

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[1] Aristotle, *De interpretatione*, in *The Complete Works of Aristotle*, vol. 1, ed. J. Barnes (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1984), 16 a 1 - 17 a 7: 25-26.

Duns Scotus, and William of Ockham, for example. Among the commentators we also find some modistic grammarians: Martin of Dacia, Boethius of Dacia, Siger of Courtrai, and Thomas of Erfurt.[2]

The preoccupation with the relation between word and its meaning has a long history, one of its earliest illustrations being the *Cratylus* of Plato.[3] Although this text could not directly influence medieval thinkers, it is still worth mentioning as the source of Aristotle and as a valuable exposition of ancient philosophical views on the nature of language. Plato's *Cratylus* is usually regarded as an inquiry into the origins of language. However, it is more accurate to recognize that it deals with the correctness of names, that is, whether names do reflect the nature of things they signify.[4] Apparently, there is general agreement that words are somehow established; indeed, there is an initial process of naming. The question is, rather, whether these names are chosen arbitrarily, at random, or there is a logic to them, a link that connects the name and the thing naturally. Cratylus, whose views inspire the debate, maintains that all names have a natural correctness, they reflect the thing signified, and thus they are descriptive names. Those which are not "correct" are simply not names. He stresses that this is true for Greek as well as for other languages.[5] His opponent, Hermogenes, on the other hand, holds the view that names signify by convention, so their truth (correctness) lies in an agreement to use this and not another expression to designate a certain thing. But names can be changed, and they do in fact change whenever one decides to call a certain thing another name.[6] Socrates, who is called to express his opinion and perhaps settle the debate, does not provide an adequate answer and leaves the problem unsolved. He does partly embrace Cratylus' view with the reservation, however, that not all names signify naturally since some are not correct, yet they are understood by the force of convention. Nevertheless, he admits that things should be

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[2] H. Arens, *Aristotle's Theory of Language and its Tradition* (Amsterdam-Philadelphia: John Benjamins, 1984), 11.

[3] For some interpretations of Plato's views in *Cratylus*, see G. Anagnostopoulos, "Plato's *Cratylus*: The Two Theories of the Correctness of Names," *Review of Metaphysics* 25 (1971-71): 691-736; T. W. Bestor, "Plato's Semantics and Plato's *Cratylus*," *Phronesis* 25 (1980): 306-330; N. Kretzmann, "Plato on the Correctness of Names," *American Philosophical Quarterly* 8 (1971): 126-138; M. M. A. Mackenzie, "Putting the *Cratylus* in its Place," *Classical Quarterly* 36 (1986): 124-150.

[4] T. M. S. Baxter, *The Cratylus: Plato's Critique of Naming* (Leiden-New York-Köln: E. J. Brill, 1992), 41-43.

[5] Plato, *Cratylus*, in *The Collected Dialogues of Plato*, ed. E. Hamilton and H. Cairns (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1985), 383 b.

[6] Plato, *Cratylus*, 384 d.

named according to their nature.[7] Socrates makes an important assumption that each thing has its natural, objective, and stable being, independent of the individual perceptions.[8] The name-giver must understand this essence of the thing and follow the Form Name as a guide to render the naturally fitting name into letters and syllables.[9] In fact, not everyone has the capacity to assign names correctly,[10] the name-giver is the rarest craftsman.[11] That is why names and knowledge based on them are often deceiving, and Socrates concludes his argument by refusing to give a final solution to the problem of correctness of names. Nevertheless, the position of Plato seems to be that there do exist "true," descriptive names, and they make it possible to arrive at some truth about the thing through its name (the bulk of the dialogue consists of etymological analyses of different Greek words). From this assumption stems the very rich tradition of etymology, extremely popular in the medieval period.

It is this position that Aristotle rejects. There is no natural relation between names and things named: they signify by convention.[12] He also stresses the fact that the word is the smallest semantic unit which cannot be divided.[13] This clearly contradicts the etymologists' attitude.

In Boethius' translation of *De interpretatione*, the Greek word *kata syntheken*, meaning 'by convention' or 'conventionally', is rendered *secundum placitum* which is a slight change, on the one hand, underlining much stronger the arbitrariness of the choice of a name, and, on the other, dropping the possible allusion to the language community that establishes a certain convention. In his commentary on *De interpretatione*, Boethius attempts to explain why words do not signify naturally but according to the arbitrary choice of the name-giver.[14] He even mentions Plato's *Cratylus* and argues against it.[15] One of his arguments is that words are not the same in all languages, which shows that they were not formed naturally but as it pleased the will of the name-givers (*ad ponentium placitum voluntatemque).*[16] Also, names can be changed (the same argument was used by Hermogenes in *Cratylus*), or there can be more

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[7] Ibid., 387 d 4-9.
[8] Ibid., 386 d 9-e 4.
[9] Ibid., 389 d 4-8.
[10] Ibid., 391 a 7-b 2.
[11] Ibid., 388 e 7-389 a 3.
[12] Aristotle, *De interpretatione*, 16 a 19: 25, 16 a 27: 25, 17 a 1: 26.
[13] Ibid., 16 a 20 - 26: 25, 16 b 6 - 7: 26.
[14] Boethius, *Anicii Manlii Severini Boetii Commentarii in librum Aristotelis Peri Ermeneias*, vol. 2, ed. K. Meiser (Leipzig: Teubner, 1880), 54-55.
[15] Boethius, *Commentarii*, 92.
[16] Ibid., 55; see also 23 and 37.

names for the same thing, which also shows that they are not natural but imposed; otherwise, there would be just one name to signify one thing.[17] A vocal expression becomes meaningful only after it is given as a name to something. Boethius quotes the example of meaningless words, such as *blityri*[18] or *scindapsos* and *hereceddy*,[19] saying they signify nothing, but if they were established to signify, they would become names.[20] It is the process of imposition that causes a voice to become a meaningful word. However, Boethius does recognize that there are certain signs (they are not really vocal forms any more) which signify by nature, like tears, groans, grief, or even voices of animals, like the barking of dogs. They were not imposed to signify; nevertheless, they have a meaning, for example, in case of dogs' barking. [21]

In quite the same tradition, Abelard, writing his commentary on *De interpretatione* embraces the conventionalist point of view. The signification of words (spoken and written) does not pertain to nature but is due to an imposition (name-giving) executed by men. In nations of different languages, these words do not have the same *officium significandi*. A Roman word for a Greek person would not have the same semantic function.[22] However, Abelard also considers some signs as being natural, namely the voices of animals.[23] Again, the barking of dogs is given as an example, and again it is meant to express the dog's anger. Interestingly, the natural signs are also said to have been imposed but imposed by nature. Hence, the dichotomy is not between voices imposed or not but between those imposed by nature and those established by convention. Abelard even explains at one point that it is God who gave barking to the dog (i.e. it was naturally imposed) so that it could show its anger. Human voices, on the other hand, signify *ad placitum* by the will of the name-giving men.[24] He repeats a similar view in his later *Dialectica*, making a distinction between voices imposed by nature (dog's barking again) and those signifying *ad placitum* which are of human invention only.[25]

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[17] Ibid., 56.
[18] Ibid., 3.
[19] Ibid., 59.
[20] The examples *blityri* and *scindappos* are not at all original. We can find them used in Sextus Empiricus, Artemidorus Daldianus, and Galen. Later, they became standard examples of meaningless words, quoted almost as commonly as Socrates in all sorts of example sentences. H. Arens, *Aristotle's Theory of Language and its Tradition*, 135.
[21] Boethius, *Commentarii*, 31.
[22] Peter Abelard, *Glossae super Peri Ermeneias*, in *Peter Abaelards Philosophische Schriften*, vol. 1, *Logica Ingredientibus*, ed. B. Geyer (Münster: Aschendorf, 1919), 320.
[23] Peter Abelard, *Glossae*, 340.
[24] Ibid., 335-336; also: 340-341.

However, in one of his earlier commentaries on Porphyry, we encounter a view that does not exclude the possibility of words being imposed but still imitating nature.[26] Here, Abelard posits that the one who originally composed names followed the nature of things.[27]

Although it is usually assumed that during the medieval period the naturalist view of the relation between words and things gradually gave way to the conviction that this relationship is entirely due to convention, it seems that the range of attitudes toward language as a reflection of reality was more differentiated.[28] Most thinkers did not, in fact, embrace either of the radical positions. They remained moderate naturalists; even Isidore of Seville, who, while indulging in the most incredible etymological speculations, did admit that not all names were imposed according to nature but some according to pleasure.[29] Even earlier, one of the first Latin grammarians, Varro divided all reality into the four categories of body, place, time, and action and claimed that they are faithfully reflected by the essential classes of words. Nevertheless, he agreed upon an original imposition of names in which the namer is guided by the nature to give proper names to things: *ea (natura) enim dux fuit ad vocabula imponenda homini.* [30] Others were moderate in claiming that language was conventional. At this time Priscian argued that words and letters are invented by men, yet they show a similitude with the elements of the real world: *literas autem etiam elementorum noncupaverunt ad similitudinem mundi elementorum.*[31] Even as late as the twelfth century, John of Salisbury recalls this debate in his *Metalogicon*. He believes that the application of

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[25] *Liquet autem ex suprapositis significativarum vocum alias naturaliter, alias ad placitum significare. Quaecumque enim habiles sunt ad significandum vel ex natura vel ex impositione significativae dicuntur. Naturales quidem voces, qua non humana inventio imposuit sed sole natura, naturaliterex impositione significativas dicimus, ut ea quam latrando canis emittit, ex qua ipsius iram concipimus (...) Sed huiusmodi voces quae nec locutiones componunt, quippe nec ab hominibus proferuntur, ab omni logica sunt alienae. Eas igitur solas oportet exsequi quae ad placitum significant, hocest secundum voluntatem imponentis, quae videlicet prout libuit ab hominibus formatae ad humanas locutiones constituendas sunt repertae et ad res designandas impositae.* Peter Abelard, *Dialectica*, ed. L. M. de Rijk (Assen: Van Gorcum, 1961), 1. 3. 1: 114.

[26] Peter Abelard, *Glossulae super Porphyrium*, in *Peter Abaelards Philosophische Schriften*, ed. B. Geyer (Munster: Aschendorf, 1923), 3: 537.

[27] Peter Abelard, *Glossulae super Porphyrium*, 3: 367.

[28] T. Coletti, *Naming the Rose* (Ithaca-London: Cornell University Press, 1990), 19.

[29] *Non autem omnia nomina a veteribus secundum naturam imposita sunt, sed quaedam et secundum placitum.* Isidore of Seville, *Etymologiarum sive originum*, ed. W.M. Lindsay (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1911), 1.29.2.

[30] Quoted in H. Bloch, *Etymologies and Genealogies* (Chicago-London: Chicago University Press, 1983), 46.

[31] Priscian, *Institutionum grammaticarum libri XVIII*, ed. H. Keil (Hildesheim: G. Olms, 1961), 2: 6.

names and the use of different expressions depends on the will of man; however, it is also in a way subject to nature which it imitates. Hence, the grammatical study of language, although an invention of man, still imitates nature from which it originates.[32] In medieval texts we can rarely find unqualified belief in the purely undetermined nature of human language, such as the present day Saussurean notion of the arbitrary sign.[33] In fact, it was rarely held that names were given totally at random. Most thinkers believed that our vocabulary was created by intelligent men who, in the process of giving names, took into consideration the properties of those things.[34] We can see clearly in Pseudo Kilwardby and Boethius of Dacia the preoccupation with the person of *impositor* who should have an appropriate knowledge of things to be able to impose an adequate word.[35] They both stress the fact that vocal expression in the sense of the series of sounds is arbitrary; however, there are certain formal features of language which do follow the reality. This conclusion can be drawn clearly from the doctrine of *modi* and universal grammar. Boethius of Dacia also allows for some vocal signs to be natural besides the voices of animals, for example, human ones, particularly when they express pain (*et haberet species humana aliquas voces ad hoc naturaliter ordinatas, sicut nunc videmus dolorem et affectus et conceptus consimiles per quasdam voces exprimi).*[36]

Thus, it seems that most of those thinkers who rejected the notion of words as physical extensions of things and accepted the fact of their imposition by convention, nevertheless, did not break with the wish for continuity between language and reality.[37] In fact, it was a rather general opinion that language was a human invention although in some sense determined by nature.

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[32] *Artium vero matrem superius collectum est esse naturam; sed licet hec aliquatenus, immo ex maxima parte ab hominum institutione processerit, naturam tamen imitatur, et pro parte ab ipsa originem ducit, eique in omnibus quantum potest, studet esse conformis... Ipsa quoque nominum impositio aliarumque dictionum, etsi arbitrio humano processerit, nature quodammodo obnoxia est, quam pro modulo suo probabiliter imitatur.* John of Salisbury, *Metalogicon*, ed. J. B. Hall, *CCL* 98, 840 d: 33.

[33] H. Bloch, *Etymologies and Genealogies*, 46.

[34] S. Ebbesen, "The Odyssey of Semantics from Stoa to Buridan," in *History of Semiotics*, ed. A. Eschbach and J. Trabant (Amsterdam-Philadelphia: John Benjamins, 1983), 71.

[35] Pseudo Kilwardby, *Commentum super Priscianum maiorem*, ed. K. M. Fredborg, N. J. Green Pedersen, L. Nielsen, and J. Pinborg, *CIMAGL* 15 (1975), 2. 1. 11: 76; Boethius of Dacia, *Modi significandi sive Quaestiones super Priscianum maiorem*, ed. J. Pinborg, H. Roos, and S. S. Jensen, *CPDMA 4* (Copenhagen: Gad, 1969), 5: 24, 12: 49, 17: 64-65; and chapter 2.b, p.26 of the present work.

[36] Boethius of Dacia, *Modi significandi*, 5: 25.

[37] H. Bloch, *Etymologies and Genealogies*, 46.

We must not neglect the influence of religious doctrine in this matter and the Bible as the primary source of all knowledge for good Christians. According to the medieval, deeply religious, sense of history, the first instance of signification took place in Eden and involved Adam, the first *impositor,* in the act of naming the earthly animals and the birds.[38] This original language established by the first human being became distorted in the well-known story of the Tower of Babel,[39] irrevocably inspiring generations of thinkers to endeavour at reconstruction.[40] Others who did not undertake the desperate search for the primordial, natural language[41] must have been, nevertheless, at least influenced by the biblical account of the origins of language to believe in some divinely established link between the first human language and the world of real things.

Such an impact may be noticed in Augustine's theory of signs. In the *De trinitate* he regards the diversity of languages as a result of sin, symbolically represented by the Tower of Babel.[42] His position in the debate of naturalism versus conventionalism is usually associated with his division of signs into *signa naturalia* and *signa data.*[43] However, it is more correct to interpret this distinction in terms of the intentionality of the speaker in the occurrence, not in the meaning of the sign.[44] Although *De doctrina* offers a picture of the views of Augustine on the conventionality of linguistic signs, it is also important to look at his other works because some of his ideas underwent considerable change. In the *De dialectica* he still regards some words as having a natural relation to things they signify.[45] However, *De magistro* already expresses a distrust in signs. It is true that things cannot be learned without the use of signs, especially words,[46] and this basically verbal epistemology remains characteristic of Augustine for his entire life.[47] However, signs only imperfectly point

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[38] Gen. 2: 19-20.

[39] Gen. 11:1.

[40] U. Eco, *La ricerca della lingua perfetta* (Roma-Bari: Laterza, 1993).

[41] Natural in the sense of a natural link between the vocabulary of a language and the referents; there is no connection with the concept of "natural language" in Hjelmslev's model, which in fact would mean quite the contrary.

[42] Augustine, *De trinitate, MPL* 42: 15. 10.

[43] *Signorum igitur alia sunt naturalia, alia data. Naturalia sunt, quae sine voluntate atque nullo appetitu significandi, praeter se aliquid aliud ex se cognosci faciunt, sicut est fumus significans ignem.(...) Data vero signa sunt, quae sibi quaeque viventia invicem dant ad demonstrandos, quantum possunt, motus animi sui, vel sensa, aut intellecta qualibet. Nec ulla causa est nobis significandi , id est signi dandi, nisi ad depromendum et traiciendum in alterius animum id quod animo gerit id qui signum dat.* Augustine, *De doctrina christiana,* 2. 1. 2 - 2. 3: 36-37.

[44] B. Darrell Jackson, "The Theory of Signs in St. Augustine's *De Doctrina Christiana,*" in *Augustine: A Collection of Critical Essays,* ed. R.A. Markus (New York: Doubleday, 1972), 97.

[45] Augustine, *De dialectica, MPL* 32, especially in chapter 6: 1411-3.

[46] Ibid. 3. 6: 1198, 10. 30: 1212. See also *"res per signa discuntur"* in *De doctrina christiana,* 1.2.2: 19.

to the reality; consequently, they are not identical with what they signify. They do not reveal knowledge about the thing. On the contrary, it is necessary to know first the thing itself in order to be able later to understand the sign.[48] It is the pointing with the finger whereby the link between the sign and the thing is established.[49] In *De doctrina christiana* Augustine is even more explicit about the conventionality of words. Words mean different things in different languages because each society has an agreement and a consent as to their significance. Nor have men established conventions for using signs with determinate meanings because signs already had been meaningful, but they are meaningful solely because men have established the conventions for their use. [50] However, in *De trinitate* Augustine again seems to come close to the view of natural language. His doctrine of *verba mentalis* does in fact resemble the conception of ideal names:

For of necessity when we say what is true (i. e. say what we know) the knowledge itself, which we retain in memory, gives birth to a word that is altogether of the same kind as the knowledge from which it is born. For the thought formed by the thing that we know is a word that is neither Greek nor Latin nor any other language. But since it is necessary to convey it into the knowledge of those with whom we speak, some sign is adopted by which it is signified.[51]

Clearly, the outer word (vocal expression) is still considered arbitrary, but there is an idea of an inner language, more true and constant, which bears similarities to the concept of perfect natural language. It also indicates Augustine's persistent distrust in the ordinary means of expression.

We already pointed to the influence of Augustinian *verba mentalis* on Pseudo Kilwardby.[52] The distinction between *vox sensibilis exterior* and *vox interior mentalis* in Pseudo Kilwardby and his description of the process of

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[47] M. Colish, *The Mirror of Language* (New Haven-London: Yale University Press, 1968), viii; 8- 81.

[48] Augustine, *De magistro*, 10. 34: 1214.

[49] Ibid. 10. 34: 1214.

[50] *Sicut enim, verbi gratia, una figura littera X quae decussatim notatur, aliud apud Graecos, aliud apud Latinos valet, (...) sicut ergo hae omnes significationes pro suae cuiusque societatis consensione animos movent, et quia diversa consensio est, diverse movent; nec ideo consenterunt in eas homines, quia iam valebant ad significationem, sed ideo valent, quia consenserunt in eas.* Augustine, *De doctrina christiana*, 2. 24. 37: 53.

[51] *Necesse est enim cum verum loquimur, id est, quod scimus loquimur, ex ipsa scientia quam memoria tenemus, nascatur verbum quod eiusmodi sit omnino, cuiusmodi est illa scientia de qua nascitur. Formata quippe cogitatio ab ea re quam scimus, verbum est quod in corde dicimus: quod nec graecum est, nec latinum, nec linguae alicuius alterius; sed cum id opus est in eorum quibus loquimur perferre notitiam, aliquod signum quo significetur assimitur.* Augustine, *De trinitate*, 15.10: 1071.

[52] See chapter two (2 b) of the present work.

formulating the outer speech to express the inner one[53] clearly recalls the passage from the *De trinitate* that we have just quoted. Pseudo Kilwardby also refers to Anselm,[54] who quite similarly distinguishes an inner speech, *intima locutio*, which is a much truer reflection of things it represents.[55] Now, the concept of mental words brings us back to the original question of the relation between language and reality. Even if it is accepted that outer, vocal expressions are chosen *ad placitum*, the same cannot be said about the *verba mentalis*. But is the inner speech still a language? Augustine says it is *nulla lingua*; however, he still uses terminology borrowed from the realm of language (*verbum, dicere, loquere*). Pseudo Kilwardby considers the *sermo interior* as a real subject of grammar, thus treating it as a linguistic phenomenon.[56] However, the same Pseudo Kilwardby maintains that words signify primarily concepts which he calls *intellecta mentis*.[57] Does he then identify the *vox interior* and the *intellectus*? Apparently not, since he considers the linking of *significatio* and the *vox* as taking place first on the level of interior speech, so the two can hardly mean the same thing. It seems more plausible, then, that he confuses the process of forming notions about different things with expressing these thoughts in language. And he is not alone in doing so. Here, we come quite close to another problem we shall investigate, namely how and what words signify.

In one of the opening passages of the *De interpretatione*, the Philosopher points to some relations between written forms, vocal forms, *pathemata*, and real things (*pragmata*).[58] He links the written with the spoken forms, and those with the *pathemata*, the relation being one of signification or standing for. The *pathemata*, in turn, are characterized as likenesses of things. Moreover, the first two, the written and the spoken forms, are said not to be the same for all; whereas, *pathemata* and *pragmata* are said to be the same. Now, several problems arise in the interpretation of this short passage. The word *pathemata* translated by Boethius as *passiones quae sunt in anima* is rather ambiguous. Since Aristotle himself con-

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[53] Pseudo Kilwardby, *Commentum*, 2. 1. 1b- 4b: 57-60.

[54] Ibid., 2. 1. 2a: 52.

[55] *Aut enim res loquimur signis sensibus, id est quae sensibus corporeis sentiri possunt sensibiliter utendo; aut eadem signa, quae foris sensibilia sunt, intra nos insensibiliter cogitando; aut nec sensibiliter nec insensibiliterhis signis utendo, sed res ipsas vel corporum imaginatione vel rationis intellectu pro rerum ipsarum diversitate intus in nostra mente dicendo.* Saint Anselm, *Monologion*, in *S. Anselmi Opera Omnia*, ed. F. S. Schmitt (Edinburgh, 1946), 10: 24 ; see also 10: 25.

[56] Pseudo Kilwardby, *Commentum*, 1. 2. 1: 10.

[57] *Vox instituitur primo ed per se ad significandum intellectus mentis.* Pseudo Kilwardby, *Commentum*, 2. 1. 9: 71.

[58] Aristotle, *De interpetatione*, 16 a 2 - 9: 25.

ceives of them as of the likenesses of things, it is probable that he means the impressions of things formed in the soul as according to his description in *De anima*.[59] However, in some following paragraphs he speaks of *noema* and *dianoia* without making it clear that he means the same as *pathema*.[60] The other problem may arise from his use of words *symbolon* and *semeion*. Whether Aristotle distinguished between these two or did not make any difference between them is still debatable.[61] What should suffice, however, for the purpose of our investigation regarding the medieval period is the fact that Boethius translated both words as *notae*.

This rather ambiguous model of signification inspired a rich tradition of thought so that it is hardly possible to distinguish between what Aristotle really could have meant and what seems plausible in the light of the later development of his ideas. S. Ebbesen points to the role of the Stoic philosophers of the second-third centuries BC in the initial introduction of the Aristotelian model as distinguishing between words, intelligible significata, and real denotata.[62] He also strongly underlines the role that Porphyry played in formulating and spreading the interpretation of Aristotle's semantic model as one in which words signify concepts which, in turn, signify things so that words signify things via concepts.[63] The fundamental assumption Ebbesen makes is that Porphyry had a rather consistent semantic theory in which he considered vocal discourse as a sign of mental discourse and the terms of vocal propositions (words) as signs of concepts (terms of mental propositions). Hence, things were taken to be signified by words only through concepts.[64] It seems quite clear that this model constituted an important basis for the rise of modistic theory, especially the triadic system of *modi significandi, intelligendi*, and *essendi*.[65]

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[59] Especially chapters: II. 5 and 12; III. 4 and 8. Also Aristotle, *On the Soul*, in *The Complete Works of Aristotle*, ed. J. Barnes (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1984), 663-665, 674-675, 682-684, 686-687.

[60] Aristotle, *De interpretatione*, 16 a 10: 25, 16 b 20: 26. (The English translation renders both as "thought.").

[61] For two differing opinions, see H. Arens, *Aristotle's Theory of Language and Its Tradition*, 27 and N. Kretzmann, "Aristotle on Spoken Sound Significant by Convention," *Ancient Logic and Its Modern Interpretations*, ed. J. Corcoran (Dordrecht-Boston: D. Reidel, 1974), 3-21.

[62] Ebbesen, "The Odyssey of Semantics from the Stoa to Buridan," 69.

[63] Ibid., 70.

[64] For further details see: Ebbesen, "Porphyry's Legacy to Logic: A Reconstruction," in *Aristotle Transformed*, ed. R. Sorabji (New York: Cornell University Press, 1982), 141-171.

[65] I refer to Ebbesen's reconstruction of Porphyry's semantic theory because I consider it a useful model to examine the whole tradition of linguistic thought even if Ebbesen is not entirely right in attributing all this to Porphyry alone. But he projects some later ideas on Porphyry's non-extant works, and it is still a valuable framework in which to place much of the medieval language theory.

Boethius borrowed heavily from Porphyry[66] (in fact, Boethius is an important source for reconstructing Porphyrian ideas). In his commentary on Aristotle's *De interpretatione*, we encounter the semantic model involving words, concepts, and things. Boethius even remarks at one point that words signify nothing else apart from the concept.[67] However, he claims elsewhere that nouns and verbs signify primarily the notions and secondarily the things.[68] Boethius clearly recognizes the importance of the problem of determining what signification really means. He even mentions ancient debates regarding the question of what do words actually signify. Here, Boethius again relies on Porphyry in outlining the different opinions. One such view is that words signify things, another that the *significata* are some "incorporeal natures," still another opinion says that it is sensations or perceptions that are signified, and the last one suggests that meaning is imagination or mental image.[69] For Boethius the true answer lies in Aristotle; however, he is aware of the ambiguity between *pathema* and *noema* which he translates as *passio* and *intellectus* respectively. He endeavours to find the reason why Aristotle did not speak of vocal forms as signs of notions, but he chose instead the term *pathema* which emphasizes more the fact of being an impression in the soul.[70] According to Boethius, the two are basically the same, but Aristotle wanted to convey exactly the meaning of concept as a mental impression of a thing. Here, Boethius engages in some psychological explanations of how concepts are formed and what the difference between concept and imagination or sensation would be, grounding his argument on Aristotle's ideas from *De anima*.[71]

One of the fundamental assumptions of this theory of signification is the universality of reality and concepts. Solipsism is rejected on the basis of the belief that men form and link concepts in the same way. Boethius explains it in a seemingly simplistic manner: in his view, the universality of notions for all men means that if a Roman, a Greek, and a barbarian see a horse, they will all form the same notion of it, the notion of a horse. They call it differently because the vocal expressions in all these languages are different, but what remains common to them is the thing itself and the concept of it.[72] For Boethius it is inconceivable that what a Roman

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[66] For his other possible sources see: L. M. de Rijk, *Logica modernorum*, vol. 1, 28-39.
[67] Boethius, *Commentarii*, 21.
[68] Ibid., 24.
[69] Ibid., 26-27.
[70] Ibid., 33.
[71] Ibid., 33-34, also: 28; the relevant passage in Aristotle, *De anima*, 3. 8.
[72] Ibid., 21.

apprehends as a man, a barbarian could think to be a stone.[73] Interestingly, this idea of the universality of intellectual functions won an almost general acceptance and was rarely challenged in serious discussion.[74] One such case of scepticism is mentioned by Boethius himself. A certain Aspasius raises some doubts concerning this theory of the uniformity of notions in all men, giving as an example the diversity of conceptions people have about what is good and just. Boethius calls him *permolestus* and seems to be quite irritated by his arguments, attempting to counter them again by using the assumption that what is established by nature is the same for everyone.[75]

The triadic structure of words, notions, and things, however, gains a slightly new bearing, when Boethius adopts a different terminology and begins speaking about three discourses (*orationes):* written, spoken, and mental. Again, citing Porphyry as his authority, Boethius attributes the concept of three discourses to the Peripatetics.[76] In his conclusion, he assumes that as there are parts of speech in the written and spoken discourse, the parts of speech must be threefold and have their counterparts in the mental speech also.[77]

Boethius' concept of *oratio mentalis* and the Augustinian idea of *verbum in mente* share a similar terminology which creates lingustic parallels to mental phenomena. We shall see that both notions can also be compared as to the role they play in the process of signification.

The oft-quoted definition of sign in Augustine's *De doctrina christiana* is as follows: *Signum est enim res praeter speciem, quam ingerit sensibus, aliud aliquid ex se faciens in cogitationem venire.*[78] And since *quod enim nulla res est, omnino nihil est,*[79] it is quite easy to infer that signs, being themselves *res,* also signify *res.* This might lead to a false impression that Augustine has a twofold conception of signification which involves only signs and things. However, a careful examination of the process of signifying as exposed in the *De doctrina* reveals a more complex semantic scheme. In fact, the Augustinian conception of signification involves a third element, *dicibile,* which is the result of *cogitatio.*[80] What is described

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[73] Ibid., 38.

[74] There were some exceptions, of course. We shall see the doubts Abelard entertained although he generally accepted the idea.

[75] Boethius, *Commentarii,* 41-42.

[76] Ibid., 29.

[77] Ibid., 30.

[78] Augustine, *De doctrina christiana,* 2.1.1: 35.

[79] Ibid., 1.2.2: 19..

[80] B. D. Jackson's interpretation in "The Theory of Signs in St. Augustine's *De doctrina christiana,*" 104-108.

in the *De doctrina* as *id quod animo gerit, qui signum dat* [81] and in the *De trinitate* as *verbum quod in corde dicimus*[82] appears to be the same thing, namely the intermediary between *res* and *signum* although Augustine never defines it explicitly. Moreover, he never says that words signify those mental phenomena; rather, he points to their role in the process of forming signs. It is legitimate, nevertheless, to indicate, as B. D. Jackson does, the similarity between this semantic model and the one deriving from Aristotle.[83] Even if there are some clear differences between the two, we can assume that medieval readers of Aristotle and Augustine still found them compatible. Pseudo Kilwardby apparently did. His concept of *sermo in scripto, in pronuntiatione et in mente*[84] clearly owes much to the Boethian three types of *oratio*. On the other hand, his parallel notion of *vox mentalis* [85] seems closer to Augustinian *verbum in mente*. Finally, both concepts form part of a semantic model based on the triadic system of things, concepts, and words.

Now, this seems to be a particularly important element in the development of the theory of universal grammar. If the notions, mental phenomena, are said to form an *oratio* or *sermo* and consist of *verba* or *vox*, it means that they are perceived as something verbal, that is, parallel and close to language. Of course, these notions are ambiguous enough to allow more possibilities for interpretation, ranging from silent "thinking in words" to an entirely non-verbal operation, from imagining a word to *intellectus*. Nevertheless, it is significant that the process of thinking is associated with the use of language. It is not only signified by the elements of language but also conceived of as a language. This signals the assumption of a close interrelationship between cognitive and linguistic structures, and since the former are said to be the same for all, it allows the hypothesis which the Modistae form, namely, that some elements of language do reflect the process of cognition and are, therefore, universal. Of course, if language is perceived in this way, it is no more a particular language, Latin or Greek, but an abstract structure. Thus, Boethius of Dacia's type of grammar can be easily interpreted as describing the rules of a categorial language.[86]

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[81] Augustine, *De doctrina christiana*, 2.2.3: 37.
[82] Augustine, *De trinitate*, 15.10: 1071.
[83] Jackson, "The Theory of Signs in St. Augustine's *De doctrina christiana*," 130-131.
[84] Pseudo Kilwardby, *Commentum*, 1.2.1: 10.
[85] Pseudo Kilwardby, *Commentum*, 2.1.1b-4b: 57-60.
[86] See D. P. Henry's attempt at interpreting modistic grammar in terms of a categorial language in *That Most Subtle Question: The Metaphysical Bearing of Medieval and Contemporary Linguistic Disciplines* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1984).

Of course, the concept of mental or inner speech was not the only element that influenced this development. Closer associations of grammar with logic from the eleventh century onwards[87] also contributed to the rise of the doctrine of *modi*. Both grammar as well as logic were viewed as dealing principally with *sermo*, not the *res*, which again brought linguistic problems closer to the formulation of concepts. It is, therefore, worth examining Abelard's views on language which clearly show the mutual influence of grammar and logic. Although Abelard is never directly referred to in the texts of Pseudo Kilwardby or Boethius of Dacia, he consitutes, nevertheless, an important step toward the speculative, theoretical approach to grammar. He is the "unrivaled master of that twelfth-century amalgam of logical, metaphysical, semantical, and grammatical theory out of which the characteristically thirteenth-century speculative grammar and terminist logic evolved."[88] Although his commentary on Aristotle's *De interpretatione* continues the earlier tradition as conveyed by Boethius, he also makes some original remarks which are quite relevant to our investigation.

Similar to Boethius, Abelard assumes that words primarily signify the notions and secondarily the things themselves.[89] He also examines at length the question of what these notions are. He makes an argument, again like Boethius but better elaborated, for the distinction of notions from sensations and imagination.[90] Rather crucial is his statement on the problem of universals, which we shall not discuss here.[91] What is interesting to mention in connection with the influence of grammar and logic on each other is the considerable number of references Abelard makes to Priscian.[92] Abelard considers the grammarian's standpoint on the question of parts of speech. Aristotle treats only two parts of speech, the noun and the verb; however, grammarians distingush more.[93] Abelard also uses the term *causa inventionis*. Speaking about notions being the *signifi-*

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[87] For the mutual influence between grammar and logic, see L. M. de Rijk, *Logica modernorum*, 95-125 and 221-263.

[88] N. Kretzmann, "The Culmination of the Old Logic in Peter Abelard," in *Renaissance and Renewal in the Twelfth Century*, ed. R. L. Benson and G. Constable (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1985), 492.

[89] Peter Abelard, *Glossae*, 321.

[90] Ibid., 313.

[91] See the analysis of Abelard's views on the problem of universals in M. M. Tweedale, *Abailard on Universals* (Amsterdam: North-Holland, 1976).

[92] Abelard's interest in grammar is worth noting. He even composed a treatise on grammar, but it is not extant.

[93] Peter Abelard, *Glossae*, 311; He also devotes considerable attention to the distinction of nouns and names in his *Dialectica*, 121-142.

catum of words, he adds that they are also the causes of the invention of words.[94] These *causae inventionis* are again a concept quite often used by the twelfth-century grammarians. With William of Conches and Petrus Helias, they became the major concern of grammar.[95]

What appears most striking as a possible antecedent of the idea of *modi significandi* is Abelard's discussion of the uniformity of notions. He repeats Boethius' interpretation, giving again an example of a Roman and a Greek seeing a horse and perceiving it as a horse and not as a man.[96] However, Abelard also raises the question as to why Aristotle considers that notions are more universal than words. In his view, it is the mode of conceiving that makes notions the same, but words are also the same when it comes to their modes of signification. Whether in Latin or in Greek, *homo* or *anthropos* signify the same thing and in the same way.[97] The conclusion that Abelard then draws is that language too is in some sense universal. In still another example he clearly attributes the distinction of parts of speech to the various modes of conceiving. The words *currit* and *cursus* signify the same thing, but on account of the difference in notion, due to the different mode of conceiving, one is a noun, the other a verb.[98] This again resembles the modistic doctrine. In fact, his account of the differences between nouns and verbs clearly anticipates the notion of *modus significandi*.[99] Thus, it is rather probable that twelfth-century grammarians borrowed this idea directly from logic.[180]

It does not, of course, mean that we can identify the source of modistic ideas in Abelard. It shows rather the steady development of some attitudes and ideas, of which Abelard was no doubt an important exponent. It is more plausible, then, to assume that in the times of Abelard, it had already been quite accepted that the nature of *pars orationis* is to be attributed to the different modes of signifying.[181] Many twelfth-century gram-

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[94] Ibid., 309.

[95] K. M. Fredborg, "Speculative Grammar," in *A History of Twelfth-Century Western Philosophy*, ed. P. Dronke (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1988), 181-182.

[96] Peter Abelard, *Glossae*, 321; see also an example on p. 20.

[97] Ibid., 323.

[98] Ibid., 308; we find the same example also in Boethius of Dacia's treatise, which again shows the persistence and popularity of certain ideas as well as the repetitive character of logico-grammatical illustrative examples. See Boethius of Dacia, *Modi significandi*, 29: 86.

[99] *Non tam igitur in significatione temporis nomen a verbo recedere videtur quam in modo significandi.* Peter Abelard, *Dialectica*, 123: 15-16.

[180] K. M. Fredborg, "The Dependence of Petrus Helias' *Summa super Priscianum* on William of Conches' *Glose super Priscianum*," *CIMAGL* 11 (1973): 30; L. G. Kelly, "*Modus significandi:* An Interdisciplinary Concept," *Historiographia Linguistica* 6/2 (1979): 159.

[181] L. G. Kelly, "*Modus significandi*," 168.

matical *glossae* reveal the preoccupation with the *causae inventionis*, that is, the reasons for the existence of different *pars orationis*.[182] The difference between respective word classes gradually becomes interpreted in terms of *modus significandi, consignificatio*, or *officium*. William of Conches and Petrus Helias already use these concepts; however, they do so sparingly and inconsistently.[183] The following two quotations illustrate quite well the initial confusion of these terms: *Sepe enim voces habent eandem significationem ut 'lego' et 'lectio' nec tamen sunt eadem pars orationis quia non habent idem officium.*[184] An analogous example is used with the concept of *modus significandi*: *Dicimus igitur quod 'albus' idem accidens significat quod et 'albedo' sed aliter quia determinat inherentiam illius accidentis et subiecti quod hoc nomen 'albedo' non facit. Ergo hec duo nomina non in re significata differunt sed in modo significandi.*[185] It is clear that these grammarians already recognize the same linguistic phenomena as the later modists, but they still fail to describe them in an adequate, scholastic manner. The terminology they use is inconsistent. The notions largely overlap and are never defined properly. However, the germ of modistic theory is already present.

The twelfth-century grammarians also acknowledge the triadic semantic system of words, concepts, and things. For example, in the gloss *Promisimus* we read: *Sciendum quod in omni collocutione, idest unius ad alterum locutione, tria sunt necessaria: res supposita, intellectus, vox.*[186] Another anonymous commentary on Priscian also includes the written words: *Ad hec tria genera collocutionis quatuor sunt necessaria, scilicet res, intellectus, vox, littera.*[187] In fact, the Porphyrian model of signification is widely accepted by these grammarians. Thus, when the concept of *modi significandi* evolves, it is explained on the basis of the same scheme: a triad of *modi significandi, intelligendi*, and *essendi*, as seen in Boethius of Dacia's treatise.

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[182] R. W. Hunt, "Studies on Priscian in the Eleventh and Twelfth Centuries," in *History of Grammar in the Middle Ages: Collected Papers*, ed. G. L. Bursill-Hall (Amsterdam: John Benjamins, 1980), 18-19; L. M. de Rijk, *Logica Modernorum*, vol. 2/1, 110-111; K. M. Fredborg, "Speculative Grammar," 181-182; K. M. Fredborg, "The Dependence of Petrus Helias' *Summa super Priscianum* on William of Conches' *Glose super Priscianum*," 12- 15.

[183] Fredborg, "The Dependence of Petrus Helias," 28.

[184] William of Conches, *Glose*, quoted in K. M. Fredborg, "The Dependence of Petrus Helias," 22.

[185] William of Conches, *Glose*, quoted in K. M. Fredborg, "The Dependence of Petrus Helias," 31.

[186] Hunt, "Studies on Priscian in the Eleventh and Twelfth Centuries," 48.

[187] L. M. de Rijk, *Logica modernorum*, vol. 2/1, 239.

The study of *causae inventionis* turned the attention of the grammarians away from the actual use of language, causing them to concentrate instead on its formal features. These features were related predominantly to the semantic properties of words, thus bringing into the foreground the objective, universal elements of the generally accepted model of signification, namely concepts and things. This formalization of the subject of grammar was carried to such an extent that sometimes concepts even replaced words in the linguistic analysis. The anonymous author of a grammatical compendium *Breve sit* seems to confuse names and concepts; moreover, he falsely interprets Boethius: *Et quod 'homo' et 'antropos' sint idem nomen innuit Boethius dicens quod eadem sunt dictiones apud omnes et cum Graeca definitio et Latina definitio sint eadem definitio, eadem ratione nomen Latinum et nomen Graecum sunt idem nomen.*[188] Quite similarly, Pseudo Kilwardby seems to refer to concepts rather than words when he says that *sermo in mente* should be the real subject of grammatical science since it is universal.[189]

Thus, when grammarians were faced with the question of *species grammaticae*,[190] they were induced by the formalized study of language to believe that grammar itself was universal, and it could be applied to different languages. For Dominicus Gundissalinus, the species of grammar in different languages all form one genus, which is universal:

> *Species vero artis sunt ea in quorum unoquoque tota ars continetur, ad similitudinem specierum generis in quarum unaquaque totum genus invenitur. Species igitur artis grammatice sunt genera linguarum ut latina, greca, ebrea, arabica et similia, quoniam in unaqueque earum invenitur tota grammatica cum omnibus partibus suis.* [191]

K. M. Fredborg presumes that the idea of universal grammar was already well acknowledged in the twelfth century.[192] However, the twelfth-century grammarians failed to indicate explicitly which elements of grammar they considered to be constant for all languages. They dif-

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[188] Fredborg, "Universal Grammar According to Some Twelfth-Century Grammarians," *Historiographia Linguistica* 7/1-2 (1980): 81; other excerpts of *Breve sit* on pp. 78-80.

[189] Pseudo Kilwardby, *Commentum*, 1.2.1: 10.

[190] The twelfth-century manuals of *artes* usually began with a general introduction in which the author examined the genus, the species, the parts, the subject, the goals, the instruments, and the person of *artifex* of a particular art (e.g. grammar), see: R. W. Hunt, "The Introduction to the *Artes* in the Twelfth Century," in *History of Grammar in the Middle Ages: Collected Papers*, ed. G. L. Bursill-Hall (Amsterdam: John Benjamins, 1980), 117-144.

[191] Dominicus Gundissalinus, *De divisione philosophiae*, ed. L. Baur, *BGPTMA* 4/2-3, (Munster: Aschendorf, 1903), 50.

[192] Fredborg, "Universal Grammar According to Some Twelfth Century Grammarians," 74.

ferentiated between the task of an *artifex,* being the actual application of grammatical rules in a particular language, and the role identified as a grammarian teaching these rules: *Grammaticus enim dicitur proprie qui artem docet, litterator qui artem exercet.* [193] We find a similar idea also in Pseudo Kilwardby:

> *Dicendum quod grammatica est ars et est scientia, sed dicitur scientia in quantum nominat habitum animae ut in quiete. Dicitur autem ars in quantum nominat eundem habitum ut in opere.*[194]

Thus, he distinguishes between practical and theoretical aspects of grammar. Clearly, the theoretical relates to the universal elements; whereas, the practical relates to the actual use of language. However, similar to the twelfth-century grammarians, Pseudo Kilwardby is not explicit in defining and explaining the parts of grammar considered to be universal.

This is the accomplishment of the modistic grammarians who succeeded in constructing an adequate theoretical framework. The components of this theory were already present in the work of their predecessors, but only with the Modistae proper were all these elements linked together to form a consistent doctrine. The concept of *modi significandi,* the idea of one grammar valid for all languages, and the Porphyrian semantic model were not new concepts; however, when combined, they formed an original paradigm. The system of *modi* was developed on the basis of Porphyrian semantics. The direct dependence of *modi significandi* on the *modi intelligendi* constituted a link between the concepts believed to be universal and the surface structure of language, thus reasserting grammar in its pretensions to universality.

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[193] Petrus Helias, *Summa super Priscianum,* ed. L. Reilly (Toronto: Pontifical Institute of Mediaeval Studies, 1993), 3-4.
[194] Pseudo Kilwardby, *Commentum,* 1.4.1: 28.