

SPECULATIVE GRAMMARS OF THE MIDDLE AGES

APPROACHES TO SEMIOTICS

edited by

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SPECULATIVE GRAMMARS
OF THE
MIDDLE AGES

THE DOCTRINE OF *PARTES ORATIONIS*
OF THE MODISTAE

by

G. L. BURSILL-HALL

1971

MOUTON

THE HAGUE • PARIS

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*To my Mother and
the memory of my Father*

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North Vancouver, 1968

G. L. Bursill-Hall

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INTRODUCTION

This study was approved in substantially its present form for the Ph.D. degree in the University of London in 1959.

The work represents a somewhat new departure for studies in General Linguistics. The speculative grammarians of the Middle Ages are quite well known to most students of the Middle Ages but are almost unknown to the majority of modern linguists. This book attempts to make a critical examination of some of these mediaeval grammarians,¹ *not*, however, by a mediaevalist but by a modern linguist; the aim has been to examine and describe the grammatical theories, in particular the theories of the *partes orationis*, of a group of speculative grammarians now known as the *Modistae*, who were active in the later 13th and 14th centuries.

Grammatical theory and study in Europe can look back on an unbroken past of some 2000 years but little is known, however, by modern linguists about this long and illustrious past. Professor R. H. Robins has shown² the broad lines of progress in grammatical study from the ancient Greeks to the close of the Middle Ages and has more recently given us a general history of linguistics;³ we have, however, no detailed history of linguistics which takes us up to the present era, but, as Professor H. Hoenigswald has pointed out,⁴ it is not yet possible to write the full history of grammatical theory, since so much of the original material remains to be edited and interpreted. Robins, indeed,

¹ This work is based to a very great extent on the grammars of Siger de Courtrai and Thomas of Erfurt; constant reference is made throughout to the grammars of Martin of Dacia and Michel de Marbais. A separate study of Martin is in preparation; his work would appear to be of particular interest since he was probably the first of the *Modistae*, viz. H. Roos, "Die erste Gruppe, deren vorzüglichster und vielleicht erster Vertreter der Traktat des Martinus de Dacia ist . . ." (*Die Modi Significandi des Martinus de Dacia*, 1952, p. 132).

² R. H. Robins, *Ancient and Mediaeval Grammatical Theory in Europe* (London, 1951).

³ R. H. Robins, *A Short History of Linguistics* (London, 1967).

⁴ H. M. Hoenigswald, Review of: "R. H. Robins, *Ancient and Mediaeval Grammatical Theory in Europe*", *Language* 29 (1953), 180-182.

has also provided us with a more detailed examination of the grammatical theories of Dionysius Thrax,⁵ and the present book is similarly a critical examination of the theories of a group of grammarians of the Middle Ages, i.e. the Modistae, and is in effect a study *in depth* of this group of grammarians.

The Modistae are of particular interest to the modern linguist in that they represent a stage in the development of grammatical theory in the Middle Ages not unlike the present position in modern linguistics. Professor W. O. Dingwall has pointed out⁶ that sciences tend to pass from classification to the establishment of theory; it is reasonable to say that such a progression may be observed between Priscian and the Modistae who were concerned with the construction of an over-all theory in terms of Latin just as scholars such as N. A. Chomsky, C. F. Hockett, and M. A. K. Halliday have as their object the formalisation of a linguistic theory, almost it would seem, to the exclusion of descriptive matters. Professor Hockett, in his Presidential address,⁷ referred to 'break-throughs' in his account of the development of modern linguistics and we may similarly refer to 'break-throughs' in the development of mediaeval linguistics;⁸ the Modistae attempted an 'accountability hypothesis', though it would be foolhardy to develop the analogy any further.

In recent years, a great deal of interest in the history of linguistics has been aroused; many graduate schools and the Summer Institutes of the Linguistic Society of America now offer courses in the history of linguistics.⁹ This interest has tended to be limited to post-Saussurean linguistics or at best to linguistics, since Humboldt, but along with the researches of individual scholars this has done much to awaken

⁵ R. H. Robins, "Dionysius Thrax and the Western Grammatical Tradition", *TPS* (1957), 67-106.

⁶ W. O. Dingwall, "Transformational Grammar: Form and Theory", *Lingua* 12 (1963), 233-275.

⁷ C. F. Hockett, "Sound Change", *Language* 41 (1965), 185-204.

⁸ Peter Helias: "Species cuiuslibet artis qualitates sunt quas artifex per artem attribuit materie. Cum enim species pluribus modis accipiatur, hic pro forma vel pro qualitate ponitur. Sunt ergo species artis grammaticae genera linguarum in quibus ars grammatica tractata est et composita". (Ch. Thurot, pp. 126-127.) Robert Kilwardby: "Cum scientia maneat eadem apud omnes, et subiectum eius idem manet. Quare subiectum grammatice debet manere idem omnibus." (Ch. Thurot, p. 127.)

Roger Bacon: "grammatica una et eadem est secundum substantiam in omnibus linguis, licet accidentaliter varietur." (*Gram. Graec.* Oxford MS, ed. Charles, p. 278.) Cf. also R. H. Robins, *Op. cit.*, p. 77.

⁹ It is perhaps not without significance that at the Seventeenth Annual Round Table Meeting of the Institute of Languages and Linguistics of Georgetown University a whole session should have been devoted to the history of linguistics.

a lively interest in this aspect of linguistic science. More recently still, the work of Professor Chomsky¹⁰ has prompted a great expansion in studies in the linguistic theories of our predecessors.

The significance of Chomsky's contribution has been to demonstrate that the forefathers of modern linguistics – and by that is meant the students of grammar *prior* to the 19th century – were far from being linguistically naive, and that they discussed problems concerning the nature of language which are of the greatest relevance to the *speculations* of the modern linguist.¹¹ Furthermore, as Chomsky implies, and this is one of the principal underlying themes of the present work, these ideas were developed in an intellectual context quite different from that of today. We reject much of the work of these earlier linguists because we reject the intellectual tradition that nurtured them;¹² nevertheless, the earlier grammarians were studying aspects of the nature of language which are of perennial interest,¹³ and it is surely one of the functions of the historian of linguistics to examine the 'capital of ideas' of our predecessors and to suggest their exploitation in the further study of language.¹⁴ We achieve nothing, however, if we insist on viewing them through the filter of our own intellectual environment; they must be seen in terms of a very different situation and it is therefore imperative that the student of the history of linguistics become a participant in the situation.¹⁵

It is a good thing for the modern linguist to begin to realise that his predecessors did have considerable insights into general linguistic theory and the problems of linguistic description¹⁶ and that they had much to say on these fascinating subjects.¹⁷ It is important that the modern linguist become aware of the history of his science and thereby obtain a more appropriate sense of his own place in a long and honoured

¹⁰ N. A. Chomsky, *Current Issues in Linguistic Theory (Janua Linguarum, Series Minor XXXVIII)*, 1964. N. A. Chomsky, *Cartesian Linguistics* (New York, 1966).

¹¹ N. A. Chomsky, *Cartesian Linguistics*, p. 1.

¹² G. L. Bursill-Hall, "Notes on the Semantics of Linguistic Description", *In Memory of J. R. Firth* (London, 1966), 40-51.

¹³ R. G. Godfrey, "Late Mediaeval Linguistic Meta-Theory and Chomsky's Syntactic Structures", *Word* 21 (1965), 251-256. N. A. Chomsky, *Cartesian Linguistics*, pp. 72-73. R. H. Robins, "The Development of the Word Class System of the European Grammatical Tradition", *Foundations of Language* 2 (1966), 3-19. D. T. Langendoen, "A Note on the Linguistic Theory of M. Terentius Varro", *Foundations of Language* 2 (1966), 33-36.

¹⁴ N. A. Chomsky, *Cartesian Linguistics*, p. 3.

¹⁵ G. L. Bursill-Hall, *Op. cit.*, pp. 41-42.

¹⁶ N. A. Chomsky, *Current Issues*, pp. 15-16.

¹⁷ Cf. D. Abercrombie, "Our Antecedents are Older and Better than we Think." "Forgotten Phoneticians", *Studies in Phonetics and Linguistics* (Oxford, 1965), p. 75.

tradition. It is probably true to say that the revival of interest in the ancient and mediaeval grammatical traditions derives in great part from the shift in emphasis in modern linguistics. Prior to the fifties, linguistics was concerned essentially with phonology and morphology with only a peripheral interest in syntax (what Dingwall has called the 'classification of observable properties and relations'),¹⁸ whereas there is no question that linguistics in the late fifties and sixties has become grammar oriented. One result of the earlier emphasis on phonology had been the proper recognition of the excellence of Indian work in phonetics and an almost total disregard of the Graeco-Roman tradition, whereas the contemporary shift in emphasis to grammar has produced a rehabilitation of the achievements of the ancient, mediaeval, and early modern grammatical traditions;¹⁹ as Robins points out,²⁰ the linguistic achievement of grammarians prior to the 19th century was in grammar.

There is, however, a great deal more still to be done before linguists will be in a position to write the history of their science. In the last few years, critical editions of the Danish 'Modistae' have appeared,²¹ but if, for example, we consider the period of the later Middle Ages, beginning with the rediscovery of Aristotle, we find that there are a larger number of grammarians, prior to the Modistae, scholars of real importance in their day whose work has never been interpreted by the modern linguist – I refer to the work of scholars such as Peter Helias, John of Salisbury, Petrus Hispanus,²² Robert Kilwardby, Roger Bacon; unfortunately, much of their work still remains unedited. This is one field at least where there can be genuine and fruitful cooperation between the philologist and the structural linguist.

¹⁸ W. O. Dingwall, *Op. cit.*, p. 256.

¹⁹ N. A. Chomsky, *Current Issues*, p. 16.

²⁰ R. H. Robins, *A. and M.*, p. 4.

²¹ A. Otto (ed.), *Johannis Daci Opera. (Corpus Philosophorum Danicorum Medii Aevi, I)* (Copenhagen, 1955). H. Roos (ed.), *Martini de Daci Opera. (Corpus Philosophorum Danicorum Medii Aevi, II)* (Copenhagen, 1961). A. Otto (ed.), *Simonis Daci Opera (Corpus Philosophorum Danicorum Medii Aevi, III)* (Copenhagen, 1961). J. Pinborg and H. Roos (eds.), *Boethii Daci Opera (Corpus Philosophorum Danicorum Medii Aevi, IV)* (Copenhagen, 1969). This last work was in fact published after this study was completed.

²² Petrus Hispanus was not in fact a grammarian. There are editions available of his so-called "Summulae", viz. J. P. Mullally (ed.), *The "Summulae Logicales" of Peter of Spain (Publications in Medieval Studies, VIII)* (Notre Dame, 1945); this is not a complete version, and I. M. Bochenski (ed.), *Petri Hispani Summulae Logicales* (Rome, 1947). Professor de Rijk is preparing the first critical edition.

I

A SHORT HISTORY OF GRAMMAR IN ANCIENT AND MEDIAEVAL EUROPE

A. GENERAL OUTLINE

The study of grammar in Europe has a long and fruitful history¹ and linguistics is now recognised in most universities as an autonomous academic discipline. It has not always enjoyed such a privileged position although there have been occasional periods when the study of grammar achieved quasi-autonomy; for the most part, however, linguistic speculation in the past was carried on by men who were not primarily grammarians. An examination of the theories of these grammarians of the past has its own intrinsic worth but another service that such study does is to stress the degree of interpenetration that must obtain between linguistics and various associated disciplines, and in the past theories and terminologies from associated disciplines, e.g. logic, metaphysics, etc.² have been introduced to support and explain the speculations on the nature of grammar.

One such period when grammar achieved a position of prominence was the later Middle Ages; theirs was a grammatical heritage of considerable wealth and can be traced back to a number of sources. The Greeks were pioneers in grammatical theory as in so many other fields, and the mediaeval grammarians derived many of their ideas from them. Mediaeval grammarians were also logicians and influenced obviously by Plato and Aristotle, but prior to the rediscovery of Aristotle, the mediaeval schoolmen had to rely on the translations of Boethius for their knowledge of Aristotle.³ Peter Helias and scholars such as Robert Kilwardby who (particularly the former) were the creators of the mediaeval grammatical tradition achieved, it would seem, a remarkable

¹ J. R. Firth, "The Technique of Semantics", *Papers in Linguistics*, p. 139.

² G. L. Bursill-Hall, "Notes on the Semantics of Linguistic Description", *In Memoriam J. R. Firth*, pp. 40-51.

³ H. M. Barrett, *Boethius. Some Aspects of his Times and Work* (Cambridge, 1940); H. O. Taylor, *The Mediaeval Mind* (New York, 1925).

synthesis of these lines of descent from Aristotle, Plato, the Stoics, and the Alexandrian grammarians, via (i) the new discoveries of the later works of Aristotle, (ii) the Aristotelian tradition through the translations of Boethius who is himself a scholar of importance in the history of grammatical thought during the early Middle ages, and (iii) the Greek grammatical tradition of Thrax and Apollonius as they had been transmitted to the Middle Ages by Donatus, Priscian, and their commentators.⁴ It remained for the Modistae to confirm this tradition in their own work which reveals the culmination of the grammatical and logical theories of the Greeks expressed in the language of the schoolmen but using the organisation of the Latin grammarians.

We can point to three important sources on which the Modistae were able to draw in the construction of their theories. The first is the pioneering work of the Greek philosophers. Thrax and Apollonius had themselves derived their grammatical theories from Aristotle, the Stoics, and other philosophers of language in the sense that these philosophers were the great pioneers of grammatical writing in ancient Greece, and without their work the theories of the Alexandrian school would not really have been possible. This is the second source, though it can be considered an indirect one, dormant through the history of grammar from the Alexandrians onward, until it appears once more as a positive factor in the great synthesis of grammarians of the 12th and 13th centuries, such as Peter Helias and Robert Kilwardby who wrote commentaries on Priscian's grammar using the terminology and critical processes that they had acquired from ancient Greek logical and philosophical works which had recently been discovered by the West.

The third source is through the influence of Peter Helias and other commentators of Priscian; there seems to be some doubt about Peter's exact status in the academic world of the 12th century⁵ but it seems safe to say that he was the first in the mediaeval world to make a *systematic* attempt to relate the ideas of the new philosophy (i.e. Aristotle's rediscovered philosophy) to the study of grammar. Peter Helias thus represents one of the first attempts to make a fusion of the two schools of Greek grammatical theory, *i.e.* Aristotle, the Stoics, and other philosophical schools on the one hand, and on the other the grammatical theories of Thrax and Apollonius transmitted to the Middle Ages by Priscian – two schools which had for so long remained separate.

⁴ R. H. Robins, "Dionysius Thrax and the Western Grammatical Tradition", *TPS* (1957), 67-106.

⁵ R. W. Hunt, "Studies on Priscian in the 11th and 12th Centuries", *Mediaeval and Renaissance Studies* 2 (1950), p. 39.

B. GREEK GRAMMARIANS

The contributions of the linguistic scholarship of the Ancient Greek world have long been known to European scholarship and it is regrettable that this contribution has been misjudged by those scholars who have tended to view linguistics in terms of phonetics and phonology and who therefore have prized the work of the earliest Indian linguists at the expense of the Greeks. In recent years, there has been an increasing recognition of the importance of the Greek contribution, and this too has been coincidental with a shift in emphasis in modern linguistics. The Greek achievement was in grammar and with them we can see the burgeoning of a tradition which has continued with little interruption to the present day.⁶

The relevance of Greek grammatical scholarship in the present context is directed to its contribution to mediaeval grammatical thought⁷ and we shall see that its influence, though in no real sense a direct one, was nonetheless enormous. In a sense the mediaeval grammarian represents the culmination of the three great traditions of ancient linguistic scholarship, *i.e.* the philosophical tradition which began with the Pre-Socratics, the grammatical tradition of the Alexandrians, and the adaptation of the Greek descriptive scheme to Latin, especially in the work of the late Latin grammarians Donatus and Priscian. Professor R. H. Robins, who has done more than any other modern linguist to make us aware of the extent and value of Greek grammatical scholarship,⁸ points out that their basic procedure was classification of the word-classes and grammatical categories and that this classification was done by means of definitions in basically Aristotelian form. It is very suggestive to think that mediaeval grammatical theory which was in fact based in terms of its classificatory procedures on the unbroken Aristotelian tradition should come to its full fruition after the re-discovery of the Aristotelian logical tradition. Professor T. Langendoen has shown⁹ that classical, especially Greek linguistic scholarship, was amongst other things concerned with levels of theoretical adequacy.¹⁰

⁶ R. H. Robins, "The Development of the Word Class System of the European Grammatical Tradition", *Foundations of Language* 2 (1966), 3-19.

⁷ R. H. Robins, *Ancient and Mediaeval Grammatical Theory in Europe* (London, 1951). This work will be referred to frequently and will be abbreviated as *A and M*.

⁸ R. H. Robins, *cf.* the items already mentioned.

⁹ T. Langendoen, "A Note on the Linguistic Theory of M. Tevntius Varro", *Foundations of Language* 2 (1966), 33-36.

¹⁰ Langendoen points out that Greek scholarship referred to what we might call four levels of adequacy. He points out also that Greek linguistic scholarship never

The interesting fact is that the mediaeval grammarians married successfully the Aristotelian grammatical and logical traditions and that the Modistae in particular welded this with their own philosophical tradition to produce of Latin grammar a very different interpretation which required explanatory adequacy rather than descriptive adequacy.¹¹ And although the Modistae worked entirely within the framework for Latin which had been settled by Priscian, it is nonetheless possible to trace the origins of this framework back beyond the Stoic and Alexandrian schools to the speculations of Plato and Aristotle.

The details of Greek (and Latin) grammatical theory are well known and it is unnecessary to spell them out once more in this essay.¹² The earliest records in Europe of grammatical writing go back to the Pre-Socratic philosophers and Rhetoricians but the first grammatical thinker of significance was undoubtedly Plato, and it can be said of him that he 'first considered the potentialities of grammar'.¹³ It was Plato who justified, on logical or philosophical grounds however, the separation of the noun and verb. Grammatical theory was further developed by Aristotle, but at no stage in the work of these thinkers do we find specific grammatical treatises; philosophical and grammatical studies were accepted as parts of the general body of knowledge, but statements of grammatical reference have to be abstracted from a body of treatise which were not grammatical in tone or intent.

It is not until we reach the Stoics that we find that grammar is accorded a separate place, but even so it is not an autonomous place; grammar was accorded a place in their philosophical system. With the Stoics, grammar made important advances and although grammar is continually influenced by philosophy, it was studied by them as a separate branch of learning. They gave to grammar a definite place in a wider scheme of general linguistic scholarship and for the first time we find scholars attempting to frame a general theory of language.¹⁴

The importance and originality of the contributions of Greek philosophers to a general theory of grammar are beyond dispute, but the next stage in Greek grammatical work is in many ways the most significant for its intrinsic value and for the influence it had on sub-

sought to go beyond descriptive adequacy; it is also reasonable to say that Priscian was content with observational adequacy.

¹¹ N. Chomsky, *Current Issues in Linguistic Theory (Janua Linguarum, Series Minor XXXVIII)* (The Hague, 1964), Chapter 2.

¹² R. H. Robins, *A. and M.*, and other items already listed.

¹³ R. H. Robins, *A. and M.*, p. 17.

¹⁴ R. H. Robins, *A. and M.*, p. 25.

sequent grammatical theory in that it provided a framework which has to all intents and purposes survived to the present day. The Alexandrian school¹⁵ should be considered much more as a group of specialist grammarians than as philosophers of language; they also introduced a new factor into grammatical study, *i.e.* a consciousness of their literary past and the divergence between the spoken Greek of their day and classical literary Greek. Priscian took the Alexandrian grammarians as his model and 'literary' grammarians basing their own work on the language of literature became the mode for the transmission of grammatical theory into the Latin speaking world; as such, they became the model for grammatical teaching in the mediaeval world and indeed the later speculative grammarians continued to accept the Priscianic framework even if their premises and criteria differed quite radically.

The key figures of the Alexandrian school were Dionysius Thrax and Apollonius Dyscolus;¹⁶ Thrax formalised the word-class system which became the basis of the syntactic works of Apollonius and it was this combined system which was passed on to Priscian. Thrax is very typical of this new style of grammarian. For him, grammar had the practical purpose of preserving the Greek language from decay; this definition of grammar was to place an emphasis on literature in contrast to colloquial speech. This too is the starting point of a tradition in grammatical work which has to a great extent survived to the present. The value of the work of Thrax is that he was much more linguistic than any of his predecessors; his word-classes were defined to a very large extent in formal terms of morphology and syntax. None of his successors in the Greek or Latin worlds achieved the same degree of formal descriptive rigour.

It is far too facile for us to reject the work of the Greek grammarians; wholesale rejection of the work of our predecessors has no more place in scholarship than the indiscriminate acceptance of modern ideas. The Greeks began their grammatical theorising and practice from nothing and we should honour them for their awareness of the world about them. To disparage them would be to lose sight of the importance and extent of their achievements; instead, we must be grateful for the intellectual curiosity which led them to speculate on the nature of language and to build up a framework of grammatical study which became the basis of almost all subsequent grammatical work, an inheritance we enjoy today.

¹⁵ R. H. Robins, *Thrax*, p. 36.

¹⁶ Thrax lived in the first century B.C. and Apollonius some 200 years later.

C. LATIN GRAMMARIANS

The contributions of Latin grammarians to general grammatical theory are pale in comparison to those of the Greeks. The Romans admired the achievements of the Greeks in original thought and it was the Roman genius for organisation that protected these Greek achievements. As far as grammar is concerned, the Romans were faced with a different task since they had to hand a systematic approach to the problem of the organisation and description of linguistic form-classes. The Latin grammarians were, however, content to apply the Greek grammatical system to a description of Latin word-classes and grammatical categories rather than set up a grammatical system for Latin in terms of Latin.¹⁷ It is for this reason that it is difficult to ascribe any degree of originality to their work, since, with one notable exception, they confined themselves in the construction of their models to observational adequacy, though it must be conceded that there are what we might call 'flashes' of descriptive adequacy in Priscian's work.

There are three Latin grammarians of note who must be mentioned in this brief account of the contributions of Rome to grammatical theory, *i.e.* Varro, Donatus, and Priscian. There is no doubt that Varro¹⁸ was a grammarian of originality, and indeed, as Langendoen has suggested, Varro was the only grammarian of the ancient classical world

¹⁷ R. H. Robins, *A. and M.*, p. 48.

¹⁸ Varro established a distinction between VOLUNTARY and NATURAL derivation on lines which in a way anticipated the Modistic distinction of ABSOLUTE and RESPECTIVE within the modes of signifying. He described VOLUNTARY DERIVATION as something which is not conditioned by external factors, *i.e. declinationum . . . voluntarium est, quo ut cuiusque tulit voluntas declinavit* (*De Lingua Latina*, VIII. 21); this would today be called derivation which does not involve the word in syntactic relations with other sentence constituents. He described NATURAL DERIVATION as something which is conditioned by external factors, *i.e. naturalem declinationem dico, quae non a singulorum oritur voluntate, sed a communi consensu* (*De Lingua Latina*, VIII. 22). This would today be called inflection — Varro in fact referred to case-forms — and this does have a specific syntactic function.

The Modistae divided the modes of signifying into absolute and respective, *cf.* pp. 106-107. The absolute is internal to the modes of signifying and excludes all reference to other word-classes; accidental modes such as *species* and *figura* (in the *nomen*), which describe the derivational features of the *nomen*, are absolute modes and as such have no syntactic function. The respective mode is considered in terms of the mutual relations which can be established between the word-classes, so that the respective mode must be syntactically functional; accidental modes such as *casus* and *declinatio* (in the *nomen*), which describe the inflectional features of the *nomen*, are relative modes and as such do have a syntactic function.

There is no evidence, however, that the Modistae were directly influenced by Varro in setting up their distinction of absolute and relative.

to deal with the problem of explanatory adequacy.¹⁹ It is, however, impossible to make any real judgment of Varro's contribution to grammatical theory since his work has come down to us far from complete; in any case, a consideration of his work is not germane to this study, since he does not appear to have had any influence at all on mediaeval grammatical theory.

It is not until we reach the time of the Late Latin grammarians, especially Donatus and Priscian,²⁰ that we find significant contributions in the context of mediaeval grammatical theory. Their intellectual climate was not unlike that of the Alexandrian grammarians; they were conscious of their literary past and they were intent on the preservation of the literary language. They were not innovators of linguistic and grammatical theories, and were content to follow on the lines of their Greek predecessors.²¹

Their most significant task was their massive compilation of the facts of the Latin Language; their importance is further enhanced by their influence on the grammarians of the Middle Ages, as their works became the accepted textbooks of the Middle Ages. Of the two, Priscian is the more prominent and his grammar has survived in more than a thousand manuscripts which is striking testimony of its popularity. It is reasonable to state that his work remains the most complete statement of the facts of Latin. He made meaning his main criterion in grammar,²² although in actual fact he kept to the more formal classification developed by the Alexandrians. He did not, however, make his definitions according to any consistent principle since we find, alongside meaning, criteria such as formal structure and philosophical abstractions; in precision and consistency of theory, it does not compare to Thrax's work on which it is based, by Priscian's own admission. Its importance to us in the present study is that it was the source on which the mediaeval grammarians drew so extensively; this will account for the sparseness of illustration to be found in so many mediaeval grammatical writings, since they were almost always commentaries in their own terms of Priscian's grammar of Latin.

¹⁹ Varro lived in the 1st century B.C.; he may not have been the first Roman grammarian, but it is with Varro that the study of grammar by the Romans really begins.

²⁰ Donatus taught in Rome during the 4th century A.D.; Priscian taught in Constantinople during the 6th century A.D.

²¹ R. H. Robins, *A. and M.*, p. 62.

²² Priscian (II, 16-7): *non aliter possunt discerni a se partes orationis, nisi uniuscuiusque proprietates significationem attendamus.*

It would be quite wrong to belittle and disparage the work of the Late Latin grammarians. Their achievements were great and lasting; they built the foundations on which mediaeval scholars could know, develop, and criticise classical grammar. It was this knowledge which enabled Western scholars to keep alive, during the early Middle Ages, the study of literature and other scholarly pursuits.

D. MEDIAEVAL GRAMMARIANS

1

There are wide and serious gaps in our knowledge of the development of grammatical theory between the 6th and 11th centuries. We know little if anything of the works of *e.g.* Boethius, Cassiodorus, Isidore of Seville, Aelfric, to mention but a few. What is beyond dispute is that grammar came to hold a position of considerable privilege in the programme of university studies in the Middle Ages; it achieved this not only because of its intrinsic importance, but because it became the key to what the mediaeval schoolmen considered higher forms of learning, *i.e.* dialectic and theology.²³ The curriculum of the mediaeval university was built around the Liberal Arts which were divided into the Trivium and Quadrivium;²⁴ grammar was the first subject of the Trivium and naturally assumed the position of pre-requisite to all the Liberal Arts, being the necessary study for the reading and writing of the 'universal'²⁵ language of learning, *i.e.* Latin. Thus grammar came to be studied for its own sake as part of human culture and for the study of classical authors, particularly of the Latin Bible.²⁶

The year 1000 can be said to mark the transition from one of the darkest periods to a period of progress culminating in the intellectual

²³ R. W. Hunt, "Studies in Priscian in the 11th and 12th Centuries", *Mediaeval and Renaissance Studies* I and II (1941-43: 1950), 194-231: 1-56, *cf.* 194: "If we neglect grammatical theory, we are cutting ourselves off from an important source for understanding the thought of the 11th and 12th centuries. At that time everyone had to study grammar, and it was regarded as the 'foundation and root' of all teaching. Its influence is as pervasive as that of logic and may be seen in unexpected places, in theology and even more in logic itself; no study of the logical doctrines of the early 12th century would be adequate which did not take account of Priscian and the glossators of his work". *Cf.* also J. P. Mullally, *The "Summulae Logicales" of Peter of Spain (Publications in Mediaeval Studies VIII)* (Notre Dame, 1945), especially Introduction, XI-XCVII.

²⁴ These terms are attributed to Boethius.

²⁵ In the mediaeval sense of the term.

²⁶ R. H. Robins, *A. and M.*, p. 70.

revival of the 12th century.²⁷ This period coincided with the encouragement given to learning by Charlemagne, one of his greatest services being the encouragement of the study of grammar.²⁸ Prior to this period, however, grammar as a science appears to have made no progress; grammar was defined and practised as the art of speaking and writing correctly and the art of interpreting the poets,²⁹ the text-books used being the grammars of Donatus and Priscian.

The second period of learning in the Middle Ages, the so-called 'Renaissance of the 12th century',³⁰ during which time grammar came to be regarded as a pre-requisite for all scholarship, dates from the middle of the 11th century and can be thought of as continuing up to the end of the 13th century,³¹ a period in the history of grammar which culminated in the complete philosophy of language of the Modistae.³² Four important and closely connected facts characterise the intellectual history of this period insofar as grammar is concerned: (a) the discovery of Aristotle and the concomitant introduction of logic into grammar; (b) the influence of William of Conches and Peter Helias; (c) the triumph of the grammarians over the humanistic schools of the 'authors', *i.e.* the struggle between Orleans and Chartres, the home of the study of classical literature, against the rising influence of logic in the schools of Paris;³³ (d) the constitution of speculative grammar embodying the new knowledge which followed upon the rediscovery of Aristotle's philosophical works and which culminated in the treatises on the modes of signifying (*Summa modorum significandi*) of the Modistae. A more detailed statement is to be found in Pinborg's excellent account (Pinborg 1967: 55-6).

2

The Middle Ages are often divided into two periods, the first going up to the 12th century and the second to the Renaissance. Such a division

²⁷ J. E. Sandys, *A History of Classical Scholarship*, Vol. I (Cambridge, 1921), p. 514.

²⁸ G. Wallerand, *Les Œuvres de Siger de Courtrai (Les Philosophes belges VIII)* (Louvain, 1913), p. 34.

²⁹ Quintilian: *recte loquendi scientiam et poetarum enarrationem (De institutione oratoria, I. IV. 2)*.

³⁰ C. H. Haskins, *The Renaissance of the 12th Century* (Cambridge, Mass., 1927).

³¹ The Modistae span a period of at least 100 years, *i.e.* ca. 1250-ca. 1350, *cf.* J. Pinborg, *Die Entwicklung der Sprachtheorie im Mittelalter*.

³² G. Wallerand, *Op. cit.*, p. 34.

³³ This is well described in Henri d'Andeli's allegorical poem "La Bataille des Sept Arts", published by L. J. Paetow, *The Battle of the Seven Arts (Memoirs of the University of California IV)* (Berkeley, 1914).

is of course artificial, but well before the 12th century certain influences were experienced which were to have a profound effect on mediaeval grammatical theories. The first period was formative and contains little of interest in the history of grammar; it merely uses theories and methods already well established and which derive directly from Donatus and Priscian. Latin was the only classical language in use since Greek was, to all intents and purposes, unknown; indeed, the only Greek works known to the early Middle Ages were those that had survived in Latin translations.³⁴

In the earlier mediaeval period, the study of grammar was carried on as preparation for the serious study of literature; Latin literary studies in northern France in the first half of the 12th century gave every promise of leading to a great revival of classical literary studies,³⁵ and the work of John of Salisbury suggests that the 12th century was well on the way to a real comprehension of classical civilisation. This was cut short by the growing interest in dialectical and theological studies which followed upon the rediscovery of ancient Greek philosophy; the decline in the study of the classics and other literary pursuits can be attributed directly to the rise of dialectic to a position of undisputed eminence in the arts.³⁶

By 1215, classical authors were absent from the Arts course in the University of Paris and by 1255, only Donatus and Priscian remained of the ancient Latin authors; the plain fact is that the classical literary tradition which had been so superbly fostered by the cathedral schools of Chartres and Orleans died of sheer starvation, because the ideas which the study of Aristotle produced became too absorbing to allow the study of the classical authors to remain important.³⁷ Grammar, the weathervane of intellectual change, turned from the study of literature to a logical science, a speculative philosophical discipline, and its problems were no longer solved by reference to the best Latin literature

³⁴ Thomas Aquinas, however, is known to have used translations made directly from the Greek, whereas most mediaeval schoolmen of this period knew Greek philosophy only through the translations and commentaries of Arab and Jewish scholars which came to Europe via Spain. Robert Grosseteste and Roger Bacon both knew Greek and the former particularly made many translations into Latin from Greek and not only of Aristotle.

³⁵ F. B. Artz, *The Mind of the Middle Ages* (New York, 1953), p. 433.

³⁶ L. J. Paetow, *The Arts Course at Mediaeval Universities with Special Reference to Grammar and Rhetoric* (*The University of Illinois Studies*, III, 7) (Urbana, 1909), p. 29.

³⁷ L. J. Paetow, *The Arts Course at Mediaeval Universities*, p. 29.

but by logic.³⁸ The liberation of grammar from philological restraints, the influence of Aristotle, and the commentaries of Arab scholars produced a new orientation in grammatical studies; from being a pedagogical, normative subject, it became philosophical, theoretical, and speculative, and the introduction of logic made grammar the 'handmaid of the philosopher'.³⁹

In the 12th and 13th centuries the study of logic and its pervasion of grammar spread throughout northern Europe, and the digestion of Aristotle's logic became the greatest intellectual task of the period.⁴⁰ The progressive invasion of the University of Paris by the doctrine of Aristotle is a well known fact, but we are still far from knowing the details with any precision.⁴¹

There is a great difference, however, between grammar in northern Europe, and in France south of the Loire, *i.e.* Orleans, Italy and Spain; in northern Europe, particularly in Paris where humanistic tendencies had once been strongest, the reign of Aristotle became absolute⁴² and by the 13th century dialectic and theology had become the exclusive intellectual pursuits with grammar as a purely speculative science. In southern Europe, however, the pursuit and study of grammar and logic were subordinate to law, and the student cultivated them in order to speak and write Latin elegantly.⁴³ The principal reason for the decline in classical studies can be attributed to the change in the nature of grammatical studies which became more and more speculative and deductive.

The stimulus given to dialectic by Abelard reinforced by the knowledge of Aristotle's logic produced a marked change in the Trivium;⁴⁴ the earlier Trivium had preserved a balance between logic on the one hand, and grammar and rhetoric on the other, but this was destroyed by the addition of new material to be mastered, so that there was less time and inclination left for the more leisurely study of grammar and literature;⁴⁵ rhetoric virtually disappeared and grammar became no

³⁸ L. J. Paetow, *The Arts Course at Mediaeval Universities*, p. 35.

³⁹ R. H. Robins, *A. and M.*, p. 89.

⁴⁰ R. W. Southern, *The Making of the Middle Ages* (London, 1953), p. 181.

⁴¹ E. Gilson, *History of Christian Philosophy in the Middle Ages* (London, 1955).

⁴² L. J. Paetow, *The Arts Course at Mediaeval Universities*, p. 29.

⁴³ J. E. Sandys, *A History of Classical Scholarship*, Vol. I, p. 666. H. O. Taylor, *The Mediaeval Mind*, Vol. I (New York, 1925), p. 251.

⁴⁴ G. Leff, *Mediaeval Thought from Saint Augustine to Ockham* (London, 1958), p. 169.

⁴⁵ C. H. Haskins, *Op. cit.*, p. 355.

longer the guide to literary expression, but was instead governed by its logical aspects and absorbed in philosophy, devoted to the language of logic.⁴⁶

To the Parisian masters of the early 13th century, the discovery of Aristotle's philosophy meant a new and universally applicable method,⁴⁷ and the whole field of intellectual endeavour, from grammar to theology, was invaded by the notion of science, *i.e.* a necessary knowledge justified by strict demonstration together with the notion of 'art', *i.e.* a systematic body of principles and consequences.

3

The period from the 11th century to the Renaissance is significant in the history of grammar, in terms of both grammatical theory and grammatical method.⁴⁸ The effect of this development was to bring grammar

⁴⁶ C. H. Haskins, *Op. cit.*, pp. 135-137.

⁴⁷ E. Gilson, *Op. cit.*, p. 312.

⁴⁸ It is possible to discern two lines of grammatical thought in the Middle Ages, and these two trends continue the philosophical and literary traditions of the ancient world. The literary tradition, however, comes to an end in the 13th century, and from then on to the Renaissance, philosophical grammar becomes the dominant trend. Grammar prior to the 13th century might be considered an equivalent term to 'philology'; after this period, grammar comes closer to its modern equivalent, *i.e.* as a part of linguistic science. The struggle between literature and logic in the universities of the 13th century has been well reported in Henri d'Andeli's poem "La bataille des sept arts". We have seen that in ancient Greece, Alexandrian grammarians based their grammatical theory and method on the study of literature; in the time of the Late Latin grammarians we found a similar insistence on the study of literature as the model for the grammarian. This use of literature as a model for grammar was bequeathed to the Middle Ages by Priscian, the last of the 'literary' grammarians of the ancient world, so that the mediaeval schools based their grammatical teachings on the literary grammars of Priscian and other grammarians of a similar type – *e.g.* Alexander de Villa-Dei, "Doctrinale" – until literary grammar came to be superseded by philosophical grammar in the late 12th century and onwards. This must not be interpreted that Priscian disappeared from mediaeval schools; he may have been superseded in the later Middle Ages by Alexander's "Doctrinale" as a students' teaching manual, but he remained the principal source for all the philosophical and speculative grammarians of the 13th and 14th centuries.

There are two grammars which merit mention at this stage: they are the "Doctrinale" of Alexander de Villa-Dei and the "Graecismus" of Eberhardus Bethuniensis, which were typical of the type of literary grammar introduced in this period; Alexander's work achieved an enormous popularity, and eventually succeeded in superseding the grammars of Donatus and Priscian as a teaching manual. Written in verse, its purpose was didactic and was designed for students whose mother tongue was not Latin: it retained its popularity throughout the later Middle Ages, but makes no attempt to justify grammatical rules nor does it contain any theorising about grammatical doctrine. Its interest lies purely in the part it played as a teaching manual and its value in the history of grammatical writing can be largely ignored.

under the control of logic and metaphysics, and rules of grammar were now derived and justified by recourse to logic and metaphysical theories of reality.

The great achievements in mediaeval grammatical work are often said to date from the rediscovery of Aristotle's logical and philosophical works but recent research⁴⁹ allows us to be more specific. During the 11th century a noticeable change took place in grammatical teaching when dialectic began to infiltrate the domain of grammar. From the middle of the century grammarians borrowed from dialectic a number of doctrinal data as well as methodological procedures in order to provide grammar with the scientific basis which the contemporary intellectual paradigm demanded. This infiltration of dialectic, dating from the middle of the 11th century, marks the first change in the development of mediaeval grammatical theory and the period saw a great revival of grammatical teaching; indeed the degree of infiltration was such that it presented a real danger to the scope and purpose of grammar. It must, therefore, be made quite clear that it is no longer correct to view the infiltration of logic into grammar as dating from the middle of the 12th century under the influence of Peter Helias.

The effect of this logicisation of grammar (not to mention other concomitant changes in the scholarly life of the Middle Ages) was to produce an entirely different approach to grammar, one which lasted until well into the 14th century and one which continued to have a considerable impact on certain aspects of grammatical thought in the Renaissance and Early Modern period. Instead of grammar being studied as a key to knowledge of classical literature and the Bible, it became a branch of speculative philosophy,⁵⁰ and grammar was now justified, not by illustration from classical literature, but by systems of logic and metaphysical theories of reality. Grammar, *i.e.* normative grammar, continued to be taught, hence the popularity of Alexander's 'Doctrinale' as a teaching manual, but throughout the period there is an increasing rift between pedagogical grammar and philosophical treatises on grammatical theory, until normative grammar is entirely superseded by philosophical grammar.⁵¹

Inevitably there was a reaction against the predominance of dialectic

⁴⁹ Cf. R. W. Hunt, "Studies on Priscian", and L. M. de Rijk, *Logica Modernorum*.

⁵⁰ R. H. Robins, *A. and M.*, p. 75.

⁵¹ Modistic attitude to grammar is not unlike Chomsky's *viz.* N. Chomsky, *Syntactic Structures (Janua Linguarum IV)* (The Hague, 1957).

over grammar but it is safe to say that a close association between logic and grammar had become a fact of life, and from the 12th century, it is possible to suggest three stages in the logicisation of grammar, though it must not be imagined that these stages can be fitted into neatly separated compartments.

The first stage is associated with three masters, William of Conches, Peter Helias, and Ralph of Beauvais. William taught grammar at Chartres from c. 1120 to c. 1154; he was Peter Helias's teacher and a scholar of real significance in the history of grammar although it is difficult at present to make a completely valid assessment of him as a grammarian and it is doubtful whether this will be possible until we possess a fully commented edition of his work; once this has been done it should also be possible to see Peter Helias's work in its proper perspective. However, it can be said that William did set out to build up grammatical theory out of its own inspiration; furthermore, he merits the position of importance that even our present meagre knowledge of his work can properly assign to him by virtue of his criticisms of Priscian. There is a modern ring about these criticisms of Priscian and his lack of explanatory power.⁵²

The matter of causes of invention (*cause inventionis*) is a notable achievement on the part of William and was of great importance for mediaeval grammar, since the mediaeval grammarians believed that the *cause inventionis* would provide them with the most profound knowledge about the parts of speech, *i.e.* once these were found, it would then be possible to examine the parts of speech and thereafter to determine the proper grammatical function of a word.⁵³

It is quite wrong to claim that Peter Helias was the first to introduce dialectic into grammar, but this should not be allowed to minimise his achievement – he was the most famous master of grammar in the 12th century.⁵⁴ Under the influence of William of Conches, Peter, aware as he was of the domination of grammar by dialectic, made a considerable effort to disentangle them, his aim being to free grammar from questions that seemed unrelated to its purpose. He realised that grammar could not dispense with the methods of dialectic since the latter provided the basis for the scientific approach. He therefore sought to

⁵² This is an excellent example of a scientific revolution of the past in linguistics of the type discussed by Kuhn, *cf.* T. S. Kuhn, *The Structure of Scientific Revolutions* (Chicago, 1962).

⁵³ R. W. Hunt, "Studies on Priscian", pp. 211-212.

⁵⁴ L. M. de Rijk, *Op. cit.* II, p. 229.

achieve his aim by restricting the use of logical distinctions in grammatical discourse to certain areas and undertook a thorough systematisation of the grammatical theories of his predecessors. It is not without some significance that he was the first to write a *Summa in Priscianum*, *i.e.* an orderly comment on Priscian's grammar; it was not however designed to be a continuous commentary, much less an original exposition, but rather a systematic account of the discussions of his day on Priscian. It seems reasonable to say, therefore, that his teaching along with the impetus given to speculative scholarship in logic and philosophy provided not only the spur to the study of a subject already established as part of the Arts curriculum, but in fact it encouraged speculation with a new bias on the nature of language and grammar.

The generation of grammarians following Peter Helias achieved a synthesis between logic in grammar and the study of classical authors; such a synthesis was achieved in the study of syntax, and it is from this time that the first independent treatises on syntax date. As early as the second half of the 12th century we find separate treatises on syntax and this became the outlet for the grammarian's interest in logical analysis. In this respect the work of Ralph of Beauvais⁵⁵ is significant, since it is in his work that the development of syntactic theory and the renewal of the study of classical authors appear; however, grammar did not develop along the lines that Ralph marked out. Nevertheless, the attention paid to syntax by the grammarians of the later 12th century laid the basis for the continued close association between logic and grammar, a relationship fruitful enough to create a logical grammar within the domain of grammar and which culminated in the speculative grammars of the Modistae; this was not a development from the work of Ralph but the result of the full assimilation of the 'new' Aristotle and the works of the Arab logicians.⁵⁶

There is a gap in our knowledge of the development of grammatical theory between the time of Ralph of Beauvais and the Modistae some 100 years later. The second stage, the period between William of Conches, Peter Helias, Ralph of Beauvais and the Modistae, can be thought of as a period of consolidation; this period is, of course, the golden age of mediaeval scholasticism, and is the period when leading philosophers such as Thomas Aquinas, Robert Grosseteste, Albertus Magnus, logicians such as William of Sherwood, Petrus Hispanus and Lambert of Auxerre, and grammarians such as Robert Kilwardby,

⁵⁵ Cf. R. W. Hunt, "Studies on Priscian", p. 39.

⁵⁶ Cf. R. W. Hunt, "Studies on Priscian", p. 39.

Jordan of Saxony, Nicholas de Paris (all of whom wrote commentaries on Priscian), and Roger Bacon,⁵⁷ were active in creating and developing their theories in the light of the new knowledge.

Of this period of grammatical history, it is possible only to make general statements about trends and developments; it is known that by the 13th century, lectures on grammar with a logico-philosophical bent were part of the teaching programme in the Faculty of Arts in Paris, the texts used, according to Grabmann,⁵⁸ being the commentaries on Priscian of Jordan of Saxony, Nicholas de Paris, and Robert Kilwardby and in addition Kilwardby's grammatical Sophismata.⁵⁹ It will be possible to say more of these personalities and to draw more positive conclusions about the development of grammatical theory during this period when the philology of the period is better known.⁶⁰ Broadly speaking, it seems that this period brought about a refinement in theory and terminology by the application of logical and philosophical criteria to grammatical description, and that it became the task, so to speak, of the third stage, to bring to fruition this preparatory work, in the shape of the theories of the speculative grammarians of the late 13th -14th centuries, *i.e.* the Modistae.

The effect of these changes on grammatical writing can be seen with unmistakable clarity in Roger Bacon, who can be considered the starting point of the third stage, marked by the evolution of a new approach to grammar.⁶¹ Bacon observed that in every language there are two sorts of problems, some proper to the language in question and others

⁵⁷ Roger Bacon (and indeed Robert Kilwardby too) were much more than grammarians, but have been included in this context because of their grammatical activities. Roger Bacon, considered by Grabmann to be the author of the first of the speculative grammars, is mentioned at this stage since he cannot be thought of as one of the Modistae but rather as one of their immediate precursors.

⁵⁸ M. Grabmann, *Mittelalterliches Geistesleben* I (Munich, 1926), p. 118.

⁵⁹ Kilwardby was a scholar and grammarian of considerable stature, but as his grammatical work remains unedited, it is not possible for the historian of grammar to make a proper assessment of his contribution to grammatical theory. Roos reports (*Die Modi Significandi*, p. 123) that Martin of Dacia knew and used Kilwardby's commentaries on Priscian; there is no overt suggestion, *i.e.* no textual reference, in either Siger or Thomas that either of them used Kilwardby's work, unless some of the references to the 'grammatici antiqui' are in fact references to Kilwardby. Presumably, however, they knew his work which was written during the first half of the 13th century.

⁶⁰ A most serious gap is the fact that Kilwardby's Priscian commentaries and grammatical Sophismata are as yet unedited; in addition, there are no critical editions of Peter Helias's commentaries on Priscian, or Jordan of Saxony's and Nicholas de Paris's commentaries on Priscian. Furthermore, there is, of course, a complete dearth of comparative studies on their grammatical theories.

⁶¹ E. Gilson, *Op. cit.*, p. 312.

common to all language, *e.g.* what is a noun, verb, *etc.* The first sort could not become the object of scientific study, but the second could become a science and be taught as true learning because its object was universal. Bacon therefore conceived the possibility of a general grammar, *i.e.* the general grammar of human language.⁶² This change of attitude to grammar led to a renewal of interest in grammatical study, which had seemed at one time to be in danger of being relegated to the position of just one of the seven liberal arts confined to its elementary task of teaching the Latin language for literary purposes.⁶³ Men now sought to derive rules of grammar from logic and metaphysical theories of reality,⁶⁴ and a concomitant of this increase in interest was an increase in output of grammatical writing culminating in the speculative grammars of the Modistae. Grammar remained fundamentally what it always had been in the Middle Ages, a grammatical statement of Latin, but the Modistae made of their grammars a study of the word-classes (*partes orationis*) and syntax of the idealised, perfect language, *i.e.* Latin, but their methods had by now evolved in a speculative sense – speculative being used by the Modistae in the sense that language mirrors the ‘reality’ which, according to mediaeval metaphysics, underlies the phenomena of the physical world.

E. THE MODISTAE

1

For the first time, in the second half of the 13th century, a new type of grammatical literature appeared, setting out in a very systematic manner the philosophy and logic of language which Scholastic philosophers had been developing in terms of the new spirit following upon the rediscovery of Aristotelian and other Greek philosophy. These grammarians, who were at their height during the 13th-14th centuries, stated their theories in the form of treatises on the modes of signifying (*Summa Modorum Significandi*).

These writers of speculative grammars have come to be known as ‘Modistae’⁶⁵ but our knowledge of them is slight.⁶⁶ Grabmann men-

⁶² E. Gilson, *Op. cit.*, p. 313.

⁶³ C. H. Haskins, *Op. cit.*, p. 135.

⁶⁴ R. H. Robins, *A. and M.*, p. 75.

⁶⁵ Grabmann states that the first modern use of the term ‘Modistae’ was by J. Müller in an article published in the “Anzeiger für deutsches Altertum”.

tions by name some twelve or thirteen grammarians,⁶⁷ Lehmann lists some ninety manuscripts⁶⁸ of the writings of this group and Pinborg some two hundred and sixty manuscripts (most of them of the Modistae), which suggests that they constitute quite an important group of grammarians. Roger Bacon, described by Grabmann as the first author of a speculative grammar, produced his *Summa Grammatica* about 1245;⁶⁹ he was not one of the Modistae but his work does represent a valuable startingpoint for dating the work of the Modistae.⁷⁰ Martin of Dacia probably wrote his grammatical treatise about 1270,⁷¹ and John of Dacia produced his grammar in 1280,⁷² but Siger de Courtrai and Thomas of Erfurt did not write their grammars until the first half of the 14th century.⁷³ Little seems to be known about Michel de Marbais; Leclerc⁷⁴ offers a tentative date, *i.e.* ca 1300, for his death which would place him among the earlier Modistae. It is not possible, in view of the paucity of material, to say anything substantive about a coherent doctrine but if we take Martin of Dacia as one of the earliest and Thomas of Erfurt as one of the last of the Modistae, it is easy to point to certain refine-

⁶⁶ M. Grabmann, *Thomas von Erfurt und die Sprachlogik des mittelalterlichen Aristotelismus. Sitzungsberichte der Bayerischen Akademie der Wissenschaften* (Munich, 1943). Cf. also J. Pinborg, *Op. cit.* This important work should be consulted for more details of the development of grammatical theory in the Middle Ages.

⁶⁷ *E.g.* Siger de Courtrai, Thomas of Erfurt, Michel de Marbais, Jean Josse de Marvillia, Martin of Dacia, John of Dacia, Simon of Dacia, Boethius of Dacia, Johannes Aurifaber, John Avicula of Lotharingia, Matthew of Bononia, Radulfus Brito, Erhardus Knab von Zwiefalten. This list obviously does not include the large number of anonymous treatises on speculative grammar. J. Pinborg, *Op. cit.* discusses these in more detail and it would appear that Johannes Aurifaber should be regarded as anti-Modista and one of the earliest of the Nominalist grammarians; the theoretical position of other grammarians in Grabmann's list will also have to be examined more carefully.

⁶⁸ P. Lehmann, "Mitteilungen aus Handschriften VIII", *Sitzungsberichte der Bayerischen Akademie der Wissenschaften* (Munich, 1944), 3-34. Cf. J. Pinborg, *Op. cit.*, pp. 309-337.

⁶⁹ There is a possibility that Martin of Dacia may have known Roger Bacon in Paris, but it seems most unlikely that either Siger or Thomas knew him.

⁷⁰ H. Roos, *Die Modi Significandi*, p. 129.

⁷¹ H. Roos, *Die Modi Significandi*, p. 134.

⁷² A. Otto (ed.), *Johannis Daci Opera (Corpus Philosophorum Danicorum Medii Aevi)* (Copenhagen, 1955), p. XVIII.

⁷³ Siger took his Master of Arts in 1309, and presumably wrote his treatise some time after he had begun to teach, probably between 1309 and 1320. Grabmann suggests that the adult portion of his life was spent in the 14th century, and he probably died about 1350.

⁷⁴ V. Leclerc, "Michel de Roubaix ou de Brabant, Grammairien" *Histoire Littéraire de la France XXI* (1847), 267-271.

ments absent from Martin's work but which do appear in Thomas's, e.g. the clearly labelled divisions of *Etymologia* and *Diasynthetica*, and much more revealing of the improvements in presentation is the use made by Thomas of the clearly defined progression of *generalissimus*, *subalternus*, and *specialissimus* modes to describe the essential mode of any *pars orationis*.

Since most of their work remains unedited, it is difficult to say whether they can be considered a group or circle in the sense that one finds in the 20th century groups of linguists, e.g. Prague, Copenhagen. If we cannot point to documentary evidence in order to suggest that the Modistae were anything so cohesive as a linguistic circle, there is no doubt, if the grammarians to be referred to in this book are reliable witnesses, that they do present a doctrine which in essentials is much the same, although their actual presentations do vary a great deal. It is possible to see, even in the few edited works available to us, the effect of time on their work; time may indeed have refined the presentation and organisation of their work but it did not affect their doctrine.

Of the thirteen grammarians listed by Grabmann, the work of four or five only are available in a fairly modern form and few of them are to be found in critical editions. This dearth of a modern critical apparatus is, of course, a serious handicap to any investigation of the grammatical theories of the Modistae and of the history of linguistics during the mediaeval period. The edition of Martin of Dacia⁷⁵ is the most complete modern version of a Modistic grammar and indeed it remains the only critical edition of any mediaeval grammarian. John of Dacia's *Summa Grammatica* was recently published but his work is incomplete and contains only his preamble and the section on the nomen; the work of Simon of Dacia has also been published.⁷⁶ The work of John and Simon is, however, pale in comparison to the work of Martin and Boethius, who must be considered grammarians of first importance, especially among the Modistae. There is no modern critical edition available of Thomas of Erfurt's *Grammatica Speculativa*;⁷⁷ the edition

⁷⁵ H. Roos (ed.), *Martini de Dacia Opera (Corpus Philosophorum Danicorum Medii Aevi II)* (Copenhagen, 1961). An edition of the works of Boethius of Dacia, edited by H. Roos and J. Pinborg, for the series *Corpus Philosophorum Danicorum Medii Aevi* was published after this study was completed.

⁷⁶ A. Otto (ed.), *Simonis de Dacia Opera (Corpus Philosophorum Danicorum Medii Aevi III)* (Copenhagen, 1963).

⁷⁷ A modern edition of Thomas of Erfurt's, *Grammatica Speculativa* is in preparation, to appear in the series *Classics in Linguistics* published by Longmans, Green and Co. Ltd.

used for this study was published in 1902⁷⁸ but is attributed to Duns Scotus – the editor was clearly unaware of the extant MS which Grabmann and Lehmann have listed and bases his version of the text on Wadding's edition of the collected works of Duns Scotus published in 1639.⁷⁹ There is no edition at all of Michel de Marbais; extracts only are to be found in Thurot's monumental work.⁸⁰ Wallerand, in his edition of Siger de Courtrai,⁸¹ refers to eight manuscripts but only one of these contains his grammatical treatise which is furthermore incomplete;⁸² Grabmann and Lehmann do not list any other manuscript of Siger. The remainder of the works of the Modistae remain unpublished.

⁷⁸ J. Duns Scotus, *Grammaticae Speculativae*, ed. Fr. Mariani Fernandez Garcia (Quaracchi, 1902). The quotations from Thomas in the body of this study are taken from the Garcia edition and the quotations from Siger de Courtrai from the Wallerand edition. Quotations from Martin of Dacia are from Roos's edition, and the quotations from other Modistae as well as Peter Helias and Robert Kilwardby are taken from Thurot.

⁷⁹ The 'grammatica speculativa', which was for so long attributed to Duns Scotus and which has also been thought to be the work of Thomas Aquinas and Albertus Magnus is now generally accepted to be the work of Thomas of Erfurt; Grabmann has explained at great length his argument for assigning this work to Thomas of Erfurt, cf.: M. Grabmann, "De Thoma Erfordiensis auctore Grammaticae quae Joanni Duns Scoto adscribitur speculativae", *Archivum Fr. Hist.* (1922), 273-277; M. Grabmann, *Mittelalterliches Geistesleben*, Vol I, 118-125; M. Grabmann, *Thomas von Erfurt und die Sprachlogik des mittelalterlichen Aristotelismus*, SB (Munich, 1943). There is also an edition of Thomas of Erfurt, *Grammatica Speculativa* published by M. Doyon, Quebec in 1962, but this cannot be considered in any sense a critical edition.

⁸⁰ Ch. Thurot, *Notices et extraits de divers manuscrits latins pour servir à l'histoire des doctrines grammaticales au moyen âge (Notices et extraits des manuscrits de la Bibliothèque Impériale XXII)* (Paris, 1868). Reprinted *Minerva G.m.b.H.* (Frankfurt am Main, 1964).

⁸¹ G. Wallerand, *Les Œuvres de Siger de Courtrai (Les Philosophes belges VIII)* (Louvain, 1913).

⁸² Scholars writing on Siger de Courtrai, e.g. Thurot, have stated that his work is incomplete; Wallerand disputes this, and referring to Thurot's statement, that "le copiste n'a pas continué, il ne donne pas la suite du pronom, non plus, que l'adverbe, la préposition et l'interjection, mais il a ajouté le complément des traités de Siger, les discussions que Siger appelle 'sophisma'" (*Notices et extraits*, p. 41); Wallerand argues that the author, i.e. Thurot "ne nous semble pas avoir saisi le plan de l'œuvre de Siger", and continues: "dans la partie suivie de son traité 'De modis significandi', Siger ne traite que des parties déclinales du discours. Dans le 'sophisma': 'O Magister', la discussion montre sur le vif la nécessité des parties indéclinables . . . Cette incident ne prouve-t-elle pas que Siger réservait, pour la traiter à propos de ce 'sophisma', cette partie de la grammaire dont il n'a encore rien dit" (p. 31). The inescapable fact is that Siger's treatment of the pronomen is incomplete, that his discussion of the indeclinable partes is not nearly so detailed as Thomas's, and that he lacks a section on syntax, though he does refer at the end of his discussion of the nomen to a projected section on syntax.

2

The Modistae can be thought of as the second generation of speculative grammarians who sought to codify and refine the pioneer work of scholars such as William of Conches, Peter Helias, Robert Kilwardby, *etc.* The Modistae and their immediate precursors represent a great synthesis of two lines of thought which can be traced back to ancient Greece and which had passed down unbroken to the Middle Ages.

The philosophical background of the Modistae led them to believe that grammar had its basis outside language itself; they claimed therefore that there was one universal grammar dependent on the structure of reality,⁸³ and that the rules of grammar were quite independent of the language in which they were expressed.⁸⁴ There was one grammatical system fixed and valid for all languages but which the philosopher of language alone is able to discover.⁸⁵ In the process of creating their own grammatical theory, the Modistae kept the grammatical system of Donatus and Priscian more or less intact but restated the parts of speech and their accidents in semantic terms,⁸⁶ using a terminology which they derived from the metaphysical and logical theories of their contemporaries. It would be quite unfair to suggest that the Modistae considered this to be sufficient to constitute a new theory; they were not linguistically naïve and they recognized that a new theory represents a new system⁸⁷ of thought, so that restatements of Priscian by means of their 'new' terminology were conditioned by the demands of their epistemology. What they seem to have been unaware of is the fact that their theories were in fact a projection into reality of the basic patterns of the language in which they were expressed.⁸⁸

The Modistae did not add a great deal to grammatical theory, although their work does reflect a remarkable degree of sophistication

⁸³ This is a rather different position from the one taken by Peter Helias; he had stated that there are as many grammatical systems as there are languages.

⁸⁴ Cf. L. Hjelmslev, *Principes de grammaire générale*, p. 268; the great difference of course between Modistic theory of a general grammar and Hjelmslev's theory is that the Modistae constructed their theory on extra-linguistic facts based on the structure of reality, whereas Hjelmslev sought to found his theory on formal linguistic criteria, *i.e.* "une théorie du système morphologique du langage", L. Hjelmslev, *Principes*, p. 3.

⁸⁵ R. H. Robins, *A. and M.*, p. 79.

⁸⁶ It must be understood that the Modistic use of 'meaning' was in no sense notional.

⁸⁷ 'System' is used here in the every day sense of the term.

⁸⁸ R. H. Robins, *A. and M.*, p. 87.

and as such is a worthy representative of the golden age of mediaeval scholasticism;⁸⁹ in all fairness to the Modistae, however, it must be pointed out that they did make a definite advance in their definition and description of the preposition by basing their definition solely on its syntactic function.⁹⁰ The Modistae also recognised the syntactic relations of *regimen*,⁹¹ though this had already been noted by Peter Helias and the didactic grammarians, *e.g.* Alexander de Villa-Dei. The modern linguist will reject their theories because he rejects the whole system of thought that they reveal. But for the historian of grammar, the great interest of the Modistae is not only their contribution (such as it is) to general grammatical theory but the evidence they give of the tenor of the thought of their day.⁹² A grammatical theory must be considered not only in terms of its own intrinsic value but also as an expression of the intellectual climate which produced it. In this sense the Modistae are admirable representatives of certain aspects of mediaeval achievement.

⁸⁹ We must remember that the Modistae were teachers of grammar as well as creators of a grammatical theory, and it is therefore important to see something of the position of grammar in the general pedagogy of the 12th and 13th centuries.

⁹⁰ *Cf.* pp. 276-279. The fact that the Modistae stated their definitions in semantic terms should not be allowed to minimise the importance of this new analysis of the preposition.

⁹¹ *Cf.* pp. 63-64.

⁹² G. L. Bursill-Hall, "Mediaeval Grammatical Theories", *The Canadian Journal of Linguistics* 9 (1963), 40-54.

II

THE GRAMMATICAL THEORIES AND TECHNIQUES OF THE MODISTAE

A. THE GRAMMATICAL THEORIES OF THE MODISTAE

The theoretician of language is the creation of the associated disciplines of his intellectual background; this is manifestly true of most modern linguists, *e.g.* Ferdinand de Saussure who came to his theory of linguistics under the influence of the sociological theories of Durkheim.¹ Despite their non-linguistic backgrounds, these linguists have all formulated theories of language which must be considered in and of themselves without interference from the disciplines which formed their creators or which are akin to them by virtue of the similarity of their subject-matter.

The Modistae too were the spiritual children of their age and were clearly influenced by the philosophical theories on which they were nurtured. This is quite clear from the terminology used in their grammatical treatises; but the Modistae did more than retain the language of the disciplines closely associated in the Middle Ages to the study of grammar since they were, of course, more than grammarians and applied to the study of grammar not only the technical language of contemporary metaphysics and logic but also the theories of this metaphysics and logic.

In the earlier Middle Ages, grammar had tended to be almost synonymous with literary studies like Priscian's grammar which sought to provide the key to the understanding of a literary text.² From the 11th century onwards, the incorporation of Aristotle's logic began to play a very important role in the logicisation of grammar, part of the *logica vetus* having been available from the 10th century (the remainder

¹ J. R. Firth, "Personality and Language in Society", *Papers in Linguistics 1934-1951* (1957), pp. 177-189.

² This is the implication in Paetow's important study; *cf.* L. J. Paetow, *The Arts Course at Mediaeval Universities, The University of Illinois Studies*, III. 7 (1910).

becoming available from the middle of the 12th century), and as a result of this and the concomitant revival of learning the study of literature was overshadowed by the study of logic and as a result of this change in emphasis, grammar came to be associated with the formulation of concepts of reality and their expression by language – the Modistae were, however, very insistent on the discreteness of logic and grammar.³ Nevertheless, this association with logic and other non-linguistic disciplines had a profound effect on Modistic grammatical theories. Their conception of reality and of human reason led them to maintain that grammar must be ‘one’,⁴ and therefore Robert Kilwardby, one of the immediate predecessors of the Modistae, could argue that grammar can only be a science if it is one for all men;⁵ as a result of the intimacy between the reality of things and their conceptualisation by the mind, grammar becomes the study of the formulation of these concepts, their actual expression being accidental, and therefore incidental to Modistic grammatical theory. Furthermore, this theory of grammar had the effect of creating the belief that the universality of things as conceived and understood by the universality of human reason could be expressed in the universal language, Latin, which was thus raised to the status of a metalanguage. Minor matters such as the vernaculars had perhaps the effect of attesting differences in vocabulary, but these could be dismissed since they could not affect structure.

The result of this new approach to grammar was that the Modistae restated the semi-formal⁶ definitions of Priscian of Latin grammar in terms suitable to the new spirit. This new descriptive procedure for grammar can be described as semantic, but it must be made quite clear that semantic in this context of situation should not be interpreted as notional or translational. For this reason, it would seem that Nehring’s

³ Siger de Courtrai, p. 135: “sicut logica defendit animam nostram a falso in speculativis et a malo in practicis, sic grammatica defendit virtutem nostram interpretativam ab expressione conceptus mentis incongrua in omnibus scientiis.”

⁴ Roger Bacon: “grammatica una et eadem est secundum substantiam in omnibus linguis, licet accidentaliter varietur.” (*Gram. Graec.*), Oxford MS, p. 278, quoted by Wallerand, *Op. cit.*, p. 43 and by Robins, *A. and M.*, p. 77.

⁵ Robert Kilwardby: “cum scientia maneat eadem apud omnes, et subiectum eius idem manet, quare subiectum grammaticae debet manere idem in omnibus. Sed oratio constructa vel vox literata ordinabilis propter congruum non idem manet apud omnes; quare non erit subiectum grammaticae”. (Quoted by Wallerand, p. 44.

⁶ I have used the term ‘semi-formal’ to account for the variety of criteria, e.g. meaning, formal structure, etc. which Priscian used to distinguish the parts of speech, cf. Robins, *A. and M.*, p. 67.

term of 'functional linguistics'⁷ is much more suitable than logical grammar⁸ or Sprachlogik⁹ which have been used by scholars to describe Modistic theory; the Modistae, in using 'significatio' and 'consignificatio', merely aimed at a statement of the functional nature of the formal categories which Priscian had described, the criteria for these categories being however stated in terms of the correlates of reality to which they correspond. This, apart from anything else, underlines the dubious value of 'signify' when applied to the indeclinable partes orationis unless it is understood that 'signify' in such a context has no notional value but must be interpreted as 'function'. Mediaeval grammarians, *i.e.* the Modistae, in context with their philosophical theories, now established the partes orationis as the correlates of reality; the metaphysician had established within the world of things two primary elements, that of permanence and that of becoming (habitus and fieri), the expression of which became the province of the grammarian. The partes orationis which express permanence and stability are the nomen and pronomen, while the verbum and participium express the concept of becoming; the metaphysical device of the contrast of matter and form is introduced to distinguish the nomen and pronomen, and the verbum and participium. This is, however, a terminological distinction which is not to be correlated with reality and it would therefore be a mistake to identify matter with 'materia prima' and then apply this contrast of matter and form with its metaphysical implications and associations with substance directly to an analysis of the binary oppositions which serve to distinguish some of the partes orationis, *viz.* nomen/pronomen, verbum/participium; clearly the Modistae, influenced as they were by the metaphysical theory of reality, would naturally resort to a similar terminology to describe those words and more particularly those partes orationis which they had come to regard as the linguistic correlates of this reality.

It is almost a commonplace, therefore, to say that philosophical theories had a tight hold on Modistic grammatical theories; the great controversy of nominalism and realism had by their day lost much of its virulence and prominence but was, however, still vital enough to influence their philosophical outlook. The Modistae were not nominalists, nor were they extreme realists, which would have been to imply that a word became merely an imitation of reality;¹⁰ in keeping with many

⁷ A. Nehring, "A Note on Functional Linguistics in the Middle Ages", *Traditio* IX (1953), 430-434.

⁸ G. Wallerand, *Op. cit.*, p. 73.

⁹ This is the term used by (inter alia) Roos and Grabmann.

¹⁰ Priscian's definition of the noun, *i.e.* signifying substance with quality, was

of their contemporaries, they took up a mid-way position and can perhaps be best described as moderate realists since they do accept the existence of the universal in the individuals; this permitted them to set up word-classes for the individual words and yet they insist on the necessary function of the intelligence to be the necessary connection, albeit indirect, between the reality and its functional signification in a grammatical system. The word, in the Modistic scheme, is not just the imitation of a piece of reality but must pass through a 'filter of intellectual apprehension'¹¹ which will impart to the word something of the subjective ideas of the creator of the word. On the other hand, the word, which will however not be entirely a figment of the mind but must have some correlate in the world of things outside the mind,¹² will therefore be defined in terms of the properties of the thing meant; this amounts to a subjective evaluation of the being and its properties which the intelligence has perceived and is now seeking to signify.

The danger is to classify the whole of a grammatical theory in terms of certain features employed in the description of these categories. It is quite true that the Modistae not only used technical terms which were borrowed from current philosophical language but also set up a grammatical theory which was based *in theory* on non-linguistic criteria (but in fact based on Donatus and Priscian), and then resorted to metaphysical values in order to define certain *partes orationis* which are, as a result, unequally classified in terms of the metaphysical values they do or do not possess.¹³ This does not mean that all their terms and all their grammatical features can be so described; indeed their definition of the *nomen substantivum* as signifying by means of the *modus per se stantis* is more in the way of being a functional definition rather than either a metaphysical or a logical one.

The semantics of Modistic grammatical theory are discussed in more detail in the following sections of this chapter and in the following chapter. It is sufficient to state at this stage that Modistic grammatical

generally accepted; substance simply means the individual thing and quality the universal nature in which the thing participates, *cf. de Rijk, Op. cit. II, p. 521.*

¹¹ A. Nehring, *Op. cit.*, p. 433.

¹² Thomas of Erfurt, #6: "modi significandi activi non sunt figmenta, oportet omnem modum significandi activum ab aliqua rei proprietate radicaliter oriri . . . cuilibet modo significandi activo correspondet aliqua proprietas rei seu modus essendi rei".

¹³ The difference between the indeclinable and the declinable *partes* can be described very simply, that the declinable *partes* represent certain metaphysical qualities and the indeclinables (which are therefore described in syntactic terms) do not.

theory rests on the study of words and the properties of these words as the 'signs of things' which are, however, capable of signification;¹⁴ the mind seizes upon the properties of the thing, there being a mode of understanding for each property to be understood.¹⁵ The mind is not satisfied with the mere understanding of the thing but seeks to give it linguistic formulation by means of the mode of signifying – this meaning is not a possession of the thing itself but is bestowed on it by the mind¹⁶ and the process therefore continues until the word has the ability not only to signify, *i.e.* to denote, but also to signify functionally, *i.e.* syntactically, by means of the *modus consignificandi*.

There is complete interdependence in such a theory between the structure of reality and the operations of the mind; but the active mode of signifying, such as the Modistae used it, never goes beyond the conceptual (which will to some extent at least account for the total exclusion of phonetic criteria in their grammatical theory), so that the *partes orationis* become the formulation of these concepts and are validated by their modes of signifying the things and the properties of the things that the mind has perceived.¹⁷ Grammar, therefore, becomes the study of these formulations of a mental concept, but this must not be confused with the function of logic which is to distinguish right from wrong.

The grammarian, whatever his theoretical standpoint may be, studies the same data as other grammarians with different theoretical backgrounds; the test of his theory will obviously not be his data, which must by definition always be the same but his interpretation of his data. Hjelmslev has postulated three requirements for the examination of a theory, *i.e.* self-consistency, exhaustiveness and simplicity. If we apply these requirements to Modistic theory, we find a remarkable degree of consistency in their grammatical theories, but we cannot claim a similar degree of exhaustiveness of their account, since so many of their criteria were taken from extra-linguistic matters, *e.g.* the syllogism of formal logic had the effect of dismissing the subordinate clause from the type of constructions which the Modistic

¹⁴ Thomas of Erfurt, #19: "grammatica est de signis rerum".

¹⁵ Siger de Courtrai, p. 94: "modus intelligendi activus est modus quo intellectus comprehendit modum essendi seu proprietatem ipsius rei".

¹⁶ Siger de Courtrai, p. 135: "grammatica est de modis significandi qui sunt operati ab anima".

¹⁷ Siger de Courtrai, p. 94: "modi significandi activi sunt quidam conceptus ipsius intellectus; nunc conceptus intellectus manent in intellectu et sunt in eo et non transeunt extra".

grammarian would include in his inventory.¹⁸ The Modistae retained practically the whole of the Priscianic grammatical system but omitted or restated those features which did not fit into their 'a priori' grammatical system, *e.g.* they omitted altogether the subordinating conjunction from their inventory of the conjunctions. The principle of simplicity can also be said to apply to the grammatical theory of the Modistae, since the number of their premises and the terms involved are fairly few, so that the inventory of the operations necessary to their grammatical procedure is relatively simple and economical.

If, on the other hand, we accept Wallerand's definition¹⁹ of the grammarian-philosopher, *i.e.* 'étudier les formes de pensée correspondant aux choses et à leurs propriétés, déduire de ces formes de pensée, afin de les exprimer, les parties du discours et les justifier par elles jusque dans leurs détails, en un mot, faire correspondre parfaitement les formes logiques et les formes grammaticales, tel est le travail du grammairien philosophe',²⁰ then we can say that the grammatico-metaphysical schemes of the Modistae were eminently suitable, though the modern grammarian cannot begin to contemplate such a method of grammatical description as an efficient framework on which to build his analysis of linguistic structure.

B. MODISTIC DESCRIPTIVE TECHNIQUE

There is a considerable degree of agreement among the Modistae on their grammatical doctrine, but there tends to be more divergence in their actual presentation of this doctrine. It would, however, be a mistake to exaggerate the degree of divergence among them because it is possible to equate the definitions of the various categories used by the Modistae and the different elements used in the creation and description of the *pars orationis*.

The broad line of their procedure was a tri-partite statement, made progressively but in unequal divisions, of a dualist view of grammar. The first part consists of a description of their metalanguage²¹ which

¹⁸ Thomas does mention once the use of a subordinating conjunction when discussing the criteria for a complete construction, so that this cannot be dismissed altogether.

¹⁹ G. Wallerand, *Op. cit.*, p. (71).

²⁰ 'les formes logiques' must be understood as traditional logical forms; this must not, in any sense, be understood in terms of modern formal logic.

²¹ This is my term for a section which is variously called by the Modistae.

is followed by their descriptions of the *partes orationis* (called the 'Etymologia' by Thomas of Erfurt) and then of the syntax of these *partes orationis* (called the 'Diasynthetica' by Thomas of Erfurt).

The preamble or the Metalanguage is used not only to describe their technical language, but also, and more particularly, the elements and categories²² required in a descriptive process beginning with the speech act²³ and culminating in the word. In reality this preamble becomes an introduction to the type of analysis required for the description of any *pars orationis*, from its conception to its inception, and consists of two inter-related procedures, *viz.* *vox* to *pars orationis* and *modus essendi* to *modus significandi*.

The preamble, therefore, explains the development from the sound to the word, from the thought to the expression and from the thing to be signified to the thing as it is signified; the sound – it must be remembered that the Modistae excluded phonetics altogether from grammatical theory²⁴ – will also be a sign and can therefore designate something which has been understood by the mind. The sign acquires the capability of signifying (*ratio significandi*) as a result of which the sign (*signum*) becomes a *dictio*. The process does not cease at this stage; the *dictio* acquires from the mind the mode of signifying (*modus significandi*) which turns it into a *pars orationis* which is a grammatical unit with the capability of consignifying (*ratio consignificandi*), *i.e.* of signifying syntactically; this is the Modistic way of saying that it is usable syntactically, and it acquires thereby its mode of consignification (*modus consignificandi*) which is its syntactic mode of signifying.²⁵ Similarly, every thing – and the Modistae do not restrict this term 'thing' (*res*) to material objects – has a mode of being (*modus essendi*) which can be conceived by the mind by means of the mode of understanding (*modus intelligendi*) and once this stage has been reached, it is now capable of being signified by means of the mode of signifying (*modus significandi*). A *pars orationis* is, therefore, a creation of (i) the thing (*res*), (ii) the understanding of the thing (*modus intelligendi*), (iii) the

²² These and other technical terms are discussed in detail in Chapter 3.

²³ *Vox* is used here in the sense of 'expression'; it must not be associated with the 'voice' or 'phoneme' of modern linguistics.

²⁴ Frequent reference will be made to this fact.

²⁵ *Ratio* is a complex term implying a basis or cause for doing something; in this instance, it can be said that the mode of signalling implies a basis for signifying and that the mode of signifying implies a basis for consignifying, *i.e.*, functioning (signifying) syntactically, *cf.* also pp. 53-55.