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THE IMPORTANCE OF THE *MODI SIGNIFICANDI*  
IN THE LATE-MEDIEVAL LOGICAL STUDIES

Summary

The schoolmen of the Middle Ages inherited from Classical Antiquity an established grammatical tradition, but the infiltration of dialectic and the incorporation of logic of Aristotle into the schools gave renewed vigor to the study of grammar which became an exact scientific discipline. In the Middle Ages, grammar – in combination with logic – came to be the means of expressing the world of reality as established by the metaphysician.

The transformation of grammar from its association with literature into a speculative, theoretical discipline culminated in a series of treatises concerning the modes of signifying (*modi significandi*) which formulated the different properties of words and the ways in which they could be used. These were in effect treatises on grammar constructed on universal laws of meaning. They were, however, something much more than taxonomic grammars and must be viewed, by virtue of the intimacy between language and meaning, in terms of their contributions to mediaeval semiotics. The symbolism used by speculative grammars was essentially linguistic and implied a necessary close relation between the study of grammar and the study of the sign.

The authors of mediaeval treatises on the *modi significandi* (often entitled *De modis significandi*, or *Summa grammatica*, or *Summa modorum significandi*, or *Grammatica speculativa*) have come to be known as the *Modistae* who taught in the late Sixties of the 13<sup>th</sup> till the Thirties of the 14<sup>th</sup> centuries. The present study is an account of the grammatical theories of this group of mediaeval scholars (mostly the work of Thomas of Erfurt), set in the appropriate context of situation and seen in terms of the part they played in mediaeval semiotic theory, since their theory rests on the study of words and the properties of these words as signs of things. At the end of the present study the influence of the *speculative grammar* on present linguistic theories is announced. Some influence of the *speculative grammar* one could discover in many contemporary linguistic theories like those of Noam Chomsky, Ronald Langacker, Robin Lakoff and even Ray Jackendoff.

*Translated by Andrzej K. Rogalski*

**Słowa kluczowe:** *modi significandi*, teorie gramatyczne, średniowieczna teoria semiotyczna, gramatyka spekulatywna.

**Key words:** *modi significandi*, grammatical theories, mediaeval semiotic theory, speculative grammar.

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