M&Ms – Mentally Mediated Meanings

Aristotle's sketchy remarks on the relations between words, concepts and things at the beginning of the *De interpretatione* (16a3-9) gave rise to several competing interpretations during the Middle Ages. All of them claimed to be orthodox, not only with respect to the Stagirite himself, but also to Boethius, the first and most significant Latin authority on that matter. The main stream interpretation (Peter Abelard, Thomas Aquinas, Walter Burley, John Duns Scotus, John Buridan) takes Aristotle to mean that words signify things by means of concepts in the sense that words signify concepts immediately, and things only mediately – an idea which is captured in the leitmotiv *voces significant res mediantibus conceptibus*. From the middle of the 13th century onwards, Aristotle's (and Boethius') words also gave rise to competing, sometimes quite idiosyncratic, interpretations of the exact role played by concepts in the semantics of words. These interpretations share the rejection of conceptual mediation and claim either that words signify things conventionally and concepts naturally (Roger Bacon), or that words do not signify concepts at all and things in a derivative way only, namely insofar as words signify conventionally the very same things which concepts signify naturally (William of Ockham).

Obviously, the discussion of the *mediantibus conceptibus* thesis did not end with the Middle Ages, for one can trace its continuous use and discussion through the Second Scholasticism – mainly in 17th century Spain – and subsequently in the vast pedagogical literature aimed at providing students in general (and theologians in particular) with a "classical" (i.e. scholastic) philosophical background. It is not surprising, then, that a late 19th and early 20th century philosopher of language like Anton Marty uses the *mediantibus conceptibus* principle and claims that it also applies to his own semantics. Thereby, the Swiss philosopher does nothing but add a page – though a remarkable one – to the long history of the reception of Aristotelian semantics.

My aim is neither to discuss Marty's or the medievals' interpretative models, nor to show how exactly the *mediantibus conceptibus* thesis was transmitted from the 17th to the 19th century. Rather, I intend to gather some first indications in order to answer the following question: which are the doctrinal similarities and differences between Marty's understanding of the *mediantibus conceptibus* thesis and the philosophical tradition which obviously – though indirectly – inspired it?

1. Anton Marty and the mediantibus conceptibus principle

On at least six occasions, Anton Marty (Schwytz 1847 - Prag 1914)[1] mentions the scholastic saying according to which words signify things by means of concepts: *voces significant res mediantibus conceptibus*.

[1] On Marty's philosophy, see Kevin Mulligan, ed., *Mind, Meaning and Metaphysics. The Philosophy and Theory of Language of Anton Marty*, Dordrecht: Kluwer, 1990; Wilhelm Baumgartner, Robin Rollinger, Dagmar Fügmann, eds., *Die Philosophie*

The general context of these occurrences is the semantics of names or, in Marty's terminology, of *Vorstellungssuggestive*. The claims, in whose defense Marty alludes to the medieval principle, are the following:

i) In the sentence '*A* exists', *A* does not name a concept[2] but an object. This, says Marty, was the opinion of the (good) scholastics[3]:

> Die Namen, sagte sie [i.e. die bessere Scholastik], *bezeichnen die Dinge*; doch tun sie es unter Vermittlung der Begriffe (*mediantibus conceptibus*). Daher gibt es allgemeine und individuelle Namen, wie es allgemeine und individuelle Begriffe gibt.[4]

ii) Strict synonymy occurs when different names name the same object by means of the same concept (a variation of the mediating concept excludes synonymy, but a variation of the auxiliary concepts, which ensure the link between the word and its meaning, is neutral with respect to synonymy; Marty calls such auxiliary concepts the inner linguistic form):

> In Wahrheit haben die Vertreter der aristotelischen Logik trotz ihres Satzes: '*Vocabula sunt notae rerum*' nicht verkannt, dass die Namen in gewissem Sinne auch Zeichen unserer Begriffe sind. Ja, es ist sogar ihre Lehre, dass sie letzteres mehr direkt und ersteres nur indirekt und mittelbar sind. Die Namen – darüber war die aristotelische Logik sich völlig klar – können Zeichen von etwas in mehrfachem, namentlich in doppeltem Sinne genannt werden, indem sie es *bedeuten* oder indem sie es *nennen*. Letztere Funktion ist vermittelt, und zwar durch die erstere. Die Namen sind Zeichen unserer Begriffe oder Vorstellungen, indem sie solche in uns erwecken. Das Aussprechen eines Namens ist ein Mittel, im Hörer einen gewissen Begriff hervorzurufen, und ihn nennt man darum die Bedeutung oder den Sinn des Namens. Ein Lautkomplex, der keinen Begriff erweckt, ist für uns 'sinnlos'; solche, die denselben Begriff wachrufen, heissen gleichbedeutend oder synonym. Fragt man jedoch, was der Name nenne, so ist es nicht der Begriff oder die Vorstellung, sondern der Gegenstand derselben, das, was ihnen etwa in Wirklichkeit entspricht. Aber nur *mediantibus conceptibus*, wie die alte Logik richtig sagte, werden die Gegenstände durch die Laute unserer Sprache genannt, *unter Vermittlung der Begriffe* und als das, als was die Begriffe sie auffassen. Diesen und keinen andern Sinn hatte der Satz: '*vocabula sunt notae rerum*', und zu einem Tadel desselben ist für den, der ihn nicht missdeutet, kein Anlass. Die Tatsache, dass ein *Gegenstand* unter Vermittlung verschiedener – mehr oder weniger vollständiger – Begriffe eine mehrfache Benennung erhalten kann, ist also altbekannt. Neu ist ihre Vermengung mit der ganz andern, dass oft *derselbe Begriff* unter Vermittlung verschiedener innerer Formen einen lautlichen Ausdruck empfängt, und man kann nicht vorsichtig genug sein, sie zu vermeiden und auszuschliessen.[5]

Anton Martys [*Brentano Studien* 12 (2006/2009)]; Robin Rollinger, *Philosophy of Language and other Matters in the Work of Anton Marty*, Amsterdam: Rodopi, 2010.

[2] Here 'concept' renders '*Begriff*' – and just as a concept is a conceptual presentation (*begriffliche Vorstellung*), a perception (*Anschauung*) is a "sensible" presentation (*anschauliche Vorstellung*). In the following (and when considering Marty's position), we take 'concept' in the sense of a conceptual presentation.

[3] Anton Marty, "Über subjectlose Sätze und das Verhältnis der Grammatik zu Logik und Psychologie" [fünfter Artikel, 1894], in *Anton Marty. Gesammelte Schriften*, Bd. II.1, Josef Eisenmeier, Alfred Kastil, Oskar Kraus, eds., Halle: Max Niemeyer, 1918, p. 168: "In dem Satze 'A ist' nennt A nicht einen allgemeinen oder individuellen Begriff, nicht den Begriff eines Kreises oder den Begriff dieses Buches, sondern wie schon die bessere Scholastik betont hat, einen Kreis oder dieses Buch selbst, und das ist es, was in dem ausgesprochenen Urteil anerkannt wird."

[4] *Ibid.*, n. 1.

[5] Anton Marty, « Über das Verhältnis von Grammatik und Logik » [1893], in *Anton Marty. Gesammelte Schriften*, Bd. II.2, Josef Eisenmeier, Alfred Kastil, Oskar Kraus, eds., Halle: Max Niemeyer, 1920, p. 57-99 (84, n. 1). Here Marty criticizes Ludwig Noiré and his quite idiosyncratic view of ancient logic: "Aristoteles hielt also die Namen für Symbole der Dinge

iii) The function of nomination (*Nennung*) depends on the functions of indication (or *Kundgabe*, i.e. the speaker's indication of a certain presentation of his) and steering (or *Bedeutung*, i.e. the triggering of a certain presentation in the hearer)[6]. In a footnote, Marty comments:

> In diesem Sinne kann man es nur billigen, wenn schon die Scholastiker sagten: *voces significant res mediantibus conceptibus*. Die Namen nennen in der Tat die Gegenstände als das, als was sie durch unsere begrifflichen Gedanken erfasst werden (resp. vom Hörer erfasst werden sollen).[7]

iv) The medieval semantic principle holds for proper names as well: what they name is mediated by what they mean, but in their case, the mediating concept is a singular one, and the context of the utterance determines which concept plays the mediating role:

> Der Satz, dass die Namen die Gegenstände nennen *mediantibus conceptibus* könnte nur eine Anfechtung erfahren hinsichtlich der Eigennamen im engsten Sinne des Wortes, wie Aristoteles, Napoleon, … <Man> könnte geneigt sein zu meinen, die Eigennamen nennten bloss etwas, *ohne etwas zu bedeuten*. Doch wäre auch dies meines Erachtens nicht die richtige Deutung der Tatsachen. Auch hier wird eine Vorstellung des einzelnen Gegenstandes, die seine Nennung vermittelt (und natürlich muss es eine individuelle sein), nicht fehlen. Aber es ist dem Zusammenhang überlassen, *welche* gerade erweckt werde, während der Name für sich allein in dieser Beziehung nicht determinierend wirkt.[8]

v) In the case of names expressing conceptual presentations (*Begriffe*, as opposed to *Anschauungen*), the scholastic principle can be understood in a notable way. The mediating function can be attributed not to the concept itself, but to its content – the content of the concept "white", for example, is that in virtue of which every white object falls under that concept. It is what Marty calls "the concept's object in a strict sense" as opposed to "the concept's object in a wide sense", i.e. its extension:

> <Es> kann bei ihnen [i.e. den Begriffen], im Gegensatz zu den Anschauungen, ein Gegenstand im engeren und weiteren Sinne unterschieden werden. Im weiteren Sinne wäre also z.B. für den Begriff Weisses alles das ein Gegenstand zu nennen, was zu seinem Umfang, d.h. zum Bereiche seiner Anwendbarkeit gehört, d.h. alles, wovon, wenn es ist, das Weisssein in Wahrheit prädiziert werden kann. Im engeren Sinne dagegen kann vom Gegenstand dieses Begriffes gesprochen werden mit Rücksicht auf diejenige Seite an dem im ersten Sinne Gegenstand Genannten, wonach dieses in einer solchen unvollständigen Vorstellung erfasst ist. Mit anderen Worten: wenn das Vorgestellte, falls es wirklich wäre, dem Vorgestellten in der Art adäquat sein würde, daß in ihm nichts gegeben wäre, was nicht auch im Vorstellenden als solchen sein Gegenstück hätte, so können wir es 'Gegenstand im engeren Sinne' oder *Inhalt* nennen … Fasst man den Terminus 'Inhalt' in dieser Weise, … so kann man, statt zu sagen: die Namen nennen die Dinge *mediantibus conceptibus* oder als das, als was sie vorgestellt werden, sich auch ausdrücken: sie bedeuten den Inhalt unserer

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(*vocabula sunt notae rerum*, Cic.). Um zu dem Begriffe des Begriffs (*notio, conceptus*) zu gelangen, bedurfte es nicht weniger, als der angestrengten Geistesarbeit der ganzen mittelalterlichen Philosophie." (*Die Lehre Kants und der Ursprung der Vernunft*, Mainz: J. Diemer, 1882, p. 368). Noiré probably took his Ciceronian quotation from Herder's *Abhandlung über den Ursprung der Sprache* of 1772.

[6] Anton Marty, *Untersuchungen zur Grundlegung der allgemeinen Grammatik und Sprachphilosophie*, Halle: Max Niemeyer, 1908, p. 436: "Unter Vermittlung dieser äussernden und jener Bedeutungsfunktion aber kommt den Namen nun auch das zu, was wir als das *Nennen* bezeichnen."

[7] *Ibid.*, n. 1.

[8] Anton Marty, *Untersuchungen*…, p. 438-439, n. 2.

> begrifflichen Gedanken, die wir durch Aussprechen des Namens als in uns stattfindend äussern und in gleicher Weise im Hörer erwecken wollen.[9]

vi) The difference between proper and improper presentations is a difference in mediating concepts – an improper presentation is a presentation which is not perceptual (neither directly nor indirectly), or which presents its object in an oblique and non-essential way (i.e. something like a case of a mental *denominatio extrinseca*):

> Es kommt bekanntlich vor, dass man etwas ausdrücklich as *eigentlich* 'unnennbar' bezeichnet, es aber doch irgendwie nennt; also *uneigentlich*. Was ist mit diesem Unterschied eines eigentlichen und uneigentlichen Nennens oder Bezeichnens gemeint? Eines dürfte klar sein, dass, wie überhaupt die Namen stets etwas nennen *mediantibus conceptibus*, jener Unterschied in der Weise des Nennens mit einem Unterschied der dasselbe vermittelnden 'Begriffe' zusammenhänge.[10]

Without going into the details of the many doctrinal elements appearing in the six passages just quoted, one can perhaps summarize Marty's understanding and use of the scholastics' semantic principle as follows: the '*mediantibus conceptibus*' encompasses several moments in the semantics of names whose careful distinction is probably Marty's most significant contribution to the philosophy of language. In a certain sense – but in a certain sense *only* – names are signs of concepts: concepts are not the terms of the semantic relation, but the successful use of names *always* involves the mental level of presentations. Three "conceptual" moments can be distinguished in Marty's analysis of the meaning of names[11]. The first two are part of the complex pragmatic process of *Bedeutung*: a name is a vocal tool used to indicate a certain concept in the speaker (*Kundgabe*), and to trigger a certain concept in the hearer[12] – a process which includes a genuine normative component, for in the proper sense of the expression, the *Bedeutung* of a name is "that the hearer *should* form a certain presentation (*Vorstellung*)"[13]; the third moment consists

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[9] Anton Marty, *Untersuchungen*…, p. 448.

[10] Anton Marty, *Untersuchungen*…, p. 455.

[11] The full analysis of communication involves the further level of the "inner linguistic form" (*innere Sprachform*). The presentations making up the inner form, however, are not part of what is meant by names. They are auxiliary presentations linking the uttered sounds to the intended presentations. Presentations making up the inner form are implicit (and often unnoticed) leftovers of earlier stages in the development of a given language, mainly functioning by habit and association of ideas – see Anton Marty, *Untersuchungen*…, p. 134-150.

[12] *Bedeutung* is itself mediated by *Kundgabe* – Anton Marty, "Über subjectlose Sätze…", [dritter Artikel, 1884], in *Gesammelte Schriften*, Bd. II.1, p. 69: "Aber … die Kundgabe meines Vorstellens bleibt doch stets das Mittel zur Erweckung der Vorstellung im Hörenden, und diese letztere Funktion des Namens, die wir seine Bedeutung nennen, kommt ihm also nur mittelbar zu vermöge der ersteren, die wir sein Kundgeben nannten. Der Name ist Zeichen einer Vorstellung, die der Hörende in sich erwecken soll, indem er Zeichen des Vorstellens ist, das im Redenden sich abspielt." For a qualification of this principle (in practice, one only communicates by means of sentences, and never by using pure, isolated names), see Anton Marty, *Untersuchungen*…, p. 491.

[13] See for example Anton Marty, *Untersuchungen*…, p. 288: "Indem wir die Begriffe des Bedeutens im allgemeinen erläuterten und speziell auch am Beispiel der Aussage illustrierten, sind wir bereits zu dem Resultate gekommen: die Bedeutung der Aussage sei es, im Hörer ein Urteil von bestimmter Art zu erwecken. Statt dessen kann man sich aber auch ausdrücken: die Aussage bedeute 'dass der Hörer ein gewisses Urteil fällen solle." – On that topic, see the monograph

in the intentionality of the (indicated and triggered) presentation[14]: a presentation always presents an object and that object is precisely what names name (*Nennung*). Thus, a kind of mental (or conceptual) mediation is crucial in Marty's "pragmatic semantics"[15]: words refer to things by indicating and triggering mental acts directed towards objects[16].

2. The Aristotelian-Boethian framework

Concerning the question of Marty's source for his use of the medieval formula *voces significant res mediantibus conceptibus*, the Swiss philosopher could have found it just about anywhere in the vast pedagogic literature of his times[17]. Like his teacher and friend Franz Brentano, Marty was (for a surprinsingly short time) a catholic priest, a circumstance which suggests a certain familiarity with compendia of scholastic philosophy, the kind of books on which the philosophical training of future ecclesiastics was based[18]. Whichever Marty's immediate source might be, the formula certainly developed from Boethius' (d. 524) comments on Aristotle's *De interpretatione*[19]. In the opening lines of this short treatise, Aristotle writes:

> Spoken expressions are symbols of mental impressions, and written expressions <are symbols> of spoken expressions. And just as not all men have the same writing, so not all men make the same vocal sounds, but the things of which <all> these are primarily signs are

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(inspired by Marty) of Erich Ahlman, *Das normative Moment im Bedeutungsbegriff*, Helsingfors: Druckerei der Finnischen Literatur Gesellschaft, 1926.

[14] On Marty's theory of intentionality, see Arkadiusz Chrudzimsky, "Die Intentionalitätstheorie Anton Martys", *Grazer Philosophische Studien* 57, p. 175-214.

[15] Calling the first two moments "semantic-pragmatic", one can qualify the third as "strictly semantic" – in that sense, Marty's semantics is a "pragmatic semantics".

[16] For an attempt to bring out the details of *Kundgabe* and *Bedeutung* with respect to the intentions these processes essentially involve, see Laurent Cesalli, "Anton Marty's intentionalist theory of meaning", forthcoming in Denis Fisette, Guillaume Fréchette, eds., *Themes from Brentano*, Amsterdam: Rodopi, 2012.

[17] The *Cursus philosophici* of the main figures of the Second Scholasticism were still widely used at the end of the 19th century. See, for example, Cosmus Alamannus, *Summa philosophiae ex variis libris D. Thomae Aquinatis Doctoris Angelici in ordinem cursus philosophicus accommodata*, Parisius: Lethielleux, 1885 [1618 for the first edition], p. 221: "Respondeo [*to the question:* utrum nomina et verba immediate significant conceptus an res] dicendum, quod necesse est dicere, quod nomina et verba significant res et conceptus, sed hos *immediate* et per prius, illas vero *mediate*, mediantibus scilicet conceptibus, et per posterius." For (many) other occurrences of this leitmotiv in the philosophy of language of the 16th and 17th centuries, see Stephan Meier-Oeser, *Die Spur des Zeichens. Das Zeichen und seine Funktion in der Philosophie des Mittelalters und der frühen Neuzeit*, Berlin: De Gruyter, 1997, esp. p. 282ff.

[18] Marty completed his training in theology in 1867 in Mainz with a work on Aquinas' theory of knowledge. In the following year, he began attending Brentano's lectures in Würzburg, where he also met Carl Stumpf. His time as a priest lasted from 1870 to1873 (Brentano, himself a priest since 1864, made the same radical move in the same year).

[19] On Boethius' theory of language, see the outstanding study of John Magee, *Boethius on Signification and Mind*, Leiden: Brill, 1989. On Boethius' philosophy and its influence on the Middle Ages, see John Marenbon, *Boethius*, New York: Oxford University Press, 2003, as well as John Marenbon, ed., *The Cambridge Companion to Boethius*, New York: Cambridge University Press, 2009.

> the same mental impressions for all men, and the things of which these <mental impressions> are likenesses are ultimately the same.[20]

Engaging in a kind of comment *avant la lettre*, Boethius writes, in the much longer *editio secunda* of his work:

> And so before coming to Aristotle's own words, let us discuss a little in general verbs and names and what they signify. For if there is to be questioning and answering or continuous and coherent speech so that another person hears and understands, if anyone is to teach, another learn, the whole arrangement of speech consists of these three: things, thoughts and spoken sounds. The thing is conceived in a thought. Spoken sound signifies the concepts of the mind and thoughts, whilst the thoughts themselves both conceptualise the things which underlie them and are signified by spoken sounds.[21]

Two points can be underscored here: first, the different semantic relations present in Aristotle's text (being symbol, sign, or likeness) are reduced by Boethius to the sole relation of being a sign of something. Second, the basic Aristotelian scheme is explicitly placed in a communicational setting (questioning and answering, another person's understanding, teaching and learning) – something which, for sure, is not excluded by Aristotle's words, but on which he certainly does not put any emphasis[22]. In fact, as Magee has convincingly shown, the interplay between a speaker and a hearer plays a crucial role in Boethius' exposition, for he considers the triad *res-intellectus-vox* from two opposite directions, corresponding to the order of speaking (*ordo orandi*, from *res* to *vox*) and the order of knowledge (*ordo cosgnoscendi*, from *vox* to *res*)[23]:

> … the man who teaches or gives a continuous address or asks questions behaves in the opposite way to those who learn, listen or reply, in three things: spoken sound, thought and thing (we will leave out the letters because some people cannot read). For those who teach, speak and question, proceeding from things to a thought, practise the function and power of their own particular activity through names and verbs. For they derive their thoughts from things which act as subjects and express them through names and verbs. But the man who learns, hears or even the man who answers, goes from names to thoughts and eventually reaches the things. The learner, listener or answerer, in receiving the words of the teacher, speaker or questioner, understands what each of them says and in understanding acquires knowledge of the things too and is confirmed in that knowledge.[24]

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[20] Aristotle, *De interpretatione*, c. 1, 16a3-9, tranls. by H. G. Apostle, *Aristotle's Categories and Propositions (De interpretatione)*, Grinnell Iowa: The Peripatetic Press, 1980, p. 30. Magee judges Apostle's translation "more precise" than Ackrill's version of the text.

[21] Boethius, *Commanterius in librum Aristotelis Perihermeneias*, editio secunda, 20.10-20. English translation: *On Aristotle On interpretation 1-3*, translated by Andrew Smith, London: Duckworth, 2010, p. 25.

[22] Note, however, that a little later in the *De interpretatione* (c. 3, 16b19-20), Aristotle says that "[w]hen uttered just by itself a verb is a name and signifies something – the speaker arrests his thought and the hearer pauses – but it does not yet signify whether it is or not". As we shall see, medieval commentators will associate this passage with Aristotle's theory of linguistic meaning at the beginning of the same treatise which gave rise to the very idea of the concepts' mediating role. And in *Rhetoric* I.3, 1358b1, he says that three components make up speech: the speaker, that which is talked about, and the hearer, the latter being the most important element.

[23] John Magee, *Boethius on Signification…*, p. 64-92.

[24] Boethius, *Commentarius…*, 23.23-24.6, English translation, p. 27.

In the resulting picture, concepts play a pivotal role in both orders. As Magee nicely puts it, they possess a "Janus like quality", being "in some sense 'contiguous' with both, *res* and *vox*"[25]. Accordingly, they function as mediators in the cognitive order (one could say something like *res concipiuntur mediantibus conceptibus*), as well as in the corresponding (and symmetrical) semantic order: *voces significant res mediantibus conceptibus*.

3. Four medieval models

The most important source for medieval semantic theory is Aristotle's isolated remark on the meaning of words at the beginning of the *De interpretatione*[26]. Boethius's detailed explanation of this laconic passage plays a crucial role in the reception of the Stagirite's thought. The phenomenon of linguistic meaning (*significatio*) is explained in cognitive *and* communicative terms: in the hearer, words lead to things via concepts *because* the words pronounced by the speaker express concepts of things.

Although the Aristotelian-Boethian consensual idea that concepts play an essential role in the phenomenon of linguistic meaning is traditionally cashed out by the *mediantibus conceptibus* thesis – i.e. by the claim that concepts are immediately signified, and things only through concepts – the exact role of concepts gave rise to what the medievals perceived as a *non modica contentio inter viros famosos*, in the words of Roger Bacon, or, as John Duns Scotus puts it, as a *magna altercatio*[27]. In the following, we shall consider four competing semantic models elaborated from the 12th to the 14th century on the base of the Aristotelian-Boethian framework. It will turn out that the double dimension of *cognition* and *communication* already clearly identified by Boethius will lead to the emergence of two non exclusive perspectives: a strictly semantic, and a pragmatic-semantic perspective, the former being typically expressed by the *mediantibus conceptibus* thesis, and the latter by the idea that "to signify" (*significare*) is nothing but to constitute a concept in the mind of the hearer: *significare est intellectum constituere*.

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[25] John Magee, *Boethius on Signification*…, p. 71.

[26] Other important sources are Augustine's *De magistro* and *De doctrina christiana*. The *De dialectica* had close to no impact on medieval semantics – see Irène Rosier-Catach, "Henri de Gand, le *De Dialectica* d'Augustin, et l'imposition des noms divins", *Documenti e studi sulla tradizione filosofica medieval* 6 (1995), p. 145-253.

[27] On medieval semantics and its development, see for example Lambert Marie De Rijk, *Logica Modernorum*, vol. II.1, Assen: Van Gorcum, 1967, p. 177-220, 555-598; Jan Pinborg, "Bezeichnung in der Logik des 13. Jahrhunderts", in Albert Zimmermann, ed., *Der Begriff der* repraesentatio *im Mittelalter*, Berlin: De Gruyter, 1971, p. 238-281; Joël Biard, *Logique et théorie du signe au XIV^e siècle*, Paris: Vrin, 1989; Irène Rosier-Catach, *La parole comme acte. Sur la grammaire et la sémantique au XIII^e siècle*, Paris: Vrin, 1994; Klaus Jacobi, Peter King, Christian Strub, "From the *intellectus verus / falsus* to the *dictum propositionis*: the Semantics of Peter Abelard and his Circle", *Vivarium* 34.1 (1996), 15-40; Stephan Meier Oeser, *Die Spur des Zeichens…*, p. 42-114 (esp. p. 82-86); Giorgio Pini, "Species, Concept, and Thing: Theories of Signification in the Second Half of the Thirteenth Century", *Medieval Philosophy and Theology* 8 (1999), p. 21-52; Fabrizio Amerini, "La dottrina della *significatio* di Francesco da Prato O.P. (XIV secolo). Una critica tomista a Guiglelmo di Ockham", *Documenti e Studi sulla Tradizione Filosofica Medievale* 11 (2000), p. 375-408; Giorgio Pini, "Signification of names in Duns Scotus and some of his contemporaries", *Vivarium* 39.1 (2001), p. 21-51; Luisa Valente, *Logique et théologie dans les Écoles parisiennes entre 1150 et 1220*, Paris: Vrin, 2008, p. 36-62; Costantino Marmo, *La semiotica del XIII secolo*, Milano: Bompani, 2010, p. 114-125.

3.1. Concepts as semantic mediators

In his glosses on Aristotle's *De interpretatione* – a commentary he wrote on the base of Boethius' translation and (second) commentary – Peter Abelard (1079-1142) argues at length that, at least in standard cases, words first and foremost signify concepts (*intellectus*) which lead us to the cognition of things[28]:

> Vocal sounds were not invented because of the similitudes of things or of concepts, but rather because of the things themselves and their concepts, that is: in order that those concepts produce knowledge about the natures of things … Vocal sounds … constitute concepts about things…, since it is clear that vocal sounds direct [*applicant*] the hearer's mind on a similitude of a thing in order that in this <similitude> the mind focuses [*attendat*] not on <the similitude> itself, but on the thing for which <the similitude> was posited.[29]

This explanation is remarkably hearer-oriented, a perspective which is related to the general (and traditional) question of the utility of the treatise one is commenting upon. In the prologue of his commentary, Abelard, relying on the opinion of Herminos – a Greek commentator, active in the 2nd century A.D. – makes the following observation:

> When Aristotle teaches that vocal sounds are the marks of concepts, he indicates the utility of the intended work. For since everyone is naturally apt to perceive concepts, it was useful to know by means of which instruments [*instrumenta*] one could manifest one's concepts or conceive foreign <concepts> [*suos intellectus manifestare uel alienos concipere*] – something Aristotle evidently suggests where he shows, in this treatise, that vocal sounds are marks of concepts. And therefore, the so to speak general and common utility of the whole treatise consists in teaching us that vocal sounds can produce [*generare*] or contain [*concipere*] concepts.[30]

The communicative interpretation line opened by Boethius is obviously taken up by Abelard who insists on what we could call a "pragmatic moment" in his semantics. Linguistic meaning is not only *significatio*, a (mediated) relation between words and things, it is also *significare*, an action performed by a speaker with a precise goal – *significare est intellectum constituere* as Abelard (also) says in his treatise on concepts[31]:

> And <verbs and names> "signify something", and that they do signify, <Aristotle> shows on the base of the description of what it is to signify [*a descriptione significandi*], namely: that they determine [*constituunt*] a concept in the hearer. And this is: he "who speaks", that is: who utters a word, "arrests his thought". Which he [i.e. Aristotle] shows from the effect, that is:

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[28] Non standard cases discussed by Abelard are instances of empty terms (meaning, non-existents or fictions). In such cases, concepts are signified, but there is nothing in the extra-mental world to "terminate" (i.e. to be the target term of) the relation of signification. The semantics of empty terms provides a strong argument for the immediate signification of concepts by words – see Peter Abelard, *Glossae super Peri Hermeneias*, c. 1, ed. by Klaus Jacobi and Christian Strub, Turnhout: Brepols, 2010, p. 28-39.

[29] Peter Abelard, *Glossae super Peri Hermeneias*, c. 1, p. 33-34.

[30] Peter Abelard, *Glossae super Peri Hermeneias*, proem., ed. by Klaus Jacobi and Christian Strub, Turnhout: Brepols, 2010, p. 21-22.

[31] Peter Abelard, *Des intellections*, ed. and transl. by Pierre Morin, Paris: Vrin, 1994, § 91.

> because he "who hears" a word "pauses", namely: focuses [*haerendo*] and freezes [*figendo*] his mind in the concept which it has through the word.[32]

Thus, Abelard links the concepts' *mediating role* with the *instrumental function* of words: linguistic meaning is explained in terms of speakers' linguistic actions and their effects on hearers[33].

Writing a good century after Abelard, Thomas Aquinas (1224-1274) is the most famous medieval tenant of the Boethian reading of the opening chapter of the *De interpretatione*. In his comment, he puts forward a metaphysico-doxographical explanation for the thesis that words signify things *mediantibus conceptibus*: since names have a general meaning – '*homo*' does not signify Plato rather than Socrates –, and since the Stagirite rejected Plato's Ideas, words simply *have* to signify things via concepts:

> … it is important to understand that the intellect's conceptions are what names and verbs signify, according Aristotle: for it cannot be that they immediately signify things themselves, as is obvious from their mode of signifying: for this name 'man' signifies the human nature abstracted from singulars, and thus, it cannot be that it signifies immediately a singular man. This is the reason why the Platonists claimed that it signifies the separate idea of man itself; however, because, according to Aristotle's opinion, such <an idea> does not really subsist in abstraction, but only in the intellect, Aristotle had to say that words signify conceptions of the intellect immediately, and through them, things [*res mediantibus illis*].[34]

As for the pragmatic or instrumental dimension introduced by Abelard, we find it in Aquinas as well, though with lesser emphasis. Commenting on the thesis of the semantic equivalence of names and verbs (*De interpretatione* 3, 16b19-20), Aquinas says that the *proprium* of a signifying word is to evoke or produce a concept in the mind of a hearer: "*proprium vocis significativae est quod generet aliquem intellectum in animo audientis*"[35]. Here again, the concepts' mediating role is not only stated, but also presented from the perspective of verbal communication.

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[32] Peter Abelard, *Glossae super Peri Hermeneias*, c. 3, p. 116. The words between quotation marks correspond to literal quotations of Aristotle's text in Abelard's commentary.

[33] Such an interpretation seems to have been common from the second half of the 12th century onward. See for example the following passage of the anonymous *Ars meliduna* (written between 1160 and 1180), in Lambert Marie De Rijk, *Logica modernorum*, vol. II.1, p. 296: "Words have been imposed upon things not because of the things themselves – indeed, these do not require imposition for their manifestation, since they are offered to sense perception –, but in order to interpret the concepts of things we have. However, it would be more appropriate to say that words are interpreted [*interpretari*] or that they constitute [*constituere*] concepts, than that they signify."

[34] Thomas Aquinas, *Expositio libri Peryhermeneias*, I.2, Editio Leonina, t. I* 1, cura et studio fratrum praedicatorum, Paris: Vrin, 1989, p. 10-11. The *mediantibus conceptibus* thesis is the *opinio communis* in the 13th century, defended for example by Robert Kilwardby, Albert the Great, and Lambert of Lagny – see Costantino Marmo, *La semiotica del XIII secolo*, p. 115 (with further literature). One should note, however, that different accounts of the nature of the signified and mediating mental entities are propounded. Thus, the three authors just mentioned identify them with the *species intelligibilis*, whereas for Aquinas it is the *verbum mentis* (or *conceptio intellectus*) which plays this role, a mental entity which depends on, but is distinct from, the *species intelligibilis* (see Thomas Aquinas, *Quaestiones disputatae De potentia*, q. 8, a. 1, resp.).

[35] Thomas Aquinas, *Expositio…*, I.5, p. 29.

3.2. Against semantic mediation: the direct signification of things

The interest for what actually happens between users of a given language is even stronger in Roger Bacon (1214-1292), author of a recently discovered (and incomplete) treatise on semiotics and semantics entitled *De signis*[36]. Among other original views, Bacon holds that linguistic meaning is a dynamic property. Taking the conventionality of language at face value, he claims that speakers are free to, and in fact often do, (re)impose words in their actual linguistic interactions, thus using them as signs for variegated "things" (in the broadest sense of the word, that is, including concepts and non-existents) according to what they *mean to say* by those words[37].

No formal commentary of Aristotle's *De interpretatione* by the Franciscan master is known, but at the end of the fragment of the *De signis* which has come down to us, Bacon addresses the question of the relation between words, concepts and things. In a certain sense, Bacon agrees with Boethius and Aquinas that words signify concepts. The latter, however, are not signified conventionally (and neither are they what words signify primarily). Rather, words signify concepts *naturally* (and things immediately):

> And it is clear for whoever asks, that after <a name> has been imposed exclusively upon an extra-mental thing [i.e. when the name was not imposed upon a concept], it is impossible that the vocal sound signifies the concept of <this> thing as a sign given by the soul and signifying conventionally, because a signifying vocal sound does not signify unless by imposition and institution.[38]

> When a thing is actually cognized and actually named by a speaker, the thing actually named and cognized implies [*ponit*] a concept [*species*] in the soul as well as a cognitive disposition, because a thing can only be cognized through its concept and if such a disposition exists in the soul; and if it cannot be cognized, it cannot be named significatively. Therefore, whenever a significative vocal sound is uttered significatively, a concept of a thing as well as a cognitive disposition must be actually present in the soul; therefore, a significative vocal sound uttered significatively and according to the convention [*ad placitum*] necessarily entails a concept of a thing as well as a cognitive disposition in the soul. But a natural sign in the first mode was understood in that way; therefore a vocal sound conventionally signifying a thing is a natural sign of the concept of the thing itself existing in the soul, and this according to he first mode of a natural sign. And Boethius explicitly says in his *Commentary on the book Perihermeneias* that a vocal sound signifies a concept of a thing, and Aristotle holds in the same place that vocal sounds are the marks of the impressions [*passiones*] which are in the soul, and such impressions are concepts [*species*] and dispositions according to Boethius, because a thing is not in the soul.[39]

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[36] Bacon's treatise is edited by K.M. Fredborg, L. Nielsen, J. Pinborg, "An unedited part of Roger Bacon's *Opus maius*: '*De signis*'", *Traditio* 34 (1978), p. 75-136.

[37] On this specific point, see Thomas Maloney, "Roger Bacon on the *significatum* of words", in Lucie Brind'Amour, Eugène Vance, eds., *Archéologie du signe*, Toronto: Pontifical Institute of Medieval Studies, 1983, p. 187-212; Stephan Meier-Oeser, *Die Spur des Zeichens…*, p. 50-65; Irène Rosier-Catach, *La parole comme acte…*, chapters 3 to 5; Constantino Marmo, *La semiotica del XIII secolo*, p. 79-92 and 114-120.

[38] Roger Bacon, *De signis*, § 163.

[39] Roger Bacon, *De signis*, § 165. The first mode of a natural sign is that of the inference (a colored sunset is a sign of rain the next morning) ; the two other modes of natural signs are similitude and causality (the effect is sign of its cause).

Bacon is of course perfectly aware of the fact that his interpretation twists the authoritative texts which lead quite naturally to the *mediantibus conceptibus* thesis as held, for example, by Aquinas. To the objection that this is not precisely what Aristotle and Boethius seem to have in mind he thus replies that there is a shift of perspective in the Aristotelian treatise: in the opening chapter, Aristotle is talking about signs in general – just as Bacon himself in most of the *De signis*, by the way… – and not specifically about linguistic signs. This is clearly shown, Bacon argues, by the fact that Aristotle presents concepts as natural signs of things (and concepts are certainly not linguistic signs); furthermore, it is only from chapter two onwards – *de nomine* – that Aristotle does specifically speak about linguistic signs (and there, the signification of concepts by words is not a topic anymore).

As for the instrumental conception of words, already present in Abelard (and to a lesser extent in Aquinas), it plays a central role in Bacon, although the idea is not expressed in the passages where he addresses the question of the relation between words, concepts, and things, but in the general characterization of the sign, given at the very beginning of his treatise on semiotics:

> The sign belongs to the category of relation, and it is said <to be a sign> essentially with respect to that [i.e. the intellect of a receiver] for which it signifies [*ad illud cui significat*], for it actually posits that <for which it signifies> [i.e. the intellect of the receiver] when it actually is a sign, and potentially, when it is a sign potentially. As a matter of fact, unless someone can conceive <something> by means of a sign [*concipere per signum*], it [i.e. the sign] would be vain and empty; moreover: it would not be a sign at all, but remain a sign only according to its substance and would not keep its essential function of sign [*ratio signi*], like a father's substance remains when <his> son is dead, but not the relation of paternity.[40]

Words, that is: linguistic signs, are used by speakers to make others conceive something by virtue of them. The essential role Bacon attributes to hearers (or more generally: to receivers, that is to "that *for which*" a sign signifies) is confirmed by many aspects of his theory of language[41], and on one occasion at least, he even explicitly associates words with mechanical tools. Words are used by speakers to perform certain speech acts just like a stick is used to perform certain mechanical acts:

> … much like a man or a soul is the main agent in the operation of negation and the word '*non*' the instrument, he who beats is the main agent in the act of beating and the stick is the instrument; and in the same way a man or a soul is the main agent in the <linguistic> subject's distribution [i.e. quantification], and '*omnis*' is the instrument.[42]

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[40] Roger Bacon, *De signis*, § 1.

[41] See Alain de Libera and Irène Rosier-Catach, "Engendrement du discours et intention de signifier chez Roger Bacon", *Histoire, Épistémologie, Langage*, VIII.2 (1986), p. 63-79. Contrary to the authors we considered so far, Bacon develops his views on language under a decisively Augustinian perspective (while the authority of Aristotle plays a comparatively minor role) – hence the overwhelming importance of the notion of communication and linguistic interaction in his semantics. On this point, see Irène Rosier-Catach, "Aristotle and Augustine. Two models of occidental medieval semantics", in H. Sing Gill, G. Manetti, eds., *Signs and Signification*, New Dehli: Bahri Publications, t. II, p. 41-62.

[42] Roger Bacon, *Summa de sophismatibus et distinctionibus*, Robert Steele, ed., Oxford: Clarendon, 1937, p. 153-154. Such a concrete, instrumental conception of words can already be observed in the *Tractatus de proprietatibus sermonum* (ca. 1200, ed. Lambert Marie De Rijk, *Logica Modernorum*, II.2, p. 710): "But it seems that 'to signify' is not the same when it

According to Bacon, then, concepts are of foremost importance in the semantics of words, but they are *not* what words signify (except in the very peculiar case of the imposition of words upon concepts). Concepts are that without which no thing – literally: *nothing* – could be understood, grasped, or conceived, and subsequently signified, or named. In other words, concepts are not *semantic mediators*, but sine qua non conditions for *i)* the *potentially* successful use of language (on the part of speakers), and *ii)* the *actually* successful use of language (on the part of hearers).

3.3. Instead of semantic mediation: semantic subordination

William of Ockham (1287-1347), famous for his radical nominalism and the idea of a full-fledged mental language[43], quite fundamentally rethinks the role played by concepts *in significando*. Unlike Bacon, he does not reject the idea of concepts being primarily and conventionally signified by words, but defends a surprising interpretation of Aristotle's words in the first chapter of the *De interpretatione*:

> But the Philosopher [i.e. Aristotle] says that a vocal sound *is a mark of an impression of the soul* [*passio animae*] because of a certain order prevailing among them in signifying; for a concept [*passio*] signifies things in the first place; in the second place, a vocal sound does not signify a concept, but the same things signified by the concept.[44]

The parallel passage from the *Summa logicae* reads:

> I say that vocal sounds are signs subordinated to concepts or intentions of the soul [*intentiones animae*], not because those vocal sounds, taking the word 'signs' in its proper sense, always signify those concepts, but because vocal sounds are imposed in order to signify the same things which are signified by concepts of the mind [*conceptus mentis*], so that a concept in the first place naturally signifies something, and a vocal sound <conventionally> signifies the same thing in the second place.[45]

Aristotle and Boethius, claims Ockham, did not mean anything else when they said that vocal sounds signify concepts[46]. This reading radically differs from the traditional interpretation

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is said of a vocal sound or of a user <of language>… One talks this way about beating [*percussio*], for the beating of the stick and the beating of the beating man are the same, but <the beating> of the stick <is> accidental as <is the beating> of an instrument, whereas <the beating> of the user of an instrument <is said> in a proper way … The same applies when one says: 'this one signifies a thing by means of a vocal sound' [*significat rem per vocem*], which means: 'he uses a sign and mark of a thing with the intention to produce a sign of the thing [*cum intentione faciendi signum de re*]." For a detailed discussion of this passage, see Irène Rosier-Catach, *La parole comme acte*, p. 173-179.

[43] On Ockham's philosophy of language, see Joël Biard, *Logique et théorie du signe…*, chapters 2-4, as well as Claude Panaccio, *Les mots, les concepts et les choses. La sémantique de Guillaume d'Occam et le nominalisme contemporain*, Montréal: Bellarmin, 1992, and Id., *Le discours intérieur. De Platon à Guillaume d'Ockham*, Paris: Seuil, 1999.

[44] William of Ockham, *Expositio in librum Perihermeneias Aristotelis*, proem., § 2, ed. Angelus Gambatese and Steven Brown, St. Bonaventure University: St. Bonaventure, N. Y., 1978, p. 347.

[45] William of Ockham, *Summa logicae*, I.1, ed. Philotheus Boehner and Gédéon Gál, St. Bonaventure University: St. Bonaventure, N. Y., 1974, p. 7-8.

[46] William of Ockham, *ibid.*: "Et universaliter omnes auctores, dicendo quod omes voces significant passiones vel sunt notae earum, non aliud intendunt nisi quod voces sunt signa secundario significantia illa quae per passiones animae primario importantur…".

paradigmatically represented by Aquinas[47]. Concepts are not seen as intermediary steps in the semantics of words anymore, but words as well as concepts display parallel, though subordinated semantics[48]. In a certain sense, both Aquinas and Ockham would agree that words signify things *because* concepts signify things. But while for Aquinas the *explanans* refers to the necessary mediation of concepts – and thus to a meaning *process* or meaning *chain* characterizing the actual functioning of linguistic signs – for Ockham it expresses a *historical* and *epistemological* fact. On his account, a spoken word can conventionally signify things only if, at some point in the past, someone who had a concept naturally signifying these things on his or her mind decided to use the word at stake henceforth to signify precisely these very things[49]. Ockham's position also differs from that of Roger Bacon. Despite the fact that both authors argue for the non-mediated signification of things, their different conceptions of what a linguistic sign is make their approach radically different: for Bacon, the functioning of a spoken word as a sign is essentially dependent on a receiver and his or her mental activity[50]; for Ockham, by contrast, a spoken word is a sign essentially in virtue of its ability to stand for things[51].

Ockham's originality also appears when one compares his positions with, for example, the ones of John Duns Scotus (1265-1308) and Walter Burley (1275-1344) who occupy, within the doctrinal development we are sketching here, an indermediate position between Aquinas and Ockham: both thinkers hold that words signify things, but they insist that the *significata* of words are not things *simpliciter* (*res ut existunt*), but things insofar as they are cognized (*res ut intelliguntur* or *ut intellectae*); accordingly, the moment of mental mediation – by the *species* or mental images of things, a kind of entity forcefully rejected by Ockham[52] – remains essential in their semantic theories[53].

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[47] See Dominik Perler, "Direkte und indirekte Bezeichnung. Die metaphysischen Hintergründe einer semantischen Debatte im Mittelalter", *Bochumer Philosophisches Jahrbuch für Antike und Mittelalter* 4 (1999), p. 125-152.

[48] In that respect, Bacon seems to be quite close to the idea of subordination, although he does not tackle it as such.

[49] Semantic subordination, as Claude Panaccio has shown, occurs at the time of the imposition of names and does not require that the concepts to which spoken words are subordinated exist in the mind of a speaker at the time of the utterance (this is Ockham's so called semantic externalism – see *Ockham on Concepts* Aldershot: Ashgate, 2004, chapter 9).

[50] See the opening paragraph of the *De signis*, quote above, p. ###.

[51] See William of Ockham, *Summa logicae*, I.1 – for a detailed discussion of Ockham's conception of the sign, see Claude Panaccio, *Ockham on Concepts*, ch. 3. Note, by the way, that Ockham's account of the semantic function of spoken words is remarkably close to what Karl Bühler, in opposition to Marty, will call "the coordination" (*Zuordnung*) of words with things and states of affairs: "There exists a totally different performance of language which cannot be derived from expressive moves and does not rest on the causal relation linking the uttered word to the hearer and the speaker, but depends on a relation which, in mathematics, is called coordination [*Zuordnung*]: the name is coordinated with its object, the statement with a state of affairs. … This performance [*Leistung*] … will be most adequately referred to … by the name of 'representation' [*Darstellung*]; for it is nothing but what images manage to perform with respect to certain states of affairs, or geographical maps with respect to others, namely: that the knower be able to grasp the state of affairs." (Karl Bühler, "Kritische Musterung der neuern Theorien des Satzes", *Indogermanisches Jahrbuch* 6 (1920), p. 1-20, here p. 3-4).

[52] See Katherine Tachau, *Vision and Certitude in the Age of Ockham. Optics, Epistemology, and the Foundation of Semantics 1250-1345*, Leiden: Brill, 1988, p. 130-135.

3.4. A "pragmatic compromise": semantic mediation and *subordination*

In the perspective of the present study, John Buridan (c. 1300-c. 1358) plays a notable role in that he combines the two hitherto competing ideas of the semantic mediation of concepts *and* of the semantic subordination of spoken to mental language[54]. In the preliminary remarks with which he opens the first treatise of his *Summulae*, Buridan makes the following observation:

> One has to know, therefore, that three discourses, three terms or <three> words can be distinguished to the extent that this point is touched upon at the beginning or the book *Peri hermeneias*, namely: mental, vocal and spoken <discourse>. … One has to note as well that just like conventionally significative vocal sounds are related to mental concepts in signifying, written words are related to spoken words in signifying. Hence, spoken words do not signify extra-mental things unless through the mediation of the concepts to which they are subordinated [*voces non significant res extra nisi mediantibus conceptibus quibus subordinantur*], and neither do written words signify concepts or certain extra-mental things unless they signify the spoken words which refer to those concepts.[55]

However, whereas the conceptual mediation described here coincides with the traditional, pre-Ockhamian idea, subordination, as Buridan understands it, is something quite different from what it means in Ockham. According to Buridan, the concepts of the things meant by speakers *must* occur in them *at the moment of utterance* – nothing can be signified, if it is not grasped conceptually. In other words: Buridanian semantic subordination is nothing but the backside of semantic mediation. This conception of signification goes hand in hand with the primacy of spoken over mental language. Like Roger Bacon, Buridan sees the essence of language in its communicative function:

> Regarding … <signification>, one has to note that speech, or the power to utter vocal sounds [*virtus vociferandi*] was given to us in order to enable us to signify our concepts to others [*aliis significare conceptus nostros*], and the sense of hearing was given to us in order that the concepts of utterers be signified to us [*nobis significarentur conceptus vociferantium*]. … Thus, it is evident that a signifying vocal sound has to signify a concept of the speaker to the hearer [*debet significare audienti conceptum proferentis*] and that it must evoke in the hearer a concept similar to <the one> of the speaker [*debet in audiente constituere conceptum similem conceptui proferentis*] … <and> it is clear that the ones who discuss and speak intend precisely this, namely: that their vocal sounds operate [*operentur*] in those two ways.[56]

Communication always occurs in a determinate situation and is highly context-sensitive. Accordingly, the elucidation of linguistic meaning requires the taking into account of the complex circumstances of utterance, the pragmatic context, including the intentions of speakers (or writers):

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[53] On this question, see the two papers of Giorgio Pini, "Species, Concept and Thing…", as well as "Signification of names…". See further Laurent Cesalli, *Le réalisme propositionnel. Sémantique et ontologie des propositions chez Jean Duns Scot, Gauthier Burley, Richard Brinkley et Jean Wyclif*, Paris: Vrin, 2007, p. 122-128 and 180-185. The position of Scotus seems to have changed over time, since in his *Ordinatio* (1304) he defends a position which is quite close to Ockham's – see Claude Panaccio, *Ockham on Concepts,* p. 166.

[54] On Buridan's philosophy of language, see Peter King, *John Buridan's Logic*, Dordrecht: Reidel, 1985, p. 1-84 ; Joël Biard, *Logique et théorie du signe…*, p. 162-202 ; Jack Zupko, *John Buridan*, Notre Dame: University of Notre Dame Press, 2003, p. 3-48 ; Gyula Klima, *John Buridan*, New York: Oxford University Press, 2009, chapters 2-9.

[55] John Buridan, *Summulae. De propositionibus*, I.i.6, ed. Ria van der Lecq, Turnhout: Brepols, 2005, p. 16-17.

[56] John Buridan, *Summulae. De suppositionibus*, IV.i.2, ed. Ria van der Lecq, Turnhout: Brepols, 1998, p. 9.

> Signifying names are conventional; this is why different authors often use the same names equivocally, according to diverse intentions, and it is allowed for all authors who use names to interpret those names according to the intentions they have while using those names, and their hearers, as well as the readers of their books must receive the author's words according to the intention he has or seems to have.[57]

The "compromise" suggested by Buridan, then, can be qualified as "pragmatic" in a twofold sense: on the one hand, it combines the two traditional notions of semantic mediation and subordination ('pragmatic' here means something like 'ecumenical' or 'tactical'); on the other hand, it makes semantics depend on complex contextual factors by according a clear primacy to spoken over mental language and by ascribing a determinant role to speakers' intentions (here, 'pragmatic' is much closer to the contemporary, technical sense of the word).

4. Results

Which are the doctrinal similarities and differences between Anton Marty's understanding of the principle according to which *voces significant res mediantibus conceptibus* and the four medieval interpretative models presented above? In my opinion, this question must be answered in distinguishing two perspectives.

i) From a *strictly semantic* point of view, Marty's position does not correspond to any of the four medieval models, for these consider exclusively object- or entity-based semantics (words signify either concepts, or things, or the latter by the mediation of the former); by contrast, Marty's answer to the question of the nature of meaning (*Bedeutung / significatio*) in the proper sense of the expression is *not* given in terms of objects or entities (be they mental or extra-mental), but in terms of processes and norms. This, of course, also disqualifies Marty's naming (*Nennung*) – a semantic relation which is indeed mediated by *Bedeutung* – as a plausible equivalent of anything we found in our four medieval models.

ii) From a *pragmatic-semantic* point of view, however, striking similarities appear between Marty and the medievals, for the idea that words function as tools used to express the speakers' concepts, and to evoke similar concepts in the hearers – in other words: the idea that *significare* also has the active sense of *intellectum constituere* – is present in three of the four medieval models we studied and it is, as we saw, at the very heart of Marty's semantics. The exception is constituted by Okham's conception of semantic subordination: just as Bühler with respect to Marty, Ockham with respect to the tradition before him (but also to Buridan) disconnects the function of concepts – more precisely: their role as that to which

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[57] John Buridan, *Summulae. De locis dialecticis*, VI.iii.3, text quoted in Joël Biard, *Logique et théorie du signe…*, p. 178. On the same page, Biard quotes this eloquent passage from Buridan's *Quaestiones in Metaphysicen Aristotelis*, IX, 5 (ed. Paris, 1518, fol. 58v[a]): "Sermones non habent virtutem nisi ex impositione et impositio non potest sciri nisi ex usu." – Words do not possess any power unless by virtue of their imposition, while the imposition [i.e. the words' meaning] cannot be known unless through application [*ex usu*] – a claim which is in perfect accordance with Bacon's idea of the constant re-imposition of words.

spoken words are subordinated – from the actual mental acts of speakers and hearers at the moment of utterance.

That said, the medieval model with which Marty's pragmatic semantics displays the strongest affinities is certainly that of Roger Bacon. For one, the account of language put forward by both authors is primarily based on the communicative interaction between speakers and hearers; secondly, they both accept the idea that concepts play a central role without claiming that concepts are what words signify; furthermore, they both tightly link linguistic meaning with the actual mental acts of speakers and hearers. There is also a partial similarity between Bacon's interpretation of the first chapter of the *De interpretatione* and Marty's notion of indication (*Kundgabe*): just as, according to Marty, the voluntary uttering of a name indicates (*gibt kund*) the existence in the speaker of a concept (*Vorstellung*) of the thing named, the uttering of a name, according to Bacon, is a natural sign of the presence of the concept of a thing in the mind of the speaker. However, Marty and Bacon disagree in that *Kundgabe* plays an essential role in the process of linguistic meaning, whereas the natural signification of the concept pointed at by Bacon is nothing but a side effect: the Baconian *significatio* of words does not depend on the fact that they naturally signify concepts[58].

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[58] Many thanks to Nadja Germann for the carefull reading of a first version of this paper.