REMO GRAMIGNA

Augustine and the study of signs
and signification

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28

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To my father, Gerardo Gramigna,
because he has been an inspiration to me and
has helped me persevere through the many challenges
I have had.

CONTENTS

LIST OF FIGURES

LIST OF TABLES

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

ABBREVIATIONS

Abbreviations of Augustine's works

beata v.	*Beata vita liber unus*
conf.	*Confessionum librim tredicim*
c. mend.	*Contra mendacium liber unun*
dial.	*De dialectica*
doctr. chr.	*De doctrina christiana libri quattour*
f. et symb.	*De fide et symbolo liber unus*
mend.	*De mendacio liber unun*
mag.	*De magistro*
trin.	*De trinitate libri quindecim*
s. dom. m.	*De sermone domini in monte libri duo*
vera relig.	*De vera religione liber unus*
ench.	*De fide spe et caritate liber unus*
retr.	*Retractationum libri duo*
s.	*Sermones*
sol.	*Soliloquia*
CCL	*Corpus christianorum*, *Series Latina*
CSEL	*Corpus Scriptorum Ecclesiasticorum Latinorum*
PL	*Patrologiae cursus completus. Series Latina,* ed. J.-P. Migne

Other abbreviations

CP	Collected Papers of Charles S. Peirce
MS	Manuscript
EP	Essential Peirce

INTRODUCTION

A. Scope of the investigation

The aim of this dissertation is to present, as far as possible, a general description of the theory of the sign and signification in Augustine of Hippo (354–430 AD), with a view to its evaluation and implications for the study of semiotics. The underlying aspiration is that such an endeavour will prove to be beneficial to the scholars of Augustine's thought as well as to those with a keen interest in the history of semiotics.

   The concern towards the study of the concept of the sign cuts across the entire history of humanity, drawing criticisms and appraisals in a debate that is as fascinating as it is complex. However, it is possible to trace time periods in the history of Western thought in which the subject has been addressed organically and in greater depth. The study of the notion of the sign has deep and ancient philosophical roots, to the extent that it is addressed in many branches of human knowledge – from Hippocratic medicine to classical rhetoric – yielding results often intertwined in a concordant or discordant way. Fundamentals of semiotics are found, genuinely, already in Hellenism (particularly in Stoicism, where can be found a highly sophisticated theory of the sign) and the Middle Ages – especially in relation to the interpretation of the Scriptures. The history of the concept of the sign and the history of semiotics do not always overlap. While the historical overviews of semiotics often begin with John Locke, Charles Sanders Peirce, and Ferdinand de Saussure, some interpreters believe that this history is still incomplete, as Charles William Morris states in his work *Signs, Language and Behaviour* (1946). Yet the fundamental innovations of the subject matter are already in the works of Augustine of Hippo, inheritor of the studies undertaken in the previous centuries. As the historian Robert A. Markus has noted (1996: 1), "some of the Christian fathers devoted explicit and sophisticated discussion to signs and the way in which they signify. Of these the most notable is Augustine of Hippo [...] who has even been seen by some modern writers as a father of semiology".

   Indisputably, Augustine's sign theory was highly influential in medieval semiotics and became a point of reference for the theories of signification in the succeeding centuries. Augustine explicitly formulated a definition of *signum* – "A sign is a thing which causes us to think of something beyond the impression the thing itself makes upon the senses" (*Signum est enim res praeter speciem, quam ingerit sensibus, aliud aliquid ex se faciens in cogitationem venire*)[1] – that became canonical. The echo of Augustine's scholarship was felt for many centuries.[2] The numerous references to Augustine's theory of signs made in

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[1]   *Doctr. chr.* 2,1 (trans. Robertson, *On Christian Doctrine*, 34).

[2]   On Augustine's influence on medieval theories of signification, see Irène Rosier-Catach, «Signification et efficacité: sur les prolongements médiévaux de la théorie augustinienne du signe», *Revue des Sciences Philosophiques et Théologiques* 91 (2007), 51–74. For an appraisal of Augustine's theory within medieval semiotics, see Meier-Oeser, Stephan,

Anselm's *Dialogues Concerning Truth*, in Peter Abelard (1079–1142), in John of Salisbury (c. 1115–1180), in William of Sherwood (c. 1205–1267) and in Peter of Spain (1215–1217) evidence Augustine's influence in the eleventh, twelfth and thirteen centuries (Scott 1972: 29–31).

The particular significance that *signum* ("sign") has for Augustine is beyond doubt. For Augustine, *signum* is a term that is as general as to encompass a vast array of phenomena: miracles and wonders (Markus 1957), sacraments (*sacramentum* as *signum*), traces (*vestigia*), gestures, images, signal signs (as, for instance, military signs), and spoken and written words are all grouped under one single head, namely, *signa* ("signs").

Before we begin, it behoves us to make a terminological clarification. In many of his works, Augustine used extensively the Latin term *signum*. However, there is no English word which adequately represents the nuance of this term. In fact, the semantic field covered by the Latin *signum* does not map neatly onto that of the English "sign" or "symbol", despite some commentators maintaining the contrary (Markus 1957; Chydenius 1960). Although there have been attempts to make Augustine's vocabulary overlap with a more contemporary terminology, such a juxtaposition that equates *signum* to "sign" or "symbol" ultimately conceals and dilutes Augustine's genuine terminology. Thus, the title selected for the present study – *Augustine and the Study of Signs and Signification* – should not mislead the reader. The writer is fully cognizant that there is a semantic gulf between the Latin *signum* and the English "sign" that cannot be bridged so easily and must be always kept in mind while discussing Augustine's approach to the topic of signs.

As Barbara Cassin and colleagues aptly pointed out

> Although it is frequently said that Augustine's *signum* absorbed the values of the symbol [...], there has never been an inquiry into the philosophical or theological consequences of the fact that in Augustine's text, we are dealing at this juncture with only one term, namely*, signum.* (Cassin et al. 2014: 983)

However, because the present study has been written in English, it seemed appropriate to keep the main title in English, too. Moreover, considering the academic context in which the research has been conducted – semiotics as a disciplinary field – it is a custom to employ the English term "sign" as an umbrella term.

The Latin term *signum* ties in with a manifold of meanings and the study of its etymology has generally been a very hard nut to crack.[3] Emanuele Dettori

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«Medieval Semiotics», in *The Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy* (Summer 2011 Edition), Edward N. Zalta (ed.), URL = <https://plato.stanford.edu/archives/sum2011/entries/semiotics-medieval/>. Date of access: 09/09/2017.

[3] For a comprehensive view on this issue, see Barbara Cassin et al., «Sign, Symbol», in: Cassin, Barbara (ed.), *Dictionary of Untranslatables. A Philosophical Lexicon* (2014), 974–987; Umberto Eco «Segno» and «Simbolo», in: *Enciclopedia Einaudi XII*, Torino: Einaudi (1981), 628–627; 877–914; Louis Kelly «Language study and theology in the Late Middle

(1999 [1997]: 216–220) outlined five main meanings of *signum* on the basis of the analysis of the most ancient Latin texts: 1) "image" (cut, curved, or painted); 2) "insignia"; 3) "stars or heavenly body"; 4) "trace"; 5) "signal, password". In Augustine, too, *signum* is a term that reaches a very high degree of generality so much so as to embrace under the same genus classes of signs that were previously considered as independent phenomena. In fact, it has been often argued that the significance of Augustine's theory of the sign lies in the coexistence of two matrices that are for the first time grafted one upon another. In other words, Augustine's concept of *signum* encapsulates both an "inferential" model of the sign – based on the Stoic tradition of the sign as inference – and an "equational" model shaped on a linguistic conception of the sign as equivalence (Manetti 2010; 2013).

The bibliography on Augustine is vast and the works are legion. Augustine's theory of the sign has been the subject of an increasing number of studies that have addressed this issue from different disciplinary standpoints. To mention just a few, theology (Duchrow 1965; Johnson 1972a; Johnson 1972b; Morgan 2010), sacramental theology (Martinez 1976), contemporary linguistics and semantics (Baratin, Desbordes 1982; Simone 1969; Kelly 1975; Piacenza 1992; Vecchio 1994), philosophy (Bettetini 1996; Colish 1983b [1968]; Jackson 1967; 1969; O'Daly 1987; Ripanti 1980; Todisco 1993) and semiotics (Deely 2009; Manetti 1987; Todorov 1977). However, accurate studies for subject, discipline, and significance have not yet given an organic and systematic vision of Augustine's theory of the sign.[4]

The first study conducted on the subject is, to our knowledge, Karel Kuypers's *Der Zeichen-und Wortbegriff im Denken Augustins* (1934), who already underscored the significance of Augustine in regard to his theory of signs. His work, however, focused prominently on Augustine's *De magistro*. There are numerous studies that have focused on individual works of Augustine touching upon his sign theory (Connaghan 2004; Daniels 1977; Drucker 1998; Engels 1962; Pépin 1976; Ruef 1981; Toom 2002) or on the influence that the Stoic theory of meaning exerted on Augustine's understanding of words and signs (Barwik 1957; Pinborg 1962; Baratin 1981; Colish 1985). Cornelius Petrus Mayer has provided an outstanding study of the Augustinian corpus through a

[4]   The literature on the concept of the sign in Augustine is quite extensive, and in the course of this dissertation, we provide information on the studies that have addressed this issue. For an initial framework, see the select bibliography compiled by R. A. Markus, *Signs and Meanings: World and Text in Ancient Christianity* (Liverpool: Liverpool University Press, 1996) 120–124.

statistical methodology which includes the analysis of the occurrence of *signum* throughout the corpus (Mayer 1969; 1974). We will provide a detailed overview of the relevant literature in each chapter of the present work because much of the secondary literature on the subject relates either to specific works of Augustine or to specific corners in the study of his works.

In regard to Augustine's theory of the sign, the *De doctrina christiana* has especially proved to be fruitful. Indeed, this work has generated considerable recent research interest. The four books forming the treatise have been typically studied as independent subjects. Book IV has been generally regarded as "the first manual of Christian rhetoric" (Sullivan 1930: iii) and, in virtue of such a key feature, has been widely studied (Conroy 1933; Guenther 1945; Paternostro 1950; Pizzolato 1995; Sullivan 1930). Book I, in contrast, has received relatively little attention. Gérard Istace, who conducted a systematic study on the first book and considered it as "une unité littéraire bien définie" (Istace 1956: 290), is one of the rare scholars who ventured into such an enquiry. Books II and III, in turn, have been discussed in relation to the theory of signs and its antecedents (Grech 1995; Jackson 1969; Markus 1957; Pizzani 1995). Yet Eugene Kevane (1966: 122) remarks that the studies that focused on one single book of the treatise, considered as an independent research unit, "overlook the masterful and brilliantly unified plan of composition that Augustine had in mind for the work as a whole". However, resorting to the words of Augustine himself proves that the treatise could also be read in parts: "This book has turned out longer than I wished, and longer that I had thought it would be. But to that reader or listener to whom it is pleasing it is not long. He who finds it long and wishes to know about it may read it in sections".[5]

In addition to theologians, historians, and philosophers, the *De doctrina christiana* has also held a special fascination for scholars of semiotics, so much so as to be regarded as Augustine's "central treatise", such that "the text [that] has a better claim than any other to be considered the first semiotic work" (Todorov 1982 [1977]: 40).

B. A theory of semiotics *ante litteram*?

The present work is concerned with the clarification, analysis and systematization of the theory of the sign and signification in the work of Augustine, not so much because he directly addressed the study of semiotics, but rather because certain fundamental concepts of the discipline – first and foremost the concept of *signum* – are explicitly treated in his works.

Indeed, Augustine's approach to signs is always dual and instrumental. Numerous authors share such a thesis (Deely 2009: 9; Jackson 1967: 2; Ripanti 1980: 29; Simone 1969: 89–90; Todorov 1982 [1977]: 46). The double valence of Augustine's theory of the sign is also reflected in the secondary literature on

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5   *Doctr. chr.* 4,31 (trans. Robertson, *On Christian Doctrine*, 168).

the subject. It is probably possible to consider Augustine as a precursor of studies on the sign and therefore as a father of semiotics. Conversely, this aspect is downplayed for the purely theological and exegetical overlay of his works that do not fully allow, without going beyond what Augustine wrote, for a full-fledged extrapolation of an organic and general theory of semiotics, especially if considered for its own sake.

Among those who identified in Augustine a semiotics *ante litteram* (Deely 2009; Manetti 1987; Simone 1969; Todorov 1977), we include Umberto Eco, who, in connection with the development of the field, referred to it as "the history of an ostracism" (Eco 1987: 109). He pointed out that despite its very ancient origins, semiotics has encountered a difficult process of institutionalization that has hampered its development and diffusion. For Eco (1987: 109), semiotics, from its very inception, has been an ostracized disciplinary field, and as such, it has constantly been in search for its own *reason d'être*.[6] This hindrance has led semiotics to struggle to identify a unified disciplinary object. From here stems the hypothesis glimpsed by Eco that "the entire history of philosophy could be re-read in a semiotic perspective" (Eco 1987: 109).

According to Eco, semiotics turned out to be a discipline disguised in various "applied" studies, abandoning the particular purpose of a "general semiotics" – that is, the philosophical problem of the sign.[7] Eco, in fact, presumed that the scope of semiotics is to find some general coordinates that would account for the variety of phenomena that constitute the object of study of semiotics as a disciplinary field. Considering the "theoretical and methodological possibility of a unified historical approach to a supposedly identifiable Semiotic Thought", Eco (1979a: 75) suggested three plausible hypotheses that could be used as a roadmap to trace the history (or histories) of semiotics: a first, "restricted" hypothesis (which exclusively considers semiotic theories that were formulated *explicitly*), a second "moderate" hypothesis (which factors in *implicit* or "repressed" semiotic theories too), and a third "encyclopedical" hypothesis (according to which certain

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[6] On this point, see Roman O. Jakobson *Coup d'oeil sur le développement de la sémiotique* (Bloomington, 1975).

[7] Umberto Eco insisted on the difference between a «general semiotics» and the various «specific semiotics», the latter being the grammar of a particular sign system. The study of specific semiotics proves to be successful insofar as it describes a given field of communicative phenomena as ruled by a system of signification. The task and the nature of a general semiotics are different, because general semiotics is concerned with the concept of sign as a phenomenon of «referral» (*renvoi*) – after R. Jakobson's felicitous expression. The demarcation between «general» and «specific» (or applied) semiotics is a recurrent distinction is Eco's *ouvre*, and it finds its most mature formulation in *Semiotica e Filosofia del Linguaggio* (1984). Also in his latest lectures and interviews – especially when addressing the compelling question of the future of semiotics – Eco often reiterated the distinction outlined above. On this point, see also the unpublished interview of Eco with Kalevi Kull («Conversation with Umberto Eco», Milan, 15th January 2012) as well as Eco's last public lecture delivered on the 24th of May 2015 at the University of Lodz. It is also worth reminding that, to our knowledge, the first scholar who drew such a distinction («general» and «applied semiotic») was Charles Morris (1955 [1946]: 220).

practices are thought of as significant for a general theory of signs and, therefore, should be the subject of specialized studies).

According to Eco's threefold proposal for a history of semiotics, Augustine's literary production would definitely fall into the first "restricted" hypothesis because Augustine employed and conceptualized notions such as *signum* in an explicit fashion, although he did not directly design a theory of semiotics per se:

> A history of semiotics is concerned with those who, having explicitly recognized the existence of a sign-relationship in language and/or in many non-verbal human activities, outlined a general theory of signs or even foresaw the development of such a theory as a crucial node for human sciences. For instance, Plato's Cratylus, Stoics, Augustine, Ockham, Poinsot, Locke, Vico, Lambert, Husserl, Peirce and so on. In this perspective only authors who have explicitly used a term like "semiotics" (or its congeners), sign, theory of sign etc., ought to be passed under review. (Eco 1979a: 79)

Undoubtedly, Augustine treats the concept of *signum* as an explicit object of philosophical research, and this is a good reason to devote a study *ex professo* to his own approach. The present work, thus, endorses the trend traced by Eco in order to reconsider and explore, from a purely semiotic angle, the fundamental structure of the sign and signification in Augustine.

For understanding the particular importance of Augustine's theory of the sign within semiotics the works of Tzvetan Todorov (1977; 1978) and, more recently, of John Deely (2009) are two essential starting points. Both scholars acknowledged that Augustine himself did not seem to be fully cognizant of his interest in the business of semiotics. Undoubtedly, as already noted, the general character of Augustine's works is essentially theological-religious. Yet, within the treatment of those issues, he nonetheless succeeded in articulating his own theory of the sign. There has been a lot of debate over whether Augustine's theory was a novelty or whether he paid tribute to the preceding tradition and to what extent this intellectual trajectory is a rupture or a continuation in regard to the past traditions. Todorov, in his study *Théories du symbole* (1977), suggests two main features to be at the basis of the semiotics of Augustine: eclecticism and psychologism. For Todorov, the originality of Augustine's thought lies in fact almost entirely in his synthetic ability. Probably this faculty leads him to the first formulation in the history of Western thought of what deserves the name of semiotics: he in fact appears to be the founder of a "unified" theory of the sign. In this regard, Todorov (1982 [1977]: 25) marked the "birth of occidental semiotics" with Augustine.

Along the same lines, John Deely went so far as to argue that Augustine marks the beginning of "semiotic consciousness" and the so-called "proto-semiotic" development (Deely 2009: 3–7). In doing so, Augustine seems to having limited himself to re-conceptualizing ideas and notions that were rooted in different theoretical horizons. Todorov has argued that the fundamental operation that Augustine performed was the grafting of two distinct traditions,

both concerning the sign, that became synthesized and united into one single theory. The development of a theory of the "word" in the rhetorical and semantic domain was kept distinct from a parallel theory of the "sign" rooted in the realm of logic. Augustine seems to have adopted what was previously attributed to words and to have extended it onto the general level of signs. As will be seen in what follows, in his "doctrine of signs" (*doctrina signorum*), words will come to occupy only one place among other kinds of sign. The doctrine of the verbal sign (*symbolon*), which harkens back to Aristotle, is thus subjected to a theory of the logical sign (*semeion*) – a model, this second one, which Augustine presumably derives from the logic of a propositional-implicative type of Stoic origin. The complete welding together of a theory of sign and a theory of language in Augustine is therefore based on the incorporation of the Stoic theory of meaning. Except that, for the Stoics, only non-verbal signs were considered as signs (*semeia*). Augustine will exceed this perspective with decisiveness: words are thought of as signs on the same terms as non-linguistic signs.

Those studies on the subject conducted within semiotics, however very influential, have often been quite selective in focusing on individual works of Augustine. Deely's *Augustine and Poinsot. The Protosemiotic Development* (2009) deals almost exclusively with the second book of Augustine's *De doctrina christiana*, whereas in Todorov's study (1977), certain relevant sources such as the *De dialectica* and the *De magistro* play only an ancillary role, if not at all dismissed. Hence, the need to fill in a gap in contemporary research on Augustinian semiotics. To this end, we have included in the selected corpus of sources both the *De dialectica* as well as the *De magistro*, to which we devote a close examination. Our contention is that both works show a profound semiotic awareness and provide outstanding clues for reflection.

Moreover, studies on Augustine conducted within semiotics have generally focused on the Augustinian theory of signs severed from the context in which the theory initially originated. Arguably, this seems a rather artificial and *ad hoc* divorce, and whether it is intentional or not, it could substantially dilute or distort Augustine's own thought. By contrast, the present study privileges the facets of the theory that were previously neglected within semiotic research by contextualizing Augustine's theory of signs within the overall structure of the works under scrutiny.

We shall support this contention by looking at numerous illustrations. The universe, for Augustine, is divided into "things" (*res*) and "signs" (*signa*). It will be seen that one reflection of the general tendency described above is discussing Augustine's concept of *signum* in isolation, irrespectively of the relationship that this concept entails with the notion of "thing" (*res*). This order of approach must be reversed. At the cost of demythologizing the concept of the sign – undoubtedly, a pervasive notion in contemporary semiotics – we spell out the necessity of a discussion of the philosophical concept of *res* as a background for conceptualizing the definition of *signum*. At any rate, as will be shown in Chapter 3, the concept of *res* plays a crucial role in the overall structure of the *De doctrina christiana*, and it is essential for conceptualizing the notion of the

sign. Moreover, the doublet *res*/*signum* constitutes the backbone of Augustine's theory and is persistent throughout his literary career.

Another specimen of this naivety is the division between "natural signs" (*signa naturalia*) and "given signs" (*signa data*), which Augustine sets forth in Book II of the *De doctrina christiana*. This is an additional example of how Augustine's notions took a life of their own. Unhappily, such a division has been the object of systematic distortion and was generally presented in ways that do not overlap with Augustine's vision. We will discuss both issues in due course.

C. Setting the significance of Augustine's works for the present research

Our first task is clearly a justification of the significance of the subject matter for the present research. Augustine's semiotic thought has to be mined, as it were, from the abundant deposits, which we find in his many writings on language and communication and in his philosophical works.[8] The present study will be confined to the writings in which the theory of signs is treated *ex professo* – as for instance in Book II of the *De doctrina christiana* – and the works in which Augustine deals with the analysis of words as signs or treats the question of communication and acquisition of knowledge through signs. Interesting causes for reflection on the subject are found primarily in the *De dialectica* ("On Dialectic"), *De magistro* ("The Teacher"), the *De doctrina christiana* ("On Christian Doctrine"), and in *De trinitate* ("The Trinity"), even though these works have other functions and purposes. Nonetheless, the corpus of the selected texts does not completely exhaust the thought of Augustine on the subject. Thus, for the interpretation of certain particular passages or concepts, we will resort to other additional sources within the Augustinian corpus that are tangentially concerned with the subject treated in the present dissertation.

The present study focuses on the following works that, for the sake of clarity, are arranged in a chronological order:[9]

> *De dialectica* (387)
> *De magistro* (389)
> *De mendacio* (395)
> *De doctrina christiana* (Books I–III 25,36) (396)
> *Contra mendacium* (420)
> *De doctrina christiana* (Books III–IV) (426–427)

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[8] Augustine's philosophical works are: *Contra Academicos* (386), *De Beata Vita* (386), *Soliloquia* (386–7), *De Dialectica* (387), *De Libero Arbitrio* (388), *De Musica* (387–90*), De Mendacio* (396), *De Magistro* (389) and *De Diversis Questionibus* (388) (Kirwan 1989: 7). Although Kirwan takes 396 as the date for the *De mendacio*, it is generally assumed that the treatise was written in 395 (Bettetini 2001: 5; Muldowney 1952: 47).

[9] To this list we shall also include the *Soliloquia* and the *De trinitate* and a few ohter works, discussed in section 4.6

In order to circumscribe the limits of the present enquiry, the study focuses, for the most part, on the first decade of Augustine's literary production. We have chosen his juvenile treatise, the *De dialectica*, written as early as 387, as the *terminus ad quo* and the *De doctrina christiana*, penned after 395, as *terminus ad quem* of the study. Within this span of time, it is our intention to focus this study even more by concentrating our analysis on the *De dialectica*, the *De magistro*, and the *De doctrina christiana*, each of which will be discussed in separate sections of the dissertation.

In addition to the works just mentioned, we included a study on the subject of *mala fide* communication, unravelling Augustine's doctrine of the lie (*mendacium*). It is our contention that a semiotics of lying is of pivotal importance. Augustine set forth the fundamentals of this issue primarily in two treatises: *De mendacio* ("On Lying") and *Contra mendacium* ("Against Lying"), although the themes of mendacity and falsehoods run throughout numerous other works. We hold that the subject of lying is intimately interconnected with the subject of signs and how signs are used by interpreters for specific purposes. For this reason, it is our contention that the issue of lying should be treated in tandem with Augustine's theory of signs. Thus, it enters in its own right as a sub-topic in the present research. This is a somewhat untraditional approach to the study of the lie in Augustine, which was often confined within the realm of ethics and moral theology. We shall see that Augustine in his analysis is very cognizant of the power of words and how false signs affect sign-receivers.

Moreover, there is an obvious reference that bonds semiotics with the topic of lying, namely, U. Eco's famous definition of semiotics as the study of anything that can be used in order to lie (Eco 1975). This celebrated, yet paradoxical, formulation should be corrected because the definition of the sign as something that could be used in order to lie is too restrictive. Eco himself recanted his own stance (Eco 1997: 37). It would be more appropriate to say that semiotics is a theory of erroneous inference. This would allow us to extend the *proprium* of semiotics not only to sign situations where a lie may manifest, but also to include parallel phenomena of erroneous inference – for instance, a mistake – that may occur in a sign situation, and that, strictly speaking, cannot be regarded as lies. We will see that the difference between a lie and an erroneous inference was already stated with lucidity in Augustine's *De mendacio*.

There are numerous valid reasons supporting the choice of texts mentioned above. Undoubtedly, Augustine's treatise *De doctrina christiana* is a central text in respect to the theory of signs. Thus, it is not surprising that, in contrast to other Augustinian sources, this treatise has probably received more attention than others, especially among the community of interpreters within semiotics. On the contrary, the *De dialectica* and the *De magistro*, not to mention the *De mendacio* and the *Contra mendacium*, have not had such a fortune. Thus, in comparison with previous studies on the subject conducted within semiotics, the present study attempts to expound Augustine's theory of signs as presented not only in the second book of the *De doctrina christina* but also in other of his works. Because the *De doctrina christiana* has received more attention in regard

to the theory of signs than have other works, we will place emphasis also on the *De dialectica* and the *De magistro*, being somewhat less-travelled albeit fundamental cornerstones for the Augustinian theory of signs. Despite the fact that the *De dialectica* was for a long time considered as a spurious work, it is now acknowledged as a genuine text of Augustine. The *De dialectica* is particularly significant to the present study because it clearly shows a rich and sophisticated theory of signification, whose outlook echoes the ancient Stoic theory of meaning.

Many of the themes already treated in the *De dialectica* are taken up and amplified in succeeding works, and yet this early treatise lays the foundation of Augustine's approach to signs. Thus, not only the need for our enquiry to follow a chronological design – the *De dialectica* being the earliest text under scrutiny – but also the theoretical depth and clarity within this early work have led us to place it at the outset of our enquiry. Furthermore, the paucity of studies conducted within semiotics specifically devoted to Augustine's *De dialectica* fully supports such a choice. There is also a very practical reason to delimit the object of study in a way that allows it to be dealt with within the time span of a doctoral dissertation.

The *De magistro* is the lengthiest treatment of signs in antiquity after Plato's *Cratylus*. However, despite the dialogue presenting, for the most part, a minute, thorough and illuminating disquisition of signs, the *De magistro* has been generally conceived as a theologically oriented work. The conclusion of the dialogue, where Augustine emphasized the role of divine illumination in human thought (only God can teach us), led the majority of commentators towards such an interpretation. However, after a detailed analysis of the form and content of the work, we contend that the dialogue is grafted upon a division based on signs which is the heart of the book.

As we will see in detail, Augustine's real concern in the *De magistro* was the problem of the conditions of the possibility and communicability of knowledge itself. As numerous studies have shown (Cloeren 1984; Madec 1975: 71; Manfredini 1960: 17–27; Parodi 1996: 9; Pépin 1950), the problem of the acquisition of knowledge and the possibility to convey it by means of language or other sign systems, is key to the dialogue. Moreover, in order to discuss these problems, Augustine examined a series of issues that today are certainly catalogued under the rubric of semiotics. Indeed, Eugenio Coseriu (1969: 108), Robert Markus (1957: 65), and Umberto Eco (1984) all claim that the *De magistro* is among the greatest contributions to semiotics from antiquity. Commenting in a similar way, Guzzo (1927: 114) states that the treatise established the science of expression and general linguistics. Nevertheless, not all studies were able to grasp this aspect of the work. Even among scholars overtly engaged with the "doctrine of signs", such a profound study of signs and signification as the *De magistro* does not find the place that one would expect it to have. Although John Deely refers to the dialogue in his seminal study *Four Ages of Understanding* (2001), his enquiry devoted *ex professo* to the semiotics of Augustine and Poinsot (2009) is focused mainly on Augustine's *De doctrina*

christiana, referring to the *De magistro* only in passing. In the same vein, for Todorov (1977) and Ripanti (1980) the *De magistro* is of secondary importance.

Like the other works that the present dissertation aims to discuss, the theory of signs set forth in the *De doctrina christiana* emerges, too, against the background of a broader thematic horizon. Indeed, the book's main thrust is interpreting the Bible and communicating the truths identified in it. Thus, Augustine's discussion of the subject of signification is grafted within a theological-hermeneutical context. Undoubtedly, the *De doctrina christiana* is a chief source of knowledge because it discusses organically and systematically the theory of signs – focusing especially on written words – and the interpretation of texts in the light of patristic exegesis.[10] Yet Augustine's enquiry is neither an abstract theory nor a semiotics *per se*. On the contrary, his undertaking shows a pragmatic and applied approach because he intends to formulate a method for studying the Sacred Scriptures and to pass it down to posterity. Thus, the sign theory of Augustine is always instrumental; it is the means to an end.

This point is essential. There is a particular difficulty that because Augustine was one of the most influential fathers of the Church, he had a special inclination to the Christian religion, and for this reason, it is hardly feasible to isolate with precision and certitude his philosophical or, as it were, his "semiotic thought" from his theological commitment and from the context in which his doctrine was deeply rooted. Thus, any investigation on Augustine's theory of signs must come to terms with the fundamentally exegetical nature of his enquiry. Disentangling such a theory is a real challenge because the subjects of signification, interpretation, and exegesis are in fact almost inseparably interwoven throughout the pages of the *De doctrina christiana* as well as in other works. Nonetheless, outstanding inquiries have quite successfully ventured into the study of the "doctrine of signs" formulated in this treatise and considered independently from the application of the theory to the interpretation of the Bible (Deely 2009; Jackson 1967; 1969; Markus 1957; Simone 1969; Todorov 1977). However, it is all too easy to dismiss Augustine's theory of signs for his theological overtones. His thought was profoundly philosophical as well as theological, and it is worthy of close scrutiny also prescinding from the theological implications of his works.

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[10] For a comprehensive overview of the work, see Luigi Alici, «Segno e parola in Agostino: Attualità e prospettive», in Riccardo Ferri, Patrizia Mangarano (eds.), *Gesto e Parola. Ricerche sulla Rivelazione* (2005), Roma: Città Nuova, 211–230; see also Luigi Alici, «Introduzione», in *Sant'Agostino d'Ippona. La dottrina cristiana* (1989), Milano: Edizioni Paoline, 6–83, which includes a rich bibliography; Gerald Press, «The subject and structure of Augustine's *De doctrina christiana*», *Augustinian Studies* 11 (1980), 99–124.

D. Methodology

The present study is interpretative of Augustine's works. The theory of the sign is expounded on the basis of the interpretation of Augustine's texts. Thus, the methodology employed throughout the present dissertation is based on textual interpretation. Augustine's works are interpreted through close scrutiny of the selected corpus of texts that form the primary sources for the enquiry.

In this work, we have attempted to pursue two objectives: (1) to extract from Augustine's writings a theory of signs and (2) to appraise the theory thus obtained against the background of semiotics. On certain occasions, Augustine's topics, concepts, and terminology are assessed against the background of the theories of other authors. The aim is to primarily clarify Augustine's position and also to emphasize the legacy and implications that such concepts and ideas have had or might have for the general study of signs. Moreover, hindrances and shortcomings that some accounts on Augustine's theory of signs and signification naturally may display are pointed out, and some solutions are offered.

The reader will notice that, sometimes, we privileged Augustine's own words over our own speculations on the subject treated. This is not accidental nor the result of a naivety, but a feature that results from a deliberate and well-pondered choice. Many of the concepts, formulas and arguments that Augustine recurred to in his works are not as straightforward as one would have liked them to be. First, the most obscure or difficult notions are identified, analysed, and discussed. We have often taken into account numerous additional Augustinian sources that encourage the elucidation, interpretation, and expansion of the subject. In other cases, we have preferred to describe Augustine's concepts and theories and compare them to certain modern semiotic theories, for the sole purpose of cultivating the comprehension of the concepts under scrutiny in a contemporary key. Because Augustine's intention was not to outline a theory of signs for its own sake, our task is to connect the dots within his theories of the sign, and this is, inherently, a step forward in the interpretation of Augustine's approach to the problem of meaning. Our selections are choices that involve an interpretation, and as such, this is already our own contribution and should be taken as such – not simply as Augustine's own thought.

However, one could too easily fall into the temptation of superimposing his or her own ideas in order to fit the disciplinary background one belongs to. The terminology Augustine employed is peculiar to his era, and thus, any bold extrapolation or speculation should be treated with the due care. Our inclination is to give priority to the interpretation of the text in order to explicate and expound it as clearly as possible. Once this task is sufficiently carried out, there is an avenue to factor in and discuss the significance of Augustine's disquisitions of signs for the contemporary semiotic reader. We truly hope that we have achieved a balanced stance in such an endeavour.

Finally, a word of explanation is due to the reader for what concerns the practice and style of quotations. At the risk of rendering the corpus of the thesis somewhat heavy with citations, we have opted for including both the original

quotation in Latin, as well as an English translation. Although this is not the custom, we believe that this solution offers to the scholar of Latin the possibility to rely on the original source and it provides the chance to reveal its content also to those who are not well versed in Latin. We have also made use of several translations and commentaries that have helped with the interpretation (whose list is in section B of the bibliography).

E. Outline of the dissertation

The division of the dissertation is into four general chapters. In Chapter 1 it is argued that the first work where Augustine explicitly discusses at length the subject of words as signs and signification is the *De dialectica*. We begin by describing the structure of the treatise. We show that Augustine develops a vocabulary to describe the process of signification with words. This model is tetradic and includes *verba*, *dicibles*, *dictiones*, and *res*. We argue that although the treatise was interrupted in the midst of an important discussion on the technical terms he employed, the tract is of pivotal importance. It is shown that Augustine used a rather sophisticated theory of signs that has evident Stoic roots. An additional characteristic feature of Augustinian semiotics is that it is chiefly geared towards the problem of communication. Next to such a semiotics of communication, it also presents a concern toward the issue of the designation of words thought of as signs.

Chapter 2 examines the dialogue of the *De magistro*, whose main protagonists are Augustine and his son Adeodatus. We dwell at length on the genesis of the dialogue as well as on the much-debated question of the form and structure of the *De magistro*. We examine the interpretations proposed in secondary literature and argue that the bifurcation Augustine makes on signs and things is key to the overall logic of the text. It is argued that despite the dialogue's purpose being to assert that Christ is the only teacher for men, the great majority of the work deals with a theory of signs that is often neglected but is yet worthy of study. This account shows that Augustine used and envisaged not only a theory of signs but also a theory of showing (ostension), which provides unseen implications for semiotics.

Chapter 3 pursues the enquiry into the *De doctrina christiana*. The treatise is explored in reference to the theory of signs and contemporary semiotics. Specific attention is given not only to the second Book of the tract, which is devoted to the *doctrina signorum* ("doctrine of signs"), but also to Book I where Augustine discusses the *doctrina rerum* ("doctrine of things"). We single out and discuss four key issues within this work: 1) the definition of signum against the background of the concept of *res*; 2) the division between *signa naturalia* and *signa data*; 3) the role of intentionality in the theory of signs; 4) the various divisions of signs.

Chapter 4 delves into the subject of mendacity and deception by discussing two works of Augustine that are relatively less known: *De mendacio* and

Contra mendacium. Our analysis will show that a semiotics of lying is of pivotal importance. It also argues for the view that Augustine's stance on the matter is more nuanced and subtle than is often portrayed. After a detailed analysis of Augustine description of the nature of the lie we challenge the traditional definition of the lie – *Mendacium est quippe falsa significatio cum voluntate fallendi* ("A lie is a false signification told with the desire to deceive")[11] – an offer an alternative reading based on a contextual reading of the Augustinian doctrine of the lie.

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[11] Mary Sarah Muldowney, S. S. J., trans., «Against Lying», in *Saint Augustine. Treatises on Various Subjects* (The Fathers of the Church. A new translation, Vol. 16) ed. Roy J. Deferrari (New York: Fathers of the Church, third reprint 1981, 106 vols.), *C. mend.* 12,26.

I. WORDS AS SIGNS IN THE *DE DIALECTICA*

1.1. Genesis of the work

The subject of this chapter is Augustine's *De dialectica* – penned in 387 in Milan – where one can glimpse the first definitions of *signum* ("sign"), *verbum* ("word") and *res* ("thing").[1] Before becoming bishop of Hippo, Augustine was a master of rhetoric. His interest towards words and language in all its articulations – already displayed from his first juvenile treatise, the *De dialectica*, indeed – is therefore not surprising.

For years the work was considered of dubious paternity but was attributed to Augustine by Darrel Jackson and Jan Pinborg on the basis of lexicographical studies and quantitative textual analysis (Pinborg 1975).[2] The *De dialectica*, coupled with the *De musica* and the *De rhetorica*, is part of the Augustinian design of a larger project on the liberal arts, as stated by the author in the *Retractationes* – the book in which Augustine reviewed all his precedent works:

> At the very time that I was about to receive baptism in Milan, I also attempted to write books on the liberal arts, questioning those who were with me and who were not averse to studies of this nature, and desiring by definite steps, so to speak, to reach things incorporeal through things corporeal and to lead others to them. But I was able to complete only the book on grammar – which I lost later from our library – and six books, *On Music*, pertaining to that part which is called rhythm. I wrote these six books, however, only after I was baptized and had returned to Africa from Italy, for I had only begun this art at Milan. Off the other five arts likewise begun there – dialectic, rhetoric, geometry, arithmetic, and philosophy – the beginnings alone remained and I lost even these. However, I think that some people have them.[3]

The authenticity of this treatise, however, is not above suspicion, especially if one considers that much of the terminology Augustine outlined in the *De dialectica* does not occur elsewhere in his writings.[4]

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[1]   The book is sometimes titled *Principia Dialecticae* and was published by Migne (*PL* XXXII coll. 1409–1420) on the basis of the Maurine edition of the works of Augustine. The *De dialectica* has been presented in a critical edition by Crecelius (1857), Pinborg (1975), Baldassarri (1985) and by Bettetini (2004). Unless otherwise indicated, the quotations from Augustine's *De dialectica* are given in the English translation of Belford Darrell Jackson and edited by J. Pinborg, *Augustine. De Dialectica* (Dordrecht: Reidel, 1975).

[2]   On the debate on the authenticity and authorship of the work, see also Jean Pépin, *Saint Augustin et la dialectique*, Wetteren, Villanova University Press 1976, 21–60; Jan Pinborg, «Das Sprachdenken der Stoa und Augustins Dialektik», *Classica et Mediaevalia* XXIII (1962): 149–151; Henri-Irénée Marrou *St. Augustin et la Fin de la Culture Antique*, Paris 1938, 576–578.

[3]   *Retr.* 1,5 (trans. Sister M. Inez Bogan, *The Retractations*, 21–22).

[4]   This is apparent if one compares Augustine's terminology employed in the *De dialectica* and in *De magistro*. The term *dicibile*, which Augustine uses in the *De dialectica* and that is reminiscent of the Greek word λεκτόν, is rendered as *pronuntiatum* in *De magistro* 5,16 (ed.

The *De dialectica* poses serious difficulties of interpretation for its incompleteness as well as for the lack of sources. In fact, in regards to the first point, the work cannot offer conclusive interpretations insofar as only an unfinished draft of it was found. In the work, however, the concepts of *signum* ("sign") and *verbum* ("word") are defined with clarity, as traceable in chapter V.

In regards to the second point – the unreliability of sources – for some, the treatise does not offer significant originality on the theory of language,[5] but it does present clear credibility about its Stoic origin.[6] And yet inasmuch as the thought of the Stoics is not transmitted directly, but is derived from secondary sources, also on this ground there are margins of uncertainty.

The aforementioned difficulties, however, did not prevent clear and precise studies of the sources within the *De dialectica*. They were formulated by Balduin Fisher in *De Augustini Disciplinarum Libro Qui est De Dialectica* (1912) and by Karl Barwick in *Probleme der Stoischen Sprachlehre und Rhetorik* (1957), which still remain two essential studies for the interpretation of the treatise. Leaving aside a detailed enquiry of the sources of the *De dialectica*, which would fall outside the primary scope of this study, it is worth referring to the philosophical context upon which the innovative capacity of Augustine's theory of the sign is grafted.

1.2. Definition of dialectic and the Stoic legacy

The treatise presents ten chapters and revolves around five main themes: the concept and division of dialectics (ch. I–IV), the relationship sign-*dicibile*-thing (ch. V), the origin of the word, the power of the word (ch. VII), and the obscurity and ambiguity of the word (ch. VIII–X).

Augustine begins with a definition of dialectic:

> Dialectica est bene disputandi scientia. Disputamus autem utique verbis.
>
> (Dialectic is the science of disputing well. We always dispute with words.)[7]

Daur, 174). While the term *dicibile* is unique to the treatise *De dialectica* and does not reoccur in other Augustinian works, the term *pronuntiatum* is akin to Cicero's rendering of ἀξίωμα, i.e. λεκτόν αὐτοτελές (cf. Aulus Gellius, *Noct. Att*., XVI.8). I owe this observation to Prof. Costantino Marmo (as reported in the preliminary review of the 9th March 2018).

5   C. Kirwan (1989: 35), for instance, claims that the characterization of language which we find in the *De dialectica* is «neither original nor profound nor correct» and he defines the latter as a «fragmentary schoolbook containing prolegomena to logic».

6   For an overview of this tendency, see Jan Pinborg, «Das Sprachdenken der Stoa und Augustins Dialektik», *Classica et Medievalia* XXIII (1962): 148–177; Baratin, Marc and Desbordes, Françoise, «Les origines stoïciennes de la théorie augustinienne du signe», *Revue des Études Latines* LIX (1981): 260–268; Marcia Colish, *The Stoic Tradition from Antiquity to the Early Middle Ages. II Stoicism in Christian Latin Thought the Sixth Century*, Leiden, E. G. Brill 1985.

7   *Dial*. 1,5 (trans. Jackson, *De dialectica*, 82).

Augustine's definition of dialectic is, as regards to the first part of the citation, clearly derived from the Stoics. Barwik (1957: 8), to substantiate this hypothesis, refers to volume III, fr. 267 of the *Stoicorum Veterum Fragmenta*: διαλεκτικὴ ἐπιστήμη τοῦ εὖ διαλέγεσθαι. Darrel Jackson (1975: 121) underlines that the Augustinian definition of dialectic synthesizes the concepts of rhetoric and dialectic expressed by Dioegenes Laertius. Jackson, however, ascribes the most likely source of this definition to Cicero – dialectic is *ars bene disserendi*[8] – and Quintilian – rhetoric is *bene dicendi scientia*.[9]

For the Stoics, dialectic is "the science of correctly discussing subjects by questions and answer" or "the science of statements true, false, and neither true nor false".[10] Moreover, the Stoics identify logic with dialectic, and the latter is understood as a semiotics, which is the science of signs. These concepts were already spelled out by the Stoics well in advance of Charles S. Peirce[11] and John Locke[12] as noted by Estelle Merrill Allen (1935: 10).

1.3. The structure of the *De dialectica*

For Augustine "we always dispute with words", which are divided into "simple" (*simplicia*) and "combined" (*coniuncta*):

> Simplicia sunt quae unum quiddam significant ut cum dicimus 'homo, equus, disputat, currit'.

> (Words which signify some one thing are simple, as when we say '*homo*,' '*equus*,' '*disputat*,' '*currit*' (man, horse, disputes, runs).[13]

> Coniuncta verba sunt quae sibi conexa res plures significant, ut cum dicimus 'homo ambulat' aut 'homo festinans in montem ambulat' et siquid tale.

> (Combined words are those which, when connected to one another, signify many things, for example, when we say 'the man is walking' or 'the man is walking quickly toward the mountain').[14]

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8   *De oratore* II, xxxviii, 157.
9   *Institutiones oratoriae* II, xv, 34.
10   Diogenes Laertius VII, 42.
11   «Logic in its general sense, is, as I have believed I have shown, only another name for semiotic, the quasi-necessary, or formal doctrine of signs» (CP II, 134).
12   «I think science may be divided properly into these three sorts. First, physica, [...] or natural philosophy [...] Secondly, practica [...] The most considerable under this head is ethics. Thirdly, semeiotike – The third branch may be called Semeiotike, or the doctrine of signs, the most usual whereof being words, it is aptly enough termed also Logike, logic: the business whereof is to consider the nature of signs, the mind makes use of for the understanding of things, or conveying its knowledge to others» (Locke 1836: 549–550).
13   *Dial*. 1,5 (trans. Jackson, *De dialectica*, 82).
14   *Dial*. 2,6 (trans. Jackson, *De dialectica*, 82–85).

Regarding verbs, all third persons are simple words[15] as they have a single meaning, while the first and second persons of verbs are combined words since they show a double meaning. The distinguishing criterion underlying the difference between simple and combined words does not lie in the structure of the word but in the way in which words signify. The meaning prevails rather than the structure. The only exception to this is the impersonal verbs – "it rains" or "it snows" – as they are all verbs in third person and, as such, do not require any determination of person.

Augustine proceeds with his analysis of words providing some examples that clarify the above-mentioned distinction. A word like *disputat* ("disputes") – formed by the prefix *dis* and the verb *puto* – may seem combined, but in reality is simple. In fact, it should be noted that in Latin, the first and the second person verbs signify the person who is speaking or the person spoken of – and therefore are combined words. Conversely, with the exception of impersonal verbs, third person verbs have an undetermined subject and thus are simple.

Along with verbs, simple nouns are included among simple words, and propositions among combined words. For Augustine, combined words include not only complete propositions – "the man is walking" – but also incomplete sentences – such as "the man quickly toward the mountain". Combined words that express a proposition are in turn subdivided in two species: those that are subject to truth or falsity and those that are not.

In short, the word can present itself in isolation – that is, provided with a single specific meaning – or can occur combined with other words. Combined words – namely, words that combined with each other signify more things – are divided into combined words where, despite the connection, the thought still remains suspended (for example, "the man quickly toward the mountain") and combined words that present a complete thought (for instance, "the man is walking"). The latter are further distinguished as combined words that do not signify what is true or what is false and combined words that signify what is true or what is false (statements).

Augustine proposed a further distinction that concerns statements. They are divided into "simple" (*simplices*) and "combined" (*coniunctae*). Complex propositions not only combine propositions but also find judgment in respect to the connection (*copulatio*) of one with the other. The connection of propositions is developed through the premises (*concessa*) and the conclusion (*summa*), thus constituting the argument ("if he is walking, he is moving"; "that man is

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[15] The same definition of simple words is found in the *De dialectica* of Martianus Capella; thus, it is safe to assume that both have been drawn from the same source, identified by Fisher (1912: 52) in Marcus Terentius Varro. Thus, the correlation between the two (Augustine and Capella) is explained by Fisher as having a common source (Varro's *Disciplinarum libri*). However, it must be pointed out that this terminology is closer to Martianus Capella than to Augustine. I was not aware of this point had not C. Marmo pointed me in that direction. For a comparison between Augustine and Capella, see Jackson (1975: 124–125).

walking; therefore, that man is moving") which is such that the premises are not compatible with the contradictory of the conclusion.

Several authors pointed out that the Augustinian system of the word presented in the *De dialectica* traces the Stoic distinction between incomplete *lekton*, complete *lekton* and full logical proposition (Baldassarri 1985: 10). Although there is a clear correspondence between the two articulations, there are also substantial differences. While in the Stoic doctrine the distinction specifically relates to the incorporeal (*lekton*), in Augustine it concerns words directly.

On the basis of this distinction of words, Augustine established a fourfold division of the dialectic:

1. Simple words (*de loquendo*)
2. Combined words
    a. Do not make a statement
    b. Do make a statement
        i. Neither true nor false
        ii. True or false (*de eloquendo*)
            A. Simple (*de proloquendo*)
            B. Combined (*de proloquiorum summa*)

The following chart summarizes the structure and classifications outlined in the first four chapters of the treatise (see Fig. 1).

```
                                    Verba
                                      |
                     ┌────────────────┴────────────────┐
                 Simplicia                          Coniuncta
               (de loquendo)                            |
                                        ┌───────────────┴───────────────┐
                                    Sententia                      Non sententia
                                        |
                          ┌─────────────┴─────────────┐
                    Vera aut falsa                  Non vera
                          |                       (de eloquendo)
               ┌──────────┴──────────┐
           Simplices            Coniunctae
        (de proloquendo)   (de proloquiorum summa)




                                    Words
                                      |
                     ┌────────────────┴────────────────┐
                   Simple                          Combined
              (on the utterance)                       |
                                        ┌───────────────┴────────────────┐
                              Do make a statement            Do not make a statement
                                        |
                          ┌─────────────┴──────────────┐
                    True or false             Neither true or false
                          |                       (on speaking)
               ┌──────────┴──────────┐
             Simple                Combined
        (on the statement)     (on the conclusion)
```
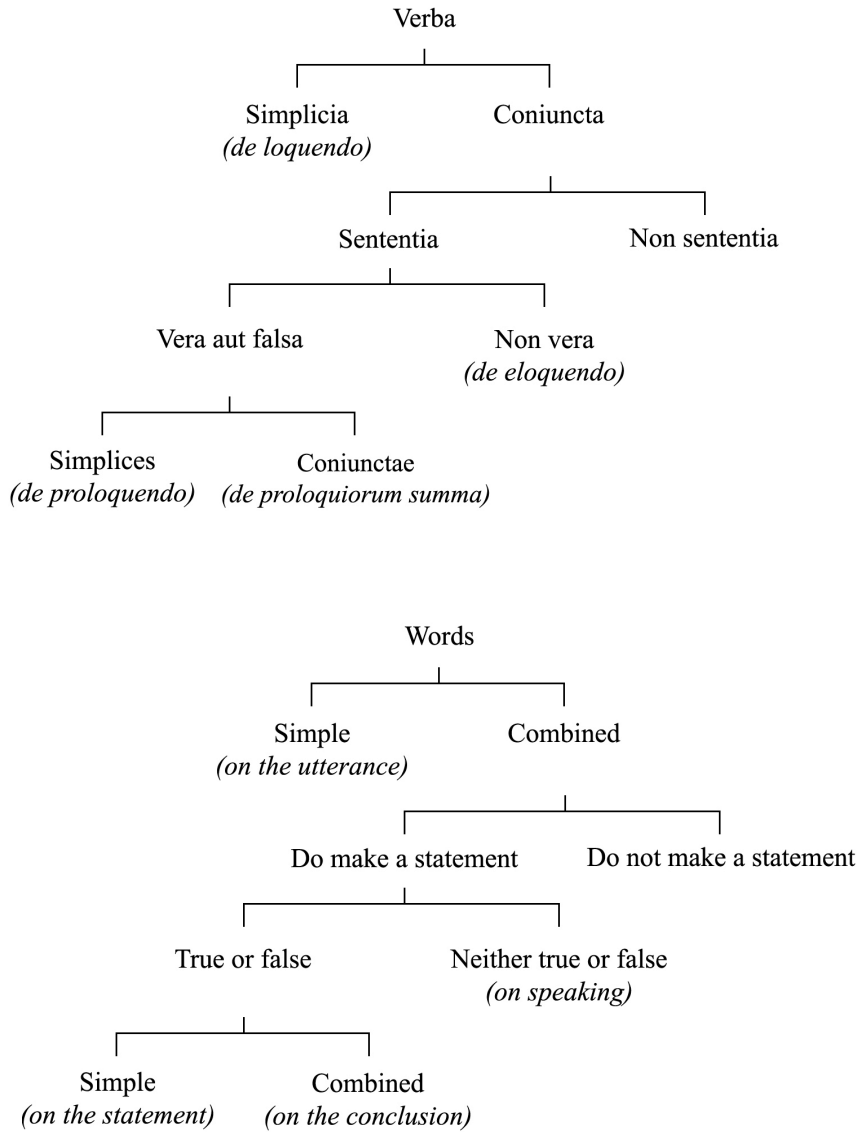
Figure 1. The structure and classifications outlined in the first four chapters of the *De dialectica* (ch. I–IV)

1.4. Definitions of *verbum, res, signum, loqui* and *vox articulata*

Having outlined the divisions of the dialectic, Augustine dwells on the part relating to signification (*de loquendo*). Chapter V of the treatise is the essential knot for the interpretation of the work, it being there that the first definitions of *verbum* ("word"), *res* ("thing") and *signum* ("sign") are formulated:

> Verbum est uniuscuiusque rei signum, quod ab audiente possit intellegi, a loquente prolatum. Res est quidquid vel sentitur vel intelligitur vel latet. Signum est quod et se ipsum sensui et praeter se aliquid animo ostendit. Loqui est articulata voce signum dare. Articulatam autem dico quae comprehendi litteris potest.
>
> (A word is a sign of any sort of thing. It is spoken by a speaker and can be understood by a hearer. A thing is whatever is sensed or is understood or hidden. A sign is something which is itself sensed and which indicates to the mind something beyond the sign itself. To speak is to give a sign by means of an articulate utterance.)[16]

In this chapter, the whole discourse of Augustine revolves around the concept of *signum*. The definitions, each of them being concatenated, in fact, lead to the concept of word as a sign, that it is therefore the key notion.

Verbum is a sign that, coming from the speaker and reaching the listener, directs the mind of the listener to the thing (*res*).

Res is the external object. It is that which is perceived directly, insofar as corporeal, by the senses, or inasmuch as incorporeal, by the mind, or remaining hidden from the direct perception of the senses and of the mind, it is inferred starting from what is directly perceived.

Signum is what – inasmuch as it is a sensible reality that incorporates in itself an intelligible content – coming into contact with a subject that perceives it, makes it possible to show (to the senses) the sign in itself and (to the mind) something other than the sensible, of which, the sign as sign, is constituted.

On these premises, Augustine presents speaking (*loqui*) as the giving of a sign (*signum dare*) through an articulate utterance (*vox articulata*). The latter, in turn, is intended as the sound deployed by phonatory organs of man under the direction of reason (intentionality). In *De dialectica*, *vox articulata* means what can be transcribed in letters (*litterata*). The term *vox articulata* will reoccur in the *De magistro*, however, with a different meaning. As L. G. Kelly (2002: 15) pointed out: "In Augustine *vox articulata* means a 'sound bearing a meaning' and is synonymous with *vox litterata*, for what is clearly pronounced can also be written (*De magistro* x.34)". In costrast to the *De dialectica*, in the *De magistro* the term *vox articulata* is generally coupled with the locution *cum aliquo significato* (with some significance). This suggests that the meaning

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[16] *Dial.* 5 (trans. Jackson, *De dialectica*, 87).

attached to the adjective *articulata* in the *De magistro* highlights the link between a phonic expression and its meaning (rather than its transcribability).[17]

Giovanni Manetti (1993 [1987]: 158) reached the conclusion that the concept of sign in Augustine and the terminological distinctions outlined in the *De dialectica* can be compared with the modern concepts of signifier, signified and referent. The author proposes a semiotic triangle, which we quote in full (see Fig. 2), which shows the correlation of three elements of Augustine's theory:

Dicibile

Vox articulata   Res
(or sonus)
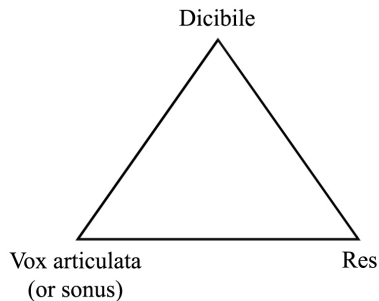
Figure 2. The semiotic triangle (Manetti 1993 [1987]: 158)

The terminological difference between *vox articulata*, *sonus* and *dicibile* is discussed in the following sections. It should be noted that, according to Todorov (1982 [1977]: 47), Augustine's definition of *verbum* – "A word is a sign of any sort of thing. It is spoken by a speaker and can be understood by the hearer" – highlights the existence of a twofold relationship linked to one another in the same definition. On the one hand, it infers the relationship between the sign (*signum*) and the thing (*res*) that concerns the framework of designation and signification; on the other hand, it infers the relation between the speaker and the hearer that relates to the dimension of communication.

This twofold relationship can be traced as follows (see Fig. 3):

Signum — Res) Dimension of signification / designation

Loquiens — Audiens) Dimension of communication
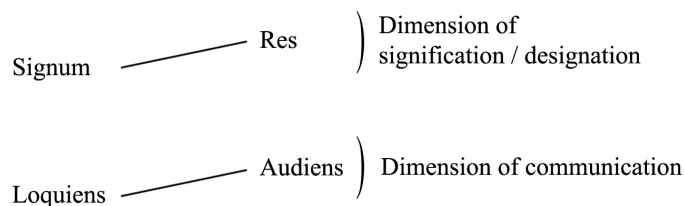
Figure 3. The dimensions of signification and communication

As pointed out in the introduction, the sensibility towards the communicative dimension is one of the characteristic features of Augustinian semiotics and is also an innovative element as compared to the previous tradition. Ruef (1981: 86) noted, in this regard: "Das Charakteristikum von Augustinus Zeichentheorie ist dies, dass sie auf kommunikationstheoretischen Grundlagen beruht".[18] Thus, to communicate means to activate in the mind of someone else something that is in our own mind and it implies the voluntary and intentional transfer of an idea from a sign-giver to one or more sign-receiver(s).

One of the characteristic elements of Augustine's definition of *signum* is its pragmatic collocation and the social significance that it implies. Simone (1969: 106), who writes that "la presenza di una audiens e di un loquens è considerata elemento costitutivo della natura stessa del segno linguistico",[19] highlighted this point.

1.4.1. Written words and spoken words

Augustine suggests that every word is sound[20] and distinguishes the spoken word from the written word. The spoken word is a sign of the thing, whereas the written word is a sign of the spoken word; that is, it is able to signifiy the sound to the mind. This means that the vision of written letters ensures that the recognition of the sound (of which the written letters are signs) takes place in the mind, as well as the necessary recognition of the signified present in the fonic sign and consequently in the graphic sign.

Suggesting that every word is sound, Augustine uses the term *sonus*. As noted earlier, we have already encountered the use by Augustine of *vox articulata* in order to refer to the phonic side of the verbal sign. We must at this point determine whether *vox articulata* and *sonus* are interchangeable terms or if these are concepts that, although partially overlapping, pertain to different meanings.

Each word is, at one and the same time, both *sonus* and *vox articulata*. Yet *sonus* (the sound) is considered unrelated to the intelligible content, whereas the *vox articulata* (articulate voice) is in relation to the intelligible content signified by it. Therefore, the examination of sound is the task of rhetoric, while the study of the voice is the task of the preliminary part of the dialectic, which is the general doctrine of grammar. Dialectic proper is concerned with the study of meaning insofar as it is meaning (that is, thought insofar as it is thought). Thus, *sonus* is not subject to the doctrine of dialectic, yet the act of disputing about the *sonus* is subject to dialectic – insofar as it is dialectic that clarifies the laws and rules of disputing correctly.

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[18] «The characteristic feature of Augustine's sign theory is that it is based on principles of communication theory». My own translation from German.

[19] «The presence of an *audiens* and a *loquens* is considered a constitutive element of the nature of the linguistic sign». My translation from Italian.

[20] A word can be conceived as sound by placing emphasis on the sonic dimension of an uttered word.

1.4.2. Signs of things and signs of words: object language and metalanguage

Augustine appears to have been "the first thinker who identified the distinction between object language and metalanguage" (Simone 1969: 106).[21] Having outlined the fundamental concepts discussed above and having stated that the sound aspect per se is not part of dialectic, some observations of considerable importance follow:

> Sed cum verba sint signa rerum, quando de ipsis / obtinent, verborum autem illa, quibus de his disputatur – nam cum de uerbis loqui nisi verbis nequeamus et cum loquimur nonnisi de aliquibus rebus loquimur – occurrit animo ita esse verba signa rerum, ut res esse non desinant.

> (Words are signs of things whenever they refer to them, even though those [words] by which we dispute about [words] are [signs] of words. For since we are unable to speak of words except by words and since we do not speak unless we speak of some things, the mind recognizes that words are signs of things, without ceasing to be things).[22]

In this passage, Augustine sharply distinguishes between *signum rei* (word as a sign of thing) and *signum verbi* (word as a sign of word): one can dispute through words not only about things but also about words (about the sound of words, the parts of speech as well as the meaning conveyed through words insofar as they are signified). In other words, a meta-language can be achieved that has language itself – in its various levels – as its own object, in a nutshell, a language about language.

In the case of *signum verbi*, the word is, on one hand, what it is talked about (the object, *res*), and on the other hand, it is what we are talking with (what allows us to talk about something else): one word constitutes the object language, the other the metalanguage.

The distinction between object language and metalanguage is possible only in virtue of the distinction between *signum* and *res* that Augustine outlined. The distinctive character of the sign is to have a special status which makes it capable of being, at one and the same time, sign and thing – the sign as sign, in fact, does not cease to be a thing. These two functions are not contradictory but complementary. As we will see in what follows, this is a recurrent theme in Augustine's writings.

As noted by Simone (1969: 107), Augustine conceived of the distinction between *signum* and *res* in terms of a relative, functional and mobile relationship, rather than as an absolute, static and definitive relationship.

In conclusion, word qua sign is, from two different points of view, *signum* and *res*, sign and thing (see Fig. 4).

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[21] My translation from Italian: «Agostino pare essere stato il primo pensatore che abbia individuato la distinzione tra lingua-oggetto e metalingua» (Simone 1969: 106).

[22] *Dial*. 5,8 (trans. Jackson, *De dialectica*, 89).
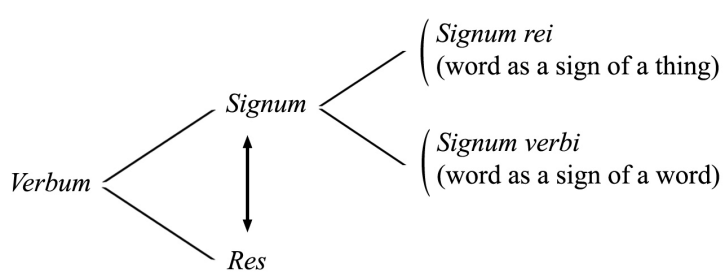
Figure 4. *Signum rei* and *sigum verbi*

1.4.3. The twofold nature of the sign

The sign is thus of a relational nature showing (*ostendit*) something other than itself. Therein lies the importance of the sign in semiotics: the reference of the sign to something else. In this respect, the reflection about the sign is of the utmost actuality, proven by its application in semiotic theories of this century. This vision of the sign is apparent in Roman O. Jakobson, who speaks of the sign as a *renvoi*, that is, the phenomenon of referral or standing-for, and resumes exactly the same principle of Augustine:

> Why is it necessary to make a special point of the fact that sign does not fall altogether with object? Because beside the direct awareness of the identity between sign and object (A is A1), there is a necessity for the direct awareness of the inadequacy of that identity (A is not A1). The reason this antinomy is essential is that without contradiction there is no mobility of concepts, no mobility of signs, and the relationship between concept and sign becomes auto-matized. Activity comes to halt, and the awareness of reality dies out. (Jakobson 1981 [1934]: 750)

Moreover, the sign retains the character of duality – sensible and intelligible – insofar as on one hand it implies a relation between the sign (*signum*) and the senses (*sensus*) and, on the other, a relation between the sign and the mind (*animus*), which, through the sign, apprehends something that is not the sign in itself. This means that the sign presupposes, simultaneously, a twofold relation-ship: perceptive and intellective (or sensible and intelligible) (see Fig. 5).
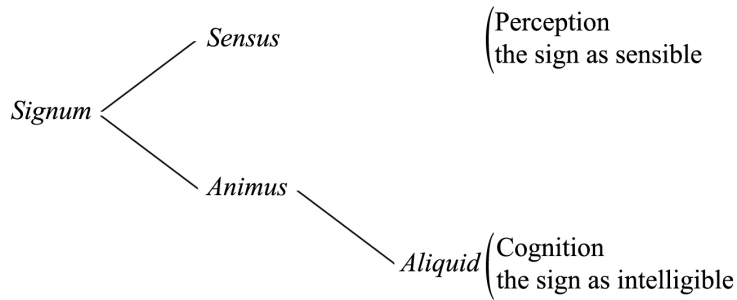
Figure 5. The twofold character of the sign

Sensus refers to the perceptible character of the sign. A sign, insofar as it presents a sensible side, can be perceived in various ways depending on the human senses engaged in the process of sign perception. The modalities of sign perception vary according to the sense to which the sign refers. A sign, in fact, can be perceived through the sense of hearing, of sight or through the use of other senses.

In the *De dialetica*, Augustine merely points out this aspect without going into the merits of the various kinds of sign that can be classified according to the sense perception or sense production. As we shall see in the course of our enquiry, Augustine discusses such matters elsewhere.

Summarily, the elements that characterize Augustine's definition of the sign as outlined in the *De dialectica* are:

1. The relational nature of the sign – namely, the reference of the sign to something other than the sign iyself;
2. The twofold nature of the sign: sensible and intelligible;
3. The social nature of the sign;
4. The intentional nature of the sign.
5. The intersubjective nature of the sign.

1.4.4. Augustine's tetradic semiotic theory: *verbum*, *dicibile*, *dictio,* and *res*

Now we come to the crux of the matter as discussed by Augustine in the fifth chapter of the treatise. Like we said, this part has a special significance for the present study insofar as Augustine presents important conceptual distinctions that fall into a general theory of semantics.

Here is the excerpt where Augustine distinguishes four conceptual cornerstones of his semiotic theory. Todorov (1982 [1977]: 21) considered this part of the chapter as "a particularly obscure page of the treatise"; therefore, we decided to report the text *in extenso*, not only for the richness of its content, but

also because it has given rise to a number of interpretations not always concordant:

> Cum ergo verbum ore procedit, si propter se procedit id est ut de ipso verbo aliquid quaeratur aut disputetur, res est utique disputationi quaestionique subiecta, sed ipsa res verbum vocatur. Quidquid autem / ex verbo non aures sed animus sentit et ipso animo tenetur inclusum, dicibile vocatur. Cum vero verbum procedit non propter se sed propter aliud aliquid significandum, dictio vocatur. Res autem ipsa, quae iam verbum non est neque verbi in mente conceptio, sive habeat verbum quo significari possit, sive non habeat, nihil aliud quam res vocatur proprio iam nomine. Haec ergo quattuor distincta teneantur; verbum, dicibile, dictio, res.

> (When, therefore, a word is uttered for its own sake, that is, so that something is being asked or argued about the word itself, clearly it is the thing which is the subject of disputation and inquiry; but the thing in this case is called a *verbum*. Now that which the mind not the ears perceives from the word and which is held within the mind itself is called a *dicibile*. When a word is spoken not for its own sake but for the sake of signifying something else, it is called a *dictio*. The thing itself which is neither a word nor the conception of a word in the mind, whether or not it has a word by which it can be signified, is called nothing but a *res* in the proper sense of the name. Therefore, these four are to be kept distinct: the *verbum*, the *dicibile*, the *dictio*, and the *res*.)[23]

Augustine addresses the problem of the relationship between the sign and what the sign is a sign of, by distinguishing the concepts *verbum*, *dicibil*e, *dictio* and *res*.

Recalling the previously defined distinction between *signum verbi* (sign of words) and *signum rei* (sign of things), *verbum* performs both sign-functions: the word is a sign of words because we speak about words only through words; nevertheless, the word does not cease to be a sign of things (*signum rei*), inasmuch as the word, referring to itself (*propter se*) becomes the subject of discourse and the object of that metalinguistic function that language possesses. *Verbum*, then, in this passage refers to the word that refers to itself, becoming the object of question and discussion.

The second distinction made by Augustine is the *dicibile*, and it is distinguished by the *verbum*, as the former is what is perceived by the mind and that in the mind itself is enclosed (*sed quod in verbo intelligitur et in animo continentur*). The *dicibile* is what is understood in the word, in the mind of the listener; it is what the mind conceives of the word uttered.

The *dictio*, instead, is the enunciation: it includes both the *verbum* and the *dicibile*; it is thus the unity of the signifier and the signified. Unlike the *verbum* – spoken to signify itself (*propter se*) – the *dictio* intends to signify something that is other than itself, and of which it is the sign.

Res, finally, it is the external object: it is what is neither *verbum* nor the *dicibile* nor the *dictio*.

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[23] *Dial*. 5,8 (trans. Jackson, *De dialectica*, 89).

1.5. The "force" of the words (*vis verborum*)

In this brief but revealing section of the treatise (Ch. VII), Augustine takes up the subject of the force of words (*vis verborum*).[24] Besides having a signification, words do have a "force" (*vis*), which is directly proportional to the ability to impact, affect, of move (*movere*) the listener. The force of words is, thus, an indicator of the effect of words upon the hearer.

Augustine explicates this concept as follows:

> Vis verbi est, qua cognoscitur quantum valeat. Valet autem tantum quantum movere audientem potest.
>
> (The force of a word is that whereby the extent of its efficacy is learned. It has efficacy to the extent to which it is able to affect the hearer.)[25]

The force of a word is the measure of its value: the greater the force of a word, the greater the value. Thus, the *vis verborum* oscillates through a spectrum that goes from a high degree of efficacy to a lower one.

There are three ways in which a word affects the hearer:

(1) On its own account (*secundum se*);
      a. In relation to the sense;
            i. By nature;
           ii. By custom;
      b. In relation to art;
      c. In relation to both sound and art.
(2) On account of what the word signifies (*secundum id quod significat*);
(3) On both its own account and what the word signifies.

The first modality according to which a word exerts its force relates to the word considered in itself – the word taken as a word – prescinding from the signification of the word (what it signifies). Here the emphasis is on the phonic dimension of the verbal sign and how the perception of the sound impacts the hearer. This perspective, thus, focuses on the word as perceived sound by the listener.

The sense of the listener is effected in two way: either by nature or by custom. Some words, Augustine maintains, have a rougher sound, whereas others are more soft and gentle. This is so by nature. An illustration of this is the name /King Artaxerxes/. Upon hearing it, the hearer is unpleasantly impressed because of the harshness this word expresses, whereas the name /Euryalus/ is smoother to the ear: "For, who, even though he has heard nothing about the men

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[24] Norman Kretzmann (1972 [1967]: 366) refers to *vis* as "import" of words.
[25] *Dial.* 7,12 (trans. Jackson, *De dialectica*, 101).

who are named, will not suppose that there is great harshness in the former and mildness in the latter?".[26]

Besides the sound of a word, the sense is also affected by custom. This way of efficacy of the word has to do with the "degree of familiarity to the hearer" (Kretzmann 1972 [1967]: 366). An uttered word can either sound familiar or foreign to the hearer according to his/her linguistic competence: "This has nothing to do with the smoothness or roughness of sound, but rather with the extent to which the passing sounds themselves are received by the inner chambers of the ears as familiar guests or as strangers".[27] As Cassin and colleagues aptly noted:

> […] the word is instituted as a function of a certain (immediate or mediate) relation to the thing; its pronunciation will thus provoke a sensory impression in the listener, which will induce an intellectual impression dependent either on the nature of the word (the "softness" or "harshness" of its sound, for instance), on the thing it signifies, or both. (Cassin et al. 2014b: 956)

Words can also affect the hearer by art or by both sense and art. Here Augustine has in mind the context in which an uttered word is perceived and appraised with reference to a particular discipline whose purpose is to identify the word as a part of speech (grammar) or as a poetic meter (metrics). Augustine refers to the word /*optimu*s/ whose two short syllables captured by the ear allow one to catalogue this word as a form of dactyl in metrics.

A word can affect the hearer on account on what it signifies (prescinding from an analysis of the word taken per se):

> Iam vero non secundum se, sed secundum id quod significat verbum movet, quando per verbum accepto signo animus nihil aliud quam rem ipsam intuetur, cuius illud signum est quod accepit.

> (A word affects sense on account of what it signifies rather than on its own account when the mind receives a sign by a word and considers nothing other than the thing itself whose sign has been received.)[28]

Tarmo Toom (2007: 411) maintains that "when Augustine mentions a word affecting on account of what it signifies […], he has a semiosis, the *scientia signorum*, in mind". Here Augustine anticipates a principle that will be taken up and further developed in the *De magistro* and reiterated in the *De trinitate*.

Lastly, a word affects the hearer "both on its own account and on account of what it signifies", and in this case "both the statement itself and that which is stated by means of it are attended to together".[29] As an illustration of this, Augustine considers the sentence /He had squandered his patrimony by hand,

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[26] *Dial.* 7,12 (trans. Jackson, *De dialectica*, 101).
[27] *Dial.* 7,12 (trans. Jackson, *De dialectica*, 101).
[28] *Dial.* 7,13 (trans. Jackson, *De dialectica*, 101).
[29] *Dial.* 7,13 (trans. Jackson, *De dialectica*, 101).

by belly, and by penis/. This sentence maintains a certain decorum in the expression because the same referent (the male genital organ) could have been also expressed using a much more sordid and vulgar word. In other words, the shamefulness of the thing signified is veiled by the dignity of the word used to signify it. Although both words signify the same thing there is a difference in their force. In the case in which a more inappropriate terminology is used, both the ugliness of the expression (the word in its own account) and the shamefulness of the thing signified (what it signifies) would affect in tandem the sense and the mind.

Such an explication leads Augustine two distinguish a twofold perspective: the presentation of the truth, which is the concern of the dialectician, and the preservation of propriety of language, which is the concern of the rhetorician.

The threefold classification of the modalities in which the force of words is manifested echoes the various perspectives in which words as signs can be conceived, namely, the word in relation to itself, the word in relation to the thing it signifies, or the word in relation to both. This minute dissection of the word in several facets seems novel and valuable because it allows him to focus on different aspects of the sign and how it affects the sign-receiver. We can notice that in this chapter of the *De dialectica* Augustine engages with a pragmatic dimension, which studies the relations between signs and interpreters (Morris 1938) or the relations between words and the listener.

1.6. Pragmatics of disambiguation

In the following chapter (Ch. 8), Augustine identifies two main hindrances that may hamper the force of words, namely, obscurity and ambiguity. The difference between the two concepts is explained in these terms:

> […] Quod in ambiguo plura se ostendunt, quorum quid potius accipiendum sit ignoratur, in obscuro autem nihil aut parum quod attendatur apparet.

> (In what is ambiguous more than one thing is presented, but one does not know which of them is to be understood; in what is obscure, on the other hand, nothing or very little appears to be considered.)[30]

What is ambiguous refers to several things that are suggested simultaneously. Later, we will see that Augustine depicts these ideas as a crossroads with many paths, multiple forks in a road (*multivium*). However, in the case of obscurity, nothing or very little suggests its meaning. Ambiguity and obscurity, however, can easily overlap, especially when a word is conveyed but very little is manifested about its signification. To untie this knot, that is, the similarity between ambiguity and obscurity, Augustine gives a brilliant example:

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[30] *Dial.* 8,7 (trans. Jackson, *De dialectica*, 103–104).

Sed ubi parum est quod apparet, obscurum est ambiguo simile: veluti si quis ingrediens iter excipiatur aliquo bivio vel trivio vel etiam ut ita dicam multivio loco, ibique densitate nebulae nihil viarum quod est eluceat. Ergo a pergendo prius obscuritate terretur; at ubi aliquantum rarescere nebulae coeperint, videtur aliquid, quod utrum via sit an terrae proprius et nitidior color incertum est. Hoc est obscurum ambiguo simile. Dilucescente autem caelo quantum oculis satis sit iam omnium viarum deductio clara est, sed qua sit pergendum non obscuritate sed ambiguitate dubitatur.

(When a little appears, obscurity is similar to ambiguity, as when someone who is walking on a road comes upon a junction with two, three, or even more forks of the road, but can see none of them on account of the thickness of a fog. Thus, at first, he is kept from proceeding by obscurity. When the fog begins to lift a bit, something can be seen, but it is uncertain whether there is any road or any of the bright colors typical on the earth. This is obscurity similar to ambiguity. When the sky clears enough for good visibility, the direction of all the roads is apparent, but which is to be taken is still in doubt, not because of any obscurity but solely because of ambiguity.)[31]

An object can be either manifest or obscure to the mind and/or to the senses. By combining the different logical alternatives of an object being either manifest or obscure to the mind and/or to the senses, Augustine singles out three kinds of obscurity:

(i) Something is manifest to the senses but is obscure (or close) to the mind;
(ii) Something would be manifest to the mind if it were not inaccessible to the senses;
(iii) Something is obscure both to the senses and to the mind.

He provides illustrations for all the three kinds of obscurity. An example of the first kind is when someone, who has never seen a pomegranate nor has ever heard what sort of fruit this is, sees a picture of a pomegranate. He would not be able to recognize the object depicted because this object is unknown to his mind although it is manifests to his eyes. Conversely, the second kind of obscurity occurs when there is a picture of pomegranate in the darkness. As soon as the darkness disappears and the eyes can see the object, the mind will recognize what is depicted without hesitations. Augustine's own example of the third kind of obscurity is a man who, without prior knowledge and experience of a pomegranate, seeks to recognize the picture of a pomegranate in the dark. Of the three kinds of obscurity, the third is the most obscure. Thus, obscurity reaches its zenith with the third kind. This is so because even if that thing which is hidden to the senses would be revealed, the mind would not be able to grasp it. Baldassari (1985: 22) pointed out that Augustine's threefold distinction of

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[31] *Dial.* 8,7 (trans. Jackson, *De dialectica*, 105).

obscurities echoes the Stoics' theory of ambiguity and he applies it to the relation between signifier and signified.

In order to show how his distinction applies to language, in the reminder of chapter 8, Augustine discusses two linguistic examples of obscurity, *temetum* (wine) and *magnus* (great). The three illustrations of kinds of obscurity discussed above are extended to the analysis of the word *temetum*. Suppose that students attending a class of grammar are arranged spatially at different distances from their teacher, so that they would form three different groups according to the distance that separates them from the teacher – (1) those seated nearby the teacher, (2) those that were at some distance from him, and (3) those who were farthest from him. Suppose also that, for some reason, only some of those who were seated farthest from him knew what *temetum* is, whereas of the others were not acquainted with the meaning of this word. It is apparent, then, that all three groups were, for different reasons, rambling in the dark. If the grammar teacher utters the word *temetum* in a very low voice, the pupils who sat nearby him heard it distinctly, those who sat at some distance heard it less clearly, and those who were the farthest away were unable to hear the sound of the word. These three groups of students illustrate the three kinds of obscurity: those who heard distinctly the sound of the word but did not know its meaning, represent the first kind. Those who knew the word *temetum* and yet could not hear its sound distinctly or not at all, represent the second kind. Those who neither were acquainted with the sound of the word spoken by the teacher nor with its significance, exemplify the third and most severe type of obscurity. Augustine concludes that "one who speaks in a loud enough voice, with good articulation, and using the best-known words, will avoid all the varieties of speaking obscurely".[32]

Augustine continues his analysis of the pragmatics of disambiguation by tackling the issue of ambiguity and its types. Augustine, as usual, provides insightful examples. The setting is, once again, a grammar teacher with his students as his audience. Suppose the teacher spells out just one word that everyone is acquainted with as, for instance, *magnus* (great), followed by silence. By simply uttering this word and then pausing, without providing the reference to any specific context, the grammar teacher would leave his students completely in the dark as to how to interpret this term. What could the grammar teacher mean with one single word? It is apparent that the word *magnus* has multifarious interpretations depending on the context in which the word occurs: grammar ("What part of speech is it?"), metrics, ("What sort of [metrical]foot is it"), history (Pompey the Great, how many wars did he wage?"), poetry ("Great and almost unique is the poet Virgil?"), or simply reproaching the students' negligence ("Great laziness toward studies has come upon to you!").[33] It is

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[32] *Dial.* 8,2 (trans. Jackson, *De dialectica*, 107): «Omnia igitur obscure loquendi genera vitabit, qui et lvoce quantum satis est clara nec ore impedita et verbis notissimis utetur».
[33] *Dial.* 8,2 (trans. Jackson, *De dialectica*, 107).

apparent that one single word, taken out of context, could give rise to numerous interpretations and bring out several referents.

Augustine further spells out the concept of ambiguity. He does not subscribe to the view (held by the Stoics) that every word is ambiguous, or to the principle (held by Hortensius in Cicero), that because words are ambiguous it therefore is not feasible to explain ambiguous words by means of ambiguity. Augustine clarifies that when it is said that words are ambiguous this concerns only single words. Single words are disambiguated by conjoined words. In other words, a word is ambiguous when it is considered in isolation. However, when a word in included into a discourse it cannot be said that words are ambiguous.

Like obscurity, also ambiguity is distinguished into various kinds. Augustine provides a very detailed set of distinctions that are embedded one into the other. The first two kinds of ambiguity are the following:

(i)   Ambiguity in what is said;[34]
(ii) Ambiguity in what is written.

An illustration of the first kind occurs if someone were to hear the word *aciens* (sharpness), without a clear reference to the discourse or statement in which it appears. He would be very uncertain as to whether this expression refers to (a) the point of a military formation, (b) the sharpness of a sword, or (c) the acuteness of one's vision.

Likewise, an illustration of the second kind (ambiguity in what is written) occurs when someone reads the written expression *leporem*, with no reference to its context. There would be a degree of uncertainty in regard to the quantity of syllables – "whether the penultimate syllable of the word is to be drawn out as a form of '*lepos*' (wit) or whether it is to be shortened as a form of 'lepus' (hare)".[35]

The first kind of ambiguity is, in turn, divided into two further kinds. Whenever something is said, many things can be understood. This leads to the bifurcation into univocally named terms and equivocally named terms.

The first head of this twofold division, univocal expressions, refers to many things that can be included under the same name and under the same definition. This idea is easier to be grasped by way of an example, as does Augustine. The example for a univocal term is the word *homo* (man), whose definition is "a rational, mortal animal". It is apparent that this term is equally applicable to a

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[34]   Notice that Baldassarri (1985: 23) refers to this first kind of ambiguity as ambiguity in spoken and written expressions: «Vengono quindi distinte due specie di ambiguità: l'amniguità che si presenta e in ciò che è scritto e in ciò che è detto e l'ambiguità che si presenta solo in ciò che è scritto»).

[35]   *Dial.* 9,13 (trans. Jackson, *De dialectica*, 109): «[…] utrum paenultima huius verbi syllaba producenda sit ab eo quod est 'lepos' an ab eo quod est 'lepus' corripienda - quam scilicet non pateretur ambagionem, si accusativum huius nominis casurn voce loquentis acciperet».

wide variety of tokens which can all be listed under the same rubric and that are all contained in the definition:

> Hominem cum dicimus, tam puerum dicimus quam iuvenem, quam senem, tam stultum quam sapientem, tam magnum quam parvum, tam civem quam peregrinum, tam urbanum quam agrestem, tam qui iam fuit quam qui nunc est, tam sedentem quam stantem, tam divitem quam pauperem, tam agentem aliquid quam cessantem, tam gaudentem quam maerentem vel neutrum. Sed in his omnibus dictionibus nihil est, quod non ut hominis nomen accepit ita etiam hominis definitione claudatur.

> (When we speak of a man we speak equally of a boy and of a young man and of an old man, equally of a fool and of a wise man, equally of someone large and of someone small, of a citizen and a foreigner, of a city-dweller and a country-dweller, of one who was and of one who now is, of someone sitting and of someone standing, of a plutocrat and a pauper, of one doing something and of one doing nothing, of one who rejoices and of one who mourns and of one who does neither. Among all these eight expressions there is not one which does not accept the name 'man' in such a way as to be included by the definition of man.)[36]

Thus, univocally named things are those that are included in one term as well as in one definition of that term, although each of the things included have their own names and definition and, as such, are distinguished one from another.

Equivocation, in turn, occurs when many things can have one name, thus leading to different interpretations. Equivocation is a very entangled issue and has many divisions and subdivisions within itself. Augustine first distinguished three kinds of ambiguity based on equivocation:

(i) Equivocation deriving from the liberal arts (*ab arte*);
(ii) Equivocation that stems from the use of words (*ab usu*);
(iii) Equivocation that derives from both of these together.

The first kind of ambiguity based on equivocals is due to the highly specialized metalanguage or vocabulary tailored and employed by the discipline that deals with words (such as grammar and dialectic). The same term (*Tullius*) may have different significations depending on whether a grammarian or a dialectician would be called to define the same word (because *Tullius* is at the same time a name and a dactylic foot, depending on the disciplinary viewpoint's that variously define the same term).

The second kind of equivocals derives from the use (*ab usu*) of words. Use is defined as "that for the sake of which we learn words". Withdrawing attention from the disciplines that study words, also for the layman who hears the word *Tullius* this term would be quite ambiguous. *Tullius* is in fact an equivocal term because this term may signify various things: the famous and great orator, a

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[36] *Dial.* 9,20 (trans. Jackson, *De dialectica*, 111).

picture or a statue of him, a book with his writings, and so forth. The first and second kind of equivocation can be combined and give rise to a third type which is derived by a mix of both, by equivocation from art and from use.

Proceeding with the classification of equivocals, the first kind (ambiguity in the liberal arts) is in turn divided into. Words that cause ambiguity in the liberal arts can either be the examples of themselves or they cannot. If I were to define what "word" means I could use /word/ as an illustration of the definition. This is not always possible. If I were to define the meaning of "adverb" I could not be able to use /adverb/ as an example of itself.

Like the first, also the second kind of ambiguity based on equivocation (the one that is derived from the use of words) is divided into two forms. The rationale grounding this division is that equivocal terms could stem from either the same origin or from a different one. Equivocals originating from the same source are those things that are comprised in the same term although they are not included under one and the same definition. In the example quoted above, *Tullius* can refer to many different things (the man, the statue the book, and the corpse). However, these four references cannot be included under one single definition, nonetheless, they have a common matrix, as it were, or source (the man *Tullius*).

Equivocal expressions that have different origins are illustrated by the term *nepos*: this word can signify either the son's son or a spendthrift based on origin.

Equivocal expressions of the same origin are further subdivided into two subspecies: one occurs by means of "transference" and the one through "declension". Transference occurs in many ways: (1) When "by similarity one name is used for many things"; (2) when "the part is named from the whole"; (3) when the whole is named from the part; or (4) "the species from the genus"; or (5) "the genus from the species"; or (6) "the effect from the cause"; or (7) the cause from the effect; or (8) "what is contained from the container"; or (9) vice versa.

1.7. Conclusion

The thirty-two-years-old Augustine outlines the rudiments of his theory of the sign in a treatise that remains incomplete and that, for years, was considered of dubious authorship. The *De dialectica* poses serious difficulties of interpretation for its incompleteness as well as for the lack of sources. In fact, in regards to the first point, the work cannot offer conclusive interpretations insofar as only an unfinished draft of it was found. It is difficult, if not impossible, to make a conclusive judgment on the merits of a work that came to us as an unfinished draft. However, despite these difficulties, the *De dialectica* is not without relevant theoretical achievements.

There are several important points that can be gleaned from Augustine's analysis. We have extracted five main characteristics of the conception of the sign as presented in this work:

1. The relational nature of the sign;
2. The twofold nature of the sign;
3. The social nature of the sign;
4. The intentional nature of the sign.
5. The intersubjective nature of the sign.

In addition, there are several important points to be emphasized:

a. the teatradic semiotic theory and the distinction between *verbum*, *dicibile*, *dictio*, and *res*;
b. the fundamental distinction between object language and metalanguage;
c. the emphasis placed on the semantic and pragmatic aspect of communication.

The four-fold distinction between *verbum*, *dicibile*, *dictio*, and *res* as outlined in the *De dialectica* is unique and quite original. It does not occur elsewhere in Augustine's writings with this particular outlook.

Some of the themes outlined above, instead, are typically Augustinian and will recur in other of his writings to which we shall now turn.

2. ON THE CONDITIONS AND POSSIBILITIES OF KNOWING: PHILOSOPHY OF SEMIOSIS IN AUGUSTINE'S *DE MAGISTRO*

2.1. Position of the problem

Many of the themes already treated in the *De dialectica* are taken up, amplified and deepened in the *De magistro*, *locus classicus* of the Augustinian disquisitions on the nature of language.[1] *De magistro*, written in the form of a dialogue, historically occurred[2] between Augustine and his son Adeodatus (just sixteen-years-old at that time), is part of the philosophical works of Augustine conceived during the period of Cassiciacum.[3] The dialogue was composed in Thagaste around 389 A.D., therefore placing itself chronologically after the *De dialectica* (387 A.D.).

Adeodatus, whose name means "given by God", albeit very young, is praised for his remarkable sharp-wittedness, extraordinary power of penetration and learning-ability. He was Augustine's natural son and died prematurely at the age of sixteen.[4] His father remembers the son's prodigious intellectual gifts[5] in the *Confessions*:

> He was about fifteen years old, and his intelligence surpassed that of many serious and well-educated men. I praise you for your gifts, my Lord God, Creator of all and with great power giving form to our deformities. For I contributed nothing to that boy other than sin. You and no one else inspired us to educate him in your teaching. I gratefully acknowledge before you your gifts. One of my books is entitled *The Teacher*. There Adeodatus is in dialogue with me. You know that he was responsible for all the ideas there attributed to him in the role of my partner in the conversation. He was 16 at the time. I learnt many other remarkable things about him. His intelligence left me awestruck. Who but you could be the Maker of such wonders?[6]

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[1] I used the critical edition of Augustine's *De magistro* by W. M. Green and K. D. Daur (eds.), (Turnhout, 1970), *Corpus Christianorum Series Latina* (CCSL 29). The quotations from Augustine's *De magistro* in English, unless it is otherwise indicated, are given in the translation of George G. Leckie, *St. Aurelius Augustine. Concerning the Teacher and On the Immortality of the Soul* (Appleton-Century-Croft, inc., New York, 1938).

[2] The historicity of the dialogue is a wide and very vexed question that I do not intend to discuss here. For an enquiry of this aspect, see G. Madec, «The Dialogues des historicité de Cassiciacum», *Reveu des Études Augustiniennes* 32, 1986, 207–231, and F. J. Crosson, «Show and tell: The concept of teaching in St. Augustine 'De Magistro'», in: Pizzolato, L. F.; Scanavino, G. (eds.) *Lectio Augustini. Settimana agostiniana pavese*, 1993, 13–65.

[3] Augustine went to Cassiciacum, near Milan, in 386 in preparation for baptism.

[4] The record of Adeodatus's death is 389 (*Confessions* 9,6,14).

[5] Adeodatus has also a considerable part in the dialogue *De beata vita* (386), written at Cassiciacum too. Writes Augustine: «The grandeur of his mind filled me with a kind of terror» (*Beta v.* 6).

[6] *Conf.* 9,6,14 (PL 32, col. 769, trans. Chadwick, *Confessions*, 164).

Father and son are not only the formal interlocutors of the dialogue, but they also symbolise the roles of the teacher and the learner. Augustine starts the conversation leading the son along a series of thought-provoking and complex issues, often introduced in the guise of a question.

One of the central themes of the dialogue is teaching, intended as theory and practice. Very explicit in this regard is Wade (1935: 10): "Thus in the De Magistro we see Augustine in the very act of explaining his theory of knowledge making use of his own theory in a practical manner. The work is both the theory and the practice. A practical exemplification of the theory".

As we will see in detail, Augustine's real concern was the problem of the conditions of the possibility and communicability of knowledge itself (Cloeren 1984; Madec 1975: 71; Manfredini 1960: 17–27; Parodi 1996: 9; Pépin 1950). Moreover, in order to discuss this question, he examined a series of issues that today are certainly catalogued under the rubric of semiotics. Indeed, Eugenio Coseriu (1969: 108), Robert Markus (1957: 65), and Umberto Eco (1984) all claim that the *De magistro* is among the greatest contributions to semiotics from antiquity. Commenting in a similar way, Guzzo (1927: 114) states that the treatise established the science of expression and general linguistics. Nevertheless, not all studies were able to grasp this aspect of the work. Even among scholars overtly engaged with the disciplinary field of semiotics, such a profound study of signs and signification as the *De magistro* does not find the place that one would expect it to have.

Augustine did not explicitly say what is the true subject of the dialogue. The various secondary interpretations by other scholars on the content of the work are partial. What is, then, the *trait d'union* of the *De magistro*? Is there a unifying internal logic underlying the whole work?

On the surface, the *De magistro* may be largely inaccessible, leading the reader to the conviction that s/he is facing a strictly technical work and a hard subject. However, if one carefully reads the dialogue, s/he will be undoubtedly fascinated not only by Augustine's skilfulness and expertise in dialectics and grammar, as much as for the ability with which he leads his interlocutor to philosophise, to seek for answers and, at times, to suggest hypotheses. Augustine is firm in guiding the inexperienced Adeodatus, and he is knowledgeable in showing, through irony and a maieutic process, the will of compassion of the one who teaches. Through a methodology of research dialectically modern, Augustine tackles the heart of the problem of the whole text, namely, the one of the acquisition and communicability of knowledge. Is teaching and showing through signs altogether feasible, or is the learning process a relation of compassion where both protagonists, teacher and learner, communicate attaining to their own inward richness, longing for the final destination that is the attainment of truth? Moreover, what is the place of signs and the signifying process in respect to teaching, learning, and communication in general? Do signs contribute to the acquisition of knowledge or, instead, can the sign-mediation be altogether bypassed?

Essentially, in the *De magistro*, Augustine poses a series of questions whose schema is as follows: question–obvious answer; objection that refutes the previous answer; student that replies with a counter-objection and, in turn, is refuted in what is a dialectical path. Augustine comes to the truth through gradual and successive stages in order to lead the interlocutor to the complete response. This method is referred to as *exercitatio animi* (or *mentis*). Indeed, Augustine acknowledged that the discussion that unfolds for most of the fourteen chapters of the dialogue is not undertaken "for amusement, but in order to exercise the strength and keenness of the mind".[7]

Augustine's discourse is cumulative and continues with sudden changes in directions, which lead him to dismiss the initial argument. Indeed, often, throughout the dialogue, a thesis previously substantiated is diametrically reversed, so that what seemed consolidated is questioned anew. Many illustrations of such a procedure can be found in the dialogue. Indeed, the thesis posited at the outset of the book – nothing can be taught if not by means of words – is dismissed by asserting exactly the contrary: nothing is learned by means of signs. These two opposite convictions are often taken as a point of bifurcation of the treatise, which results thus divided into two main parts:

I) Nothing is taught if not by means of signs;
II) Nothing is taught by means of signs.

In a similar vein, the thesis initially posited that certain actions can be shown by enacting them after a question is asked (except for the act of speaking), thus avoiding the recourse to signs, is completely reverted, holding the opposite.

The *De magistro* is, to a large extent, imbued with such a logic that is also the basis for a method of research that is conducive to the critical doubt of epistemological foundation. A further example of such a methodology is illustrated in chapter 8, paragraph 31. In one of the most evocative passages of the dialogue, a sole question formulated by Augustine suffices to wave the entire theoretical edifice that, gradually and laboriously, was built up to that point. The issues discussed were the following:

(1) Whether anything can be taught without signs;
(2) Whether certain signs ought to be preferred to the things which they signify;
(3) Whether the cognition of things is superior to their signs.[8]

The sole enquiry of the father, who asks whether the conclusions reached in regard to the three subjects listed above were firm and indisputable, leads the son into new doubts:

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7   *Mag*. 8,21 (trans. Leckie, *Concerning the Teacher*, 30).
8   *Mag*. 10,31 (trans. Leckie, *Concerning the Teacher*, 41).

Ad. Vellem quidem tantis ambagibus atque anfractibus esset ad certa peruentum. Sed et ista rogatio tua nescio quomodo me sollicitat et ab assensione deterret – videris enim mihi non hoc de me fuisse quaesiturus, nisi haberes quod contradiceres – et ipsa rerum implicatio totum me inspicere ac securum respondere non sinit verentem, ne quid in tantis involucris lateat, quod acies mentis meae lustrare non possit.

Aug. Dubitationem tuam non invitus accipio; significat enim animum minime temerarium; quae custodia tranquillitatis est maxima. Nam difficillimum omnino est non perturbari, cum ea, quae prona et procliva adprobatione tenebamus, contrariis disputationibus labefactantur et quasi extorquentur e manibus.

(*Ad.* – I wish indeed to have arrived at certainty after such great doubts and complications, but your question disturbs me, although I do not know why, and keeps me from agreeing. For I see that you would not have asked me about this, if you did not have some objection to raise, and the problem is such a labyrinth that I am not able to explore it thoroughly or to answer with assurance, for I am disquieted let something lie hidden in these windings which evades the keenness of my mind.

Aug. – I commend your hesitation. For it indicates a mind which is cautious and this is the greatest safeguard to equanimity. It is very difficult not to be perturbed when things we consider easily and readily provable are shaken by contrary arguments and, as it were, wrenched from our hands.)[9]

In this passage, as in many others, Adeodatus shows his critical abilities, and the doubt he raised is granted by Augustine, for only the critical spirit and methodological doubt lead to the intellectual discovery and truth.

2.2. Contemporary interpretations on the form and structure of the *De magistro*

The structure of the dialogue, defined dialectically, presents a number of challenges in relation to both form and content. Several authors have ventured into the study of the inner-articulation of the work reaching inconsistent and divergent conclusions. Thus, it is not by chance that for some authors the *De magistro* is a pedagogical work (Allevi 1937; Casotti 1931; Eggersdorfer 1907; Gentili (2009 [1976]); Valentini 1936), while, for others, it is a dialogue of an ontological nature (Mayer 1969; 1974). That, for some, it has a linguistic-philosophical value (Bermon 2007; Vecchio 1994), whereas for others, its significance is merely semiotic (Cenacchi 1985; Leckie 1938).

The difference in terms of structure between the *De dialectica* and the *De magistro* is the logical consequence of the diverse approach of the two works – where the former is considered as a treatise, while the latter is thought of as a dialogue. The *De magistro*, on the surface, seems to elude objective criteria with regard to its internal partition. Massimo Parodi (1996: 5–6), apropos such a

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[9]   *Mag.* 10,31 (trans. Leckie, *Concerning the Teacher*, 41–42).

point, has observed: "It seems impossible to identify and follow a safe thread within a subject that the author himself does not try to expose systematically and neatly, even pointing out explicitly, on some occasions, the apparent disproportion between the commitment to the research and the results achieved".[10] It is only natural that the reader finds the approach given by Augustine to the dialogue as being non-linear and non-intelligible, not realizing that the purpose of the work is precisely inducing both Adeodatus (and the "model reader")[11] not to immediate answers but, rather, to formulate arguments meditated at length – in the line of what has been previously referred to as *exercitatio mentis* or *animi*.

Augustine's auto-critical observations of the *Retractationes* not only failed to clarify the concepts expressed in the work, but increased the difficulties of comprehension: "I wrote a book whose title is *On the Teacher*. In this, there is a discussion, an investigation, and the discovery that there is no teacher who teaches man knowledge except God".[12] In a very generic fashion, then, he stated that the purpose of the dialogue was essentially to clarify that there is no teacher able to teach man, except God. In general terms, the latter is referred to as being the thesis of the *solus magister*. The review on the *De magistro* made by Augustine in his *Retractationes*, thus, disregarded any reference to the doctrine of signs, the language analysis and the quest on the conditions of knowledge that, as a matter of fact, constitute a large part of the dialogue.[13] Many contemporary scholars interpreted this observation of Augustine as a reference-point for the separation of the contents of the dialogue. We shall return shortly to this point.

The difference in judgments on the interpretation of the structure of the treatise is due to the non-homogeneity of the criteria used on each occasion by the scholars for the elucidation. Some authors, in fact, considered significant the formal aspect of the work and the evolution of discourse; others, in contrast, opted for a criterion based on the content.

In general terms, in the analysis of the reading schemes of the *De magistro* two trends are drawn: interpretations that envisage a twofold division of the work, and accounts that suggest, instead, a threefold division. Most interpreters divided the dialogue into two parts, which, albeit with some slight discrepancy, are generally identified as follows:

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[10] My own translation from Italian: «Sembra impossibile individuare e seguire un filo conduttore sicuro, entro una materia che l'autore stesso non cerca di esporre in modo sistematico e ordinato, sottolineando anzi esplicitamente, in alcune occasioni, l'apparente sproporzione tra l'impegno nella ricerca e i risultati raggiunti« (Parodi 1996: 5–6). G. Madec refers to this issue not in dissimilar terms: «La lecture du De magistro d'Augustin peut être déconcertante pour des esprits formés à d'autres types d'argumentation» (Madec 1975: 63).

[11] I refer to the sense that U. Eco (1979b) gave to this notion.

[12] *Retr.* 1,12 (CPL 0250, trans. Bogan, *The Retractations*, 50): «[…] in quo disputatur et quaeritur, et invenitur, magistrum non esse, qui docet hominem scientiam, nisi Deum».

[13] The part of the dialogue that is concerned with signs and language, indeed, occupies 37 sections on a total of 46 (Mandouze 1975: 789).

I. Discussion on signs and on language;
II. Thesis of the *solus magister*.

Among others, Thonnard (1952) and Wijdeveld (1937) endorsed such a twofold division. The reference to the dialogue Augustine made in the *Retractationes*, of which we referred supra, has contributed to lead the interpreters towards a similar interpretation, thus serving as a benchmark on which to base the division of the content of the *De magistro*. Hence, following this hypothesis, the work clearly consists of two main parts – the first discussing the functions of language and signs, the second dealing with the thesis of the interior teacher.

As briefly noted above, the dissertation written in 1937 by Gerard M. Wijdeveld can be catalogued too within this interpretation.[14] The partition he suggested includes a first section (§ 1–32) – which he called "dialectics" – and a second part that coincides with the *oratio perpetua* (§ 32–46). Both divisions, in their turn, are subdivided into quaternary partitions. We can observe Wijdeveld's scheme below:

I First Part – Dialectic dialogue (§ 1–32)

I. 1 – Introduction (§ 1–7)
I. 2 – Signs that can be shown through signs (§ 7–18)
I. 3 – Pause and summary of what has been said (§ 19–21)
I. 4 – Things that can be shown through themselves and through signs (§ 22–32)

II Second Part – Oratio Perpetua (§ 32–46)

II. 1 Nothing can be taught by means of signs (§ 32–37)
II. 2 Inner truth (§ 38–40)
II. 3 Limited value of words (§ 41–45)
II. 4 Conclusions (§ 46).

2.2.1. Discussion of the threefold division of the *De magistro* according to G. Madec

In a scrupulous and detailed analysis of the structure of the *De magistro*, Goulven Madec examined both Wijdeveld's partition as well as Thonnard's and, briefly, Voss' of which we shall discuss later.

According to Madec (1975: 64), Wijdeveld's hypothesis would not do justice of the intentions of the dialogue: "L'analyse de G. Wijdeveld est de nature à satisfaire l'esprit moderne épris de symétrie; ma elle ne rende pas compte de tous les faits observables".

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[14] Since I was not able to check this work *de visu*, I refer to the accounts given by Madec (1975: 64) and Gonzalez (1986: 189).

Both the formal aspect of the work and the evolution of discourse are significant for Madec, who suggested that despite the *De magistro* presenting itself as a whole, it is feasible to find two moments of formal discontinuity ("deux points de repère d'ordre formel" says Madec), signalled at paragraphs 19 and 32 of the dialogue (Madec 1975: 63):

(i)   The first moment of rupture of the discourse is indicated by the request that Augustine made to his son to summarise the contents discussed up to that point of the dialogue. It is a sort of interlude – or, if you will, a pause for reflection – in which Adeodatus, on his father's request, recapitulates what was said (§ 19–21);

(ii)   The second moment of fracture is indicated by the transition from the form of the dialogue to the form of the monologue, retraceable at paragraph 32 and lasting until the conclusion of the work as a continuous, uninterrupted speech of Augustine: the *oratio perpetua*.

If the double suture of the discourse, as just described, is taken as a valid criterion for interpreting the entire structure of the work, then the dialogue will result in being divided into three fundamental parts determined by the two points of formal disjunction (Part one: beginning of the dialogue–summary of Adeodatus; Part two: the summary of Adeodatus; Part three: from the summary to the *oratio perpetua*).

Bernd Reiner Voss (1970) endorsed this division. He identified the three partitions as follows: the first one extends from the beginning of the dialogue to the summary of Adeodatus; the second goes from the summary up to the transition to the *oratio perpetua*, and the third part from the beginning of Augustine's continuous speech until the end of the work.

Madec held that the beginning of the *oratio perpetua* would fall in the introductory section of the dialogue and would not form a part on its own within the work, as supposed by Voss, whose hypothesis he considered as "superficielle sinon artificielle" (Madec 1975: 64). In turn, Madec (1975: 65) proposed the following plan of the work:[15]

I. Discussion sur le langage (§§ I–37)
  1. Les buts du langage (§§ I–2)
  2. Rien ne s'enseigne sans les signes (§§ 3–30)
  3. Rien ne s'enseigne par les signes (§§ 31–37)

II. Le Christ, seul Maître de vérité (§§ 38–46).

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[15] I. Discussion on language (§§ 1–37)
I. 1 – Purposes of speech (§§ 1–2)
I. 2 – Nothing can be taught without recourse to signs (§§ 3–30)
I. 3 – Nothing can be taught through signs (§§ 31–37)
II. Christ, the only teacher of truth (§§ 38–46).
My own translation from French.

A division of the book into three parts, taking Adeodatus' recapitulation as the turning point of the dialogue, is regarded as correct by Gentili (2009 [1976]) and Cenacchi (1985) too. While Gentili (2009 [1976]: 9) identified the three parts of the work labelling each of them as "semiotics" (§§1–18), "semantics" (§§ 19–35) and "didactics" (§§ 36–46), Cenacchi (1985: 290), who explicitly adopted the semiotic terminology derived from C. Morris, opted for a slightly different division and identified a "syntactic" (§§1–18), a "semantics" (§§ 21–35) and a "pragmatics" (§§ 36–46).

2.2.2. Discussion of the tripartition of the *De magistro* according to Frederick J. Crosson

The evident difficulty in identifying with precision the parts of the dialogue, however, has not prevented scholars from providing novel interpretations of the division, as evidenced by some contemporary studies that returned to the vexed question of the structure of the *De magistro*. Indeed, the interpretation suggested by Madec was recently taken up and challenged by Frederick J. Crosson (1989) who, refuting the previous studies, concluded that the simplest and most logical division is the one indicated in the text itself (Crosson 1989: 121).

Crosson maintained that the dialogue would be more properly subdivisible into three parts on the basis of the classification of signs as outlined by Augustine at chapter 4 paragraph 7 of the *De magistro*. We quote, in toto, the excerpt where the threefold division is spelled out:

> *Aug*. Cum ergo de quibusdam signis quaeritur, possunt signis signa monstrari; cum autem de rebus, quae signa non sunt, aut eas agendo post inquisitionem, si agi possunt, aut signa dando, per quae animadverti queant.

> (*Aug*. – If certain signs are asked about, then these signs can be shown by means of signs. But when things which are not signs are asked about, they can be shown either by means of doing them after the question, if they can be done, or by giving signs by means of which they can be called to the attention.)[16]

In this passage, Augustine made some remarkable discriminations. To start with, signs are distinguished from things that are not signs, which, in the semiotic terminology he subscribed to, are labelled as *res*.

While 1) signs can be shown by means of signs, with reference to 2) *res* two options are spelled out:

a) Things (that are not signs) can be demonstrated by doing things themselves, assuming that the things that are subject to question can be carried out (if these are actions), after the request has been addressed;
b) Things (that are not signs) can be shown through signs.

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[16]   *Mag*. 4,7 (trans. Leckie, *Concerning the Teacher*, 12).

Crosson took the *tripertita distributio* as the key to interpret the structure of the work altogether for, in his view, "it commands the whole of the remainder of the dialogue" (Crosson 1989: 122). Thus, the partition he envisaged follows this order:

1) §§ 4,7–8,21, where the first case of the tripartition is discussed ("Cum ergo de quibusdam signis quaeritur, possunt signis signa monstrari") leading to the conclusion that some things (namely, signs) can be shown by means of signs;
2) §§ 8,22–10,32, where the second case is discussed ("cum autem de rubus quae signa non sunt, aut eas agendo post inquisitionem si agi possunt") and it is established that certain things (actions and natural phenomena) can be shown without signs;
3) §§ 10,33–14,46, where the third case is discussed ("aut signa dando, per quae animadverti queant") and is stated that nothing can be shown by its sign (namely, the proper name of a thing).

The *tripertita distributio* spelled out by Augustine at chapter 4, paragraph 7 deserves emphasis and requires further qualifications. At closer scrutiny, the division not only is grafted onto the bifurcation *signa*/*res*, but it tacitly presupposes a further criterion upon which the members can be distinguished. At any rate, the classification is based on a twofold criterion:

a. The object of signification (*signa*/*res*);
b. The means used in signifying.

Indeed, while the bifurcation *signa*/*res* rests upon the first criterion (the object of the signification), the other subdivisions are made on the basis of the second principle, namely, the means used in order to signify the object (Balido 1993: 69).

An excellent summary of the distinction between *objects* and *means* of signification with reference to Augustine's threefold division is provided by Giuseppe Balido (1993) in his short but very useful study on the *De magistro*:

Table 1. Objects and means used in signifying (adapted from Balido 1993: 69)

Objects of signification	Means used in signifying
Signa (Signs)	Signs
Res (Things that are not signs)	By execution (whether it is possible)
	Signs

As attentively pointed out in the most recent study on the structure of the *De magistro* (Longo 1994), the abovementioned distinction is of utmost importance for the correct interpretation of the dialogue, since Adeodatus, at §20, returning to the threefold division formerly outlined by his father at § 4,7, couched it in a

rather different fashion. On closer scrutiny, indeed, the two divisions, are discordant both in terms of the order of presentation of the three members listed, as well as with reference to the criteria used each time as the basis for the divisions (Longo 1994: 2).

The table below shows the difference in the order or presentation followed by each division:

Table 2. The threefold divisions as presented in §4,7 and §20: their respective order and differences.

§4,7	§20
1. Signs shown by means of signs	1. Signs showing signs
2. Things shown by doing them	2. Signs showing things that are not signs
3. Things shown by means of signs	3. Things shown without signs

It is manifest that the order of presentation of the three members forming the two divisions, as outlined in different points of the dialogue, is altered. What was previously listed as the second case in the division of § 4,7 is referred to as the third case in the classification of §20, and vice-versa. Thus, the two divisions follow an inverted structure. It is not by chance that the order of the second partition in comparison with the former one is altered, for such a shift is instrumental in supporting the thesis that nothing is shown by means of signs (Longo 1994: 6).

Furthermore, there are outstanding incongruences also in respect to the principles used each time as the basis for the articulation of the divisions. As pointed out earlier, the tripartite partition outlined in § 4,7 is based on a twofold criterion, namely, 1) the object of signification and 2) the means used in signifying. On the contrary, the division discussed at §20 is ultimately grafted onto a different internal logic, namely, the opposition between entailing the recourse to signs/*not* entailing the recourse to signs, in order to show the object (Longo 1994: 3). This means that the two divisions are arranged to different criteria, which ultimately are not homogeneous.

What has been said hitherto can be summarized in this way:
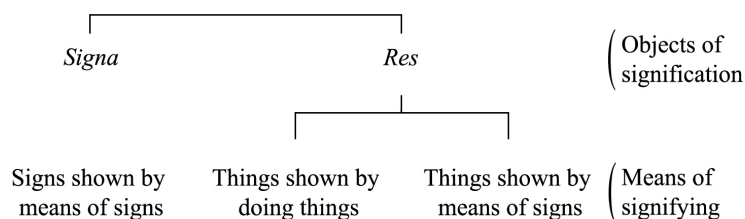
Figure 6. The threefold division as outlined in 4,7 and the criteria used for the distinctions

On this evidence, Angela Longo voiced numerous criticisms towards Crosson's interpretation and suggested a unitary reading of the dialogue. According to Longo's hypothesis, it is exactly the threefold division, as rearticulated by Adeodatus at paragraph 20, to be taken as the structure of the remainder of the dialogue, rather than the one outlined by Augustine at the paragraph 4,7, as instead suggested by Crosson.

Longo's proposal has significant implications in regard to the interpretation of the dialogue as a whole, for it shows that the *fil rouge* of the *De magistro* is an enquiry on signs and language, and ultimately, all the themes treated in the text revolve around such a discussion (Longo 1994: 12). This also shows that the bifurcation of *signa* and *res*, as well as the threefold division – which, at any rate, is a classification based on the object and means of signification – is pivotal and instrumental both for the logical and thematic organization of the dialogue, serving as a structure for the work as a whole. From this viewpoint, the *tripertita distributio*, rather than being a mere corollary to the main thesis of the inner teacher, should be reckoned as a substantial part of the dialogue and can be thought of as an engine, as it were, around which the dialogue revolves. This point deserves emphasis, for it paves the way for an interpretative avenue that values the language analysis and, ultimately, the theory of signs laid down in the *De magistro*.

Conclusively, from the cursory overview of the various contemporary interpretations of the structure of the *De magistro*, it is apparent that there is no scholarly consensus in regard to how many parts the dialogue should be subdivided into, and even within interpretations that are concordant in setting the number of the divisions, there are evident incongruences in regards both to the length of each partition and the terminology used each time by the interpreters to label the different sections identified, not to mention the precise point of the dialogue in which each division is meant to start and end.

It is in plain sight that a judgement as to what is the real content of the dialogue, whether it is a disquisition on language and other sign-systems or an argument for the thesis of the inner truth, is ineluctably reflected in the assessment of the structure of the work and in the emphasis placed on each partition. Considering the focus of the present dissertation – namely, Augustine's theory of signs and signification – both Crosson's argument that the whole dialogue is aligned to the three-fold division of signs set forth in § 4. 7, and especially Longo's conviction that the heart of the matters lies in the language analysis and the enquiry on signs, are sound and in tune with the aims set by present research. Although the two studies reached different conclusions, they both emphasized the analysis of signs through a division that, at any rate, is based upon the bifurcation of signs and things, and the ways in which they signify. Ultimately, this view shows that the theological conclusion of the treatise (only Christ does teach) is grafted onto a skilful and instrumental examination of signs, which expounds at length the limits and capacity of signs as imperfect tools of communication, showing the implications that both signs

and the mechanism of signification have for the themes of teaching and the acquisition of knowledge.

2.3. Nature and varieties of signs: Augustine's semiotic terminology

Signum is a key notion of the treatise, and its nature is qualified as something that always signifies something else. A sign is, generically, defined as follows:

> *Aug*. […] non esse signum, nisi aliquid significet.
>
> (*Aug*. – […] a sign is not a sign unless it signifies something.)[17]

Numerous illustrations of this occur throughout the treatise:

> *Aug*. Quid? Signum nisi aliquid significet, potest esse signum?
> *Ad*. Non potest.
>
> (*Aug.* – Can a sign be a sign unless it signifies something?
> *Ad.* – It cannot.)[18]

Thus, in the dialogue is echoed the definition of sign as *aliquid stat pro aliquo,* already pointed out in the *De dialectica* (and discussed in Chapter 1).

In order to avoid terminological confusions, it is worth pointing out, from the outset, that the term *signum* is used in the text with a twofold meaning: a) as a sign; b) as the word /*signum*/ itself.

Moreover, in the *De magistro* the origin of the concept of *signum* is traced back to the *signa militaria*, the "military ensigns".[19] The latter are considered as signs in the proper sense of the term, which could not be said for words that, upon analysis, are signs in a derived sense.[20] Viewed from this perspective, *signa militaria* are appropriately catalogued amongst *signa* in the true and

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[17]   *Mag*. 2,3 (trans. Leckie, *Concerning the Teacher, 7*).
[18]   *Mag*. 2,3 (trans. Leckie, *Concerning the Teacher*, 6).
[19]   The *Oxford Classic Dictionary* defines *signa militaria* as follows: «The earliest standard of the Roman army was the *signum* of the maniple. Its primitive form was a hand on the top of a pole, which later was replaced by a spearhead decorated with *phalerae*, *coronae*, and zodiac emblems. When the cohort superseded the maniple as the tactical unit, the *signum* of the leading maniple in each cohort became the chief standard of the cohort. The century had no separate *signum*. In pre-Marian army there were also five legionary standards, which were placed for safety in battle between the first two lines. In substitutions of these Marius gave each legion an *aquila* of silver or silver gilt with *coronae* as its sole decoration. The *aquila* was the *numen legionis*; its loss sometimes entailed the disbandment of the legion». (Hammond; Scullard 1949: 857).
[20]   *Mag*. 4,9: «*Aug*. […] Dicimus enim et signa universaliter omnia, quae significant aliquid, ubi etiam uerba esse inuenimus. Dicimus item signa militaria, quae iam proprie signa nominantur, quo verba non pertinent».

primitive sense of the word, whereas verbal signs are *signa* only in a secondary and derivative meaning.

Words, however, are not the only signs conceived by Augustine. Undoubtedly, the treatise shows a deep awareness of numerous kinds of signs, although they are not systematically treated. *Signum* is thus the genus that encompasses both words as well as other varieties of signs: spoken and written words, gestures, pointing fingers, pantomimes, and sign language are all conceived under the rubric of signs. For this reason, some scholars considered Augustine the precursor of the synthesis between words and signs, deeply innovating the sign theory with regard to the previous tradition (Eco 1984: 32; Todorov 1982 [1977]: 46–70; Manetti 1987: 226). Augustine reiterates the same principle throughout the *De magistro*. Moreover, a relation is evidenced between signs and the sensorium of the living being, positing that words pertain to the sense of hearing, whereas gestures and written words pertain to the sense of sight. Herein, there is outlined a division of *signa* based on the sensory channel through which signs are perceived by the sign-receiver – auditory, visual, tactile, etc. – which will be successively taken up and systematically outlined in the second Book of the *De doctrina christiana* (cf. Chapter 3).

It is worthy of note that, in the *De magistro*, the notion of *significabilia* ("significables") is introduced for the first time. The term stands for all those things that can be signified by means of signs, while they themselves are not signs, just like those things that can be seen are called "visible" and those which can be heard are labelled "audible". Moreover, Augustine traced the difference between the written and the spoken word in light of this bifurcation, since written words are "visible" and spoken words are "audible", respectively. Augustine also shows how signs refer to other signs, to themselves or to the things signified. In due course, we will return to this set of relations.

Those who are keen to consider, rather unproblematically, Augustine's stance as fundamentally logocentric – mainly due to the emphasis placed on words as signs *par excellence*, as evidenced in his *De doctrina christiana* – ignore the fact that Augustine's *De magistro* articulates a ruthless critique both to words qua signs as well as to language as a system of signification. Ultimately, the commonsensical idea that signs (and words in particular) have the capacity of bringing forth someone's ideas to another subject or that signs are able to teach something to someone is radically challenged, and ultimately, the office of signs is reappraised, limiting the power of words to a set of very specific and narrow functions.

2.4. Semantics in the *De magistro*:
The relation between signs and significata

Throughout the dialogue Augustine leads Adeadatus to a discussion of those signs that are words – which are, also, perceived through the senses. The word is that which is uttered by an articulate voice with some significance; written words, however, are signs of words. As is manifest, the definitions – spoken words and written words – coherently reiterate similar concepts already expressed and treated in the *De dialectica*. However, the four-fold distinction of *verbum*, *res*, *dictio* and *dicibile* spelled out in the *De dialectica* is not found in any other of Augustine's works, being a unique trait of his early treatise.

The *De magistro* dwells on questions regarding semantics particularly in chapter 2 where the relation between signs and significata (what signs refer to) is discussed. This is achieved, only partially, through a discussion of textual analysis that, however, ends abruptly without conclusion. The logical thread followed in the chapter is this: all words are signs; since words are conceived as signs, the question remains as to what do words actually signify. To this end, Augustine invites the son to make an exercise of textual analysis asking him to explain what every single word signifies of a verse taken from Virgil's *Aeneid*: *Si nihil ex tanta superis placet urbe relinqui* ("If it please the gods above that nothing be left of so great a city").[21]

In agreeing that this verse consists of eight words, and therefore of eight signs, Adeodatus begins to explain the meaning of every single word of Virgil's line. He acknowledges the meaning of the word /*si*/ but he is not able to define it. Hence, the father invites the son to search where he could trace the meaning of this word, whatever it may be, and he finds it in the man's soul, for /*si*/ signifies "doubt" and the doubt dwells in the soul.

In analysing the second word /*nihil*/ (nothing), Adeodatus encounters a contradiction difficult to solve: how can a sign be able to signify nothing, namely, that which is not? At any rate, according to the definition given supra, a sign must indicate something in order to be considered as a sign. The teacher explains that by the word /*nihil*/ "a certain affection of the mind is signified rather than a thing which is not", "since the mind does not see the thing and yet finds, or thinks that it finds, that it does not exist".[22] Thus, this is a word lacking a concrete referent.

Without prior notice, the discussion unfolds in a way that often mixes up different levels of analysis that, instead, should be distinguished. Indeed, in the discussion of Virgil's line there occurs an overlapping of semantics with pragmatics, since the discussion of the relationship between signs and their significata is shifted towards an understanding of the relation between signs and the sign-receiver, who decodes and interprets the given sign (Balido 1993: 68).

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[21] Virgil, Aeneid 2,659.
[22] *Mag*. 2,3 (trans. Leckie, *Concerning the Teacher*, 7): «*Aug*. Quid igitur facimus? An affectionem animi quandam, cum rem non videt et tamen non esse invenit aut inuenisse se putat, hoc verbo significari dicimus potius, quam rem ipsam quae nulla est?».

The most important point comes with the discussion of the meaning of the third sign, for it marks the sudden end of the discussion of the line of Virgil. To Augustine's question as to what the preposition */ex/* signifies, Adeodatus answers by means of synonymity: the word */ex/* has the same meaning of */de/*. This solution irritates Augustine who reminds his son that the posed question does not concern the substitution of a term with a synonym, but what it signifies. The young Adeodatus, then, replies that */ex/* signifies separation either from something that exists no more or from something that still exists:

> *Ad*. Mihi videtur secretionem quandam significare ab ea re, in qua fuerat aliquid, quod ex illa esse dicitur, sive illa non maneat, ut in hoc versu, non manente urbe poterant aliqui ex illa esse troiani, siue maneat, sicut ex urbe Roma dicimus esse negotiatores in Africa.

> (*Ad*. – It appears to mean a sort of separation from a thing in which something has been, though the thing no longer remains, as in this line, for example: although the city was destroyed, perhaps a few Trojans were left from the city [*ex illa*]; or, if the thing does remain, as when we say, for example, that there are traders in Africa from the city of Rome [*ex urbe Roma*]).[23]

The exercise on the Virgilian text, thus, remains incomplete, for the remark that the father makes to his son about the explication provided, that is – Adeodatus' solution is based on the interpretation of words by means of words, and of signs with signs, well known signs to explain well known signs. This is, ultimately, a circular definition that does not lead to a revelation of what a sign stands for. Quite provokingly, now the teacher asks Adeodatus to substantiate the very same things that are signified by means of words.

The reference to the meaning of */ex/* opens up a new vista on the signification of the categorematic and syncategorematic signs, an issue that will be much debated in medieval logic and philosophy of language. Umberto Eco, in his *Semiotica e filosofia del linguaggio* (1984), hypothesized that Augustine's *De magistro* lays the foundations for an "instructional model" that is suitable for the contextual decoding of syncategorematic terms. Eco interpreted the passage of the dialogue where Virgil's sentence is analysed in the following terms:

> Augustine then goes on to ask what */ex/* means. He refuses to accept the synonymical answer, according to which */ex/* would mean «*de*». This synonym is an interpretation that must in turn be interpreted. The conclusion is that */ex/* means a kind of separation *(secretionem quandam)* from that in which something was included. Augustine adds a further instruction for contextual decoding: the word can express separation from something which has ceased to exist, as when the city cited in the line by Virgil disappeared, or it can express separation from something which still exists, as when one says that some merchants are coming from (*ex*) Rome. The meaning of a syncategorematic term is, therefore, a set (a

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[23]   *Mag*. 2,4 (trans. Leckie, *Concerning the Teacher*, 8).

series, a system) of instructions for its possible contextual insertions and for its different semantic outputs in different contexts (all registered by the code). (Eco 1986: 35)

Costantino Marmo (2017) pointed out several shortcomings of Eco's interpretation of this particular passage of the *De magistro*. These, in summary, are the objections pointed out by Marmo *contra* Eco's reading. To start with, the one who spelled out the alleged instruction of textual decoding is not actually Augustine, but precisely his son; secondly, Eco's hypothesis is limited to the analysis of only one excerpt of the treatises and, thus, does not take into consideration the dialogue as a whole. In this regard, Marmo notes that Adeodatus' recapitulation of the result achieved in the previous discussion leaves out a reference to the instructional model of meaning. If the latter would have been an essential point of the discussion, Adeodatus would have most probably included it in his review, but this is not the case. At any rate, Augustine does not refer in any other works to what Eco termed the "instructional model".

It is revealing to pay attention to the conclusion of the discussion between the two interlocutors, since the suggestion of Adeodatus is ultimately dismissed by his father, who hints at some potential hindrances of this proposal, without however expanding upon it: "*Aug* – I admit that, and I prefer not to enumerate how many exceptions may be found to your rule. But, surely, you readily observe that you have expounded words with words, signs with signs, things well known by means of things likewise well known. I wish, however, that you would show me, if you can, the things themselves of which these are the signs".[24] Five chapters later, Adeodatus will remind his father that the question posed earlier was left unattended: "*Ad*. – Then, avoiding with a jest deep matters unknown to me, you put off the explanation until another time; and do not think that I have forgotten that you owe it me also".[25] Giving credit to Adeodatus' review, the allegedly "instructional model" provided by Augustine in chapter 2 must be taken as a provisional and tentative attempt, rather than a definitive solution to the problem.

2.5. Beyond signs: ostensive definition

The language analysis discussed above gives rise to a further enquiry into the meaning of meaning. Categorically rejecting the circular definition proposed by Adeodatus, a solution ultimately based in interpreting well known signs by means of other well known signs, the son is asked to show the things themselves instead of indicating them by means of words.

Following Augustine's request, Adeodatus replies in absolute rigorous terms, thus showing his mental acumen: "You seek the things, however, which,

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[24] *Mag*. 2,4 (trans. Leckie, *Concerning the Teacher*, 8).
[25] *Mag*. 2,4 (trans. Leckie, *Concerning the Teacher*, 27).

whatever they are, are surely not words, and yet you also ask me about them by means of words. Do first ask me about them without the help of words, and I shall then reply in the same way".[26] In this as well as in other passages of the dialogue, one cannot point out a certain jocosity that animates the two *interlocutores* and that makes the *De magistro* a work full of ironies and subtleties.

From this point onwards, the dialogue is concerned with the nature and the limits of ostension.[27] Augustine sets the essential question in these terms: is the recourse to signs for the purpose of showing something an inexorable necessity, or can one do without the mediation of signs? In other words, can nothing be shown if not by means of words or other signs?

The first objection examined is the pointing finger towards something – that, in the example under consideration, is *paries* (wall) – in order to indicate the meaning of the thing indicated:

> *Aug.* Iure agis fateor, sed si quaererem, tres istae syllabae quid significent, cum dicitur "paries", nonne posses digito ostendere, ut ego prorsus rem ipsam viderem, cuius signum est hoc trisyllabum verbum demonstrante te nulla tamen verba referente?

> (*Aug.* – I admit that you are within your right. But if when *paries* [wall] is expressed, I should ask you what the three syllables mean, could you not point it out with your finger so that I might see the very thing itself of which the three-syllable word is a sign? You would show it to me, and yet you would not employ words.)[28]

Adeodatus admits this possibility, subject to the fulfilment of two conditions:

a) The signification must refer to names that signify corporeal things;
b) The corporeal things (the subject of signification) must be present.

Not entirely satisfied with Adeodatus' response, Augustine encourages his son to restrict the spectrum of phenomena that he has identified. In fact, he observes that the colour of the wall, although it is not a body but a quality of it, may nevertheless be indicated with a finger. At this juncture, Adeodatus, aware of the oversight, admits that the case in question covers a range of phenomena far more restricted than those he had erroneously identified. The scope of the

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[26]   *Mag.* 3,5 (trans. Leckie, *Concerning the Teacher*, 9).

[27]   'Ostension', in its etymological sense, derives from the Latin *ostendo*, *ostendere*, literally means 'to show' and it may take various forms. The literature on the concept of ostension (and ostensive communication) is quite extensive. Some of the authors that have dealt with this concept are Kamlah and Lorenzen (1967), Kotarbińska (1960), Lorenz (1970). For one of the most recent studies on ostensive definition in logic and philosophy of language see, Engelland (2014). For a survey on the concept of ostension in contemporary semiotics, see Gramigna (2016).

[28]   *Mag.* 3,5 (trans. Leckie, *Concerning the Teacher*, 9).

investigation is therefore narrowed from all corporeal things (*corporalia*) to visible things (*visibilia*) only:

> *Aug*. Considera tamen, utrum etiam hinc aliqua tibi excipienda sint.
> *Ad*. Bene admones; non enim omnia corporalia, sed omnia visibilia dicere debui. Fateor enim sonum, odorem, saporem, gravitatem, calorem et alia, quae ad ceteros sensus pertinent, quamquam sentiri sine corporibus nequeant et propterea sint corporalia, non tamen digito posse monstrari.
>
> (*Aug*. – But consider now: should you not make some exceptions?
> *Ad*. – You advise me well. For I should not say all corporeal things, but all visible things. For I confess that sound, odor, taste, weight, heat and others of this sort which pertain to other senses, although they cannot be sensed without bodies, still they cannot be shown by pointing the finger.)[29]

Beside sound, smell, taste, weight and heat, also visible things are enumerated among the *corporalia* (all those things that are sensed through the body and cannot be sensed without it). However, unlike all these corporeal entities, which cannot be signified through the pointing finger, visible things may be pointed to. The scope of action that pertains to the showing of something through a pointing finger, in the suggestive hypothesis of Adeodatus, must therefore be exclusively limited to the visual sensorium.

2.5.1. Semiotic status of non-verbal pointers

Indeed, this is a remark with a considerable point. In what follows, we should spell out the implications that this discussion may have for a general theory of signs. It is worth noting that, within semiotics, the pointing finger is considered as a particular type of sign. Charles S. Peirce, for instance, considered it as an "index", which is a type of sign characterized by the physical relation between the sign and the object.[30] This is evident in some of the descriptions of indices provided by Peirce himself:

> At the same time 'indicate' has become so associated with 'index' in the sense of pointing finger (which sounds much like *digit*) that we forget that the index is so called because it performs the action of indicate (MS 409: 98).
>
> No matter of fact can be stated without the use of some sign serving as an index. If A says to B, "There is a fire," B will ask, "Where?" Thereupon A is forced to resort to an index, even if he only means somewhere in the real universe, past

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[29] *Mag.* 3,5 (trans. Leckie, *Concerning the Teacher*, 9).
[30] In an essay that has attracted much attention in Augustinian studies, Robert Marcus presents in the appendix, an attempt to survey the types of signs identified by Augustine in light of Peirce's semiotics (Markus 1957: 82–83). According to the author, Peirce's index is equivalent to the concept of «symptom» (Markus 1957: 83). For a full discussion of Markus' paper, see chapter 3 of the present dissertation.

and future. Otherwise, he has only said that there is such an idea as fire, which would give no information, since unless it were known already, the word "fire" would be unintelligible. If A points his finger to the fire, his finger is dynamically connected with the fire, as much as if a self-acting fire-alarm had directly turned it in that direction; while it also forces the eyes of B to turn that way, his attention to be riveted upon it, and his understanding to recognize that his question is answered (CP 2.305).

An *index* stands for its object by virtue of a real connection with it, or because it forces the mind to attend to that object. Thus, we say a low barometer with a moist air is an *indication* of rain; that is, we suppose that the forces of nature establish a probable connection between the low barometer with moist air and coming rain. A weathercock is an *indication*, or *index*, of the direction of the wind; because, in the first place, it really takes the selfsame direction as the wind, so that there is a real connection between them, and in the second place, we are so constituted that when we see a weathercock pointing in a certain direction it draws our attention to that direction, and when we see the weathercock veering with the wind, we are forced by the law of mind to think that direction is connected with the wind. The pole star is an *index*, or pointing finger, to show us which way is north (EP: 14).

On closer inspection, however, Peirce distinguished the "genuine" indexes from the "degenerate" ones and, according to the interpretation given by Eco (1975: 165), Peirce seems to have wanted to exclude the finger-pointing from the category of genuine indexical signs, relegating it under the rubric of signs called "sub-indices" or "hyposemes":

Subindices or *Hyposemes* are signs which are rendered such principally by an actual connection with their objects. Thus a proper name, personal demonstrative, or relative pronoun or the letter attached to a diagram, denotes what it does owing to a real connection with its object but none of these is an Index, since it is not an individual (CP 2.284).

According to Eco, the exclusion of gestural indices from the notion of index is due to the fact that "they do not have a sort of causal connection with the object to which they refer, they are not natural signs and are artificially, indeed often arbitrarily chosen" (Eco 1976: 115). Eco's reading of Peirce is somewhat too categorical and farsighted, for, granting that Peirce distinguished between degenerate indices or "designations" and genuine indices or "reagents", this is still encompassed within his general typology of signs. Thus, Eco's conclusion that Peirce intended to rule out gestural indices from the genus of indices would deserve further qualification.

Nonetheless, it is manifest that Peirce's typology of indices covers a range of phenomena much more vast than the one identified by the example of Augustine. The non-verbal pointer discussed in the *De magistro* is a "given" or inten-

tional sign (*signa data*)[31] used by someone in order to show something (e.g. /*paries*/ a wall) to someone else – who has made an explicit request through a question – in substitution of a word. Undoubtedly, the indexical sign and the pointing finger are not co-extensive phenomena; for, although a pointing finger could be interpreted as an index (in the sense that Peirce has taken the term), not all indices are pointing fingers. In fact, photographs, natural phenomena such as smoke that indicates fire or medical symptoms interpreted as indices of a disease, are thought of as indices as well.

Furthermore, it is important to stress that the pointing-finger is a coded sign nonetheless. In other words, there must exist a socially and culturally accepted code operating in the community of interpreters, which establishes a rule according to which a pointing finger is an indexical sign that is intended to signify either the object or the general class of objects that is being pointed to, instead of a word. The pointing-finger, then, is not a universal sign, exhibiting instead a local and contextual character. In this regard, Roman Jakobson wrote: "Such a typical index as a pointing finger carries dissimilar connotations in different cultures; for instance, in certain South African tribes the object pointed at is thus damned" (Jakobson 1971c [1965]: 349). Ultimately, the language of gestures operates within a quite narrow scope but it has a high degree of precision in pointing towards an object.

It is clear that Augustine's intention was not to discuss the semiotic status of pointing-fingers for its own sake, for this is exemplary and instrumental for showing to Adeodatus that, by replacing a word with a gesture, as in the example discussed, he has not shown him the thing itself (*res*). The challenge is in vain, and Augustine's request to show the thing itself without the use of words is unattended. The object is dismissed with an ad hoc argument by stating that a gesture is itself a sign (and not a thing), as it is a word. The signification of signs by means of other signs *ad infinitum* – whether words or indexical gestures such as finger pointing – is ultimately a vicious circle. Even by the recourse to gestural signs, we are still operating within the realm of a sign system, and in this way, it is not possible to reveal of the thing itself, going beyond signs and bypassing the sign-mediation altogether.

The discussion of the example of the wall – /*paries*/ – ends, categorically, with the thesis that nothing can be shown without recourse to signs:

> *Ad.* Qui potest quod quaeris, oro te?
> *Aug.* Quomodo paries potuit.
> *Ad.* Ne ipse quidem, quantum ratio progrediens docuit, ostendi sine signo potest. Nam et intentio digiti non est utique paries, sed signum datur, per quod paries possit videri. Nihil itaque video, quod sine signis ostendi queat.
>
> (*Ad.* – How, I pray, can what you ask be done?
> *Aug.* – In the same way in which the wall was shown.

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[31] *Signa data* will be examined in the following chapter devoted to the theory of signs set forth in the *De doctrina christiana.*

Ad. – Not even a wall can be shown without a sign, as far as I can see from our discussion at this point. For the directing of the finger is certainly not the wall, but through it a sign is given by which the wall may be seen. I see nothing, therefore, which can be shown without signs.)[32]

This subject, however, keeps recurring in the dialogue. Indeed, the nature of the pointing finger as a modality of signification is revisited and further qualified in a subsequent chapter of the treatise. Returning to the subject, here, Augustine posits a more substantial argument:

> […] Significationem autem re, quae significatur, aspecta. Nam illa intentio digiti significare nihil aliud potest quam illud, in quod intenditur digitus; intentus est autem non in signum, sed in membrum, quod caput vocatur. Itaque per illam neque rem possum nosse, quam noveram neque signum, in quod intentus digitus non est. Sed de intentione digiti non nimis curo, quia ipsius demonstrationis signum mihi uidetur potius, quam rerum aliquarum, quae demonstrantur.

> (We learn the signification when the thing itself is shown. For the pointing of the finger can signify only that towards which the finger is pointed, but it was pointed not at the sign but at the member which is called the head; consequently, I have not learned by means of the pointing what the thing is, for I knew that already, nor did I learn the sign in that way since the pointing was not directed at the sign. But I do not wish to place too much emphasis on the pointing of the finger, because it seems to me that it is rather a sign of the demonstration itself rather than of the things demonstrated.)[33]

It is worth noting that, with a methodology that often recurs throughout the dialogue, a thesis previously held is diametrically reversed, stating the opposite. This holds true for the subject at hand, too. Indeed, the thesis formerly maintained earlier at 3.5, which established that the signification of a thing can be shown by pointing a finger towards it, is recanted. At 10.34 Augustine further qualifies the nature of this particular sign, holding that the pointing of the finger is itself a *sign of the indication*, rather than a sign of the things pointed to. This explains why Augustine states that the act of pointing neither leads to the cognition of the thing – that part of the body that is called "head" – for it was already known, nor does it lead to the cognition of the sign, towards which the finger cannot be pointed.

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[32] *Mag.* 3,6 (trans. Leckie, *Concerning the Teacher*, 10).
[33] *Mag.* 10,34 (trans. Leckie, *Concerning the Teacher*, 45).

2.6. Augustine's doctrine of signs

Augustine outlined a rather sophisticated doctrine of signs based on several bifurcations, which is worth following in its complexity. As we have noted, the fourth chapter of the *De magistro* is of utmost importance in this respect, for it established the first substantial classification of signs envisaged in the dialogue.

To start with, three general classes of signs are singled out:

1. *Signa signorum* (signs shown by means of signs);
2. *Signa mutua* (reciprocal signs or signs that signify each other mutually);
3. A mix of the two former types.

The first member of the division concerns the *signa signorum*, namely, signs signifying other signs:

> *Aug.* In hac igitur tripertita distributione prius illud consideremus si placet, quod signis signa monstrantur; num enim sola verba sunt signa?
> *Ad.* Non.
> *Aug.* Videtur ergo mihi loquendo nos aut verba ipsa signare verbis, aut alia signa, velut cum gestum dicimus aut litteram – nam his duobus verbis quae significantur, nihilo minus signa sunt – aut aliquid aliud, quod signum non sit, velut cum dicimus lapis. Hoc enim verbum signum est – nam significat aliquid – sed id quod eo significatur, non continuo signum est.

> (*Aug.* – In this threefold division let us first consider this, namely, that signs are shown by means of signs. For words are not the only signs, are they?
> *Ad.* – No.
> *Aug.* – Now it seems to me that in speaking we signify by means of words themselves or other signs, as, for instance, when we say "gesture" or "letter" (for the things which are signified by the words *gesture* or *letter* are also signs); or we signify something else which is not a sign, as when we say "stone", for this word is a sign since it signifies something, but that which is signified in this case is not in turn a sign. But this genus, that is, the genus in which things which are not signs are signified by words, does not belong to the present part of our discussion.)[34]

Not only does this passage reiterate a general tenet of Augustine's semiotics, which we discussed before (in 2.9) – namely, words are fully-fledged signs, and, simultaneously, are other types of signs – but it also posits that words may signify in three different ways:

1. By signifying other words;
2. By signifying other signs (that are not words) – such as gestures (gestural sign) or a letter of the alphabet (written sign);
3. By signifying things that are not signs.

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[34]   *Mag.* 4,7 (trans. Leckie, *Concerning the Teacher,* 12).

```
                                Words
         ┌─────────────────────────┼─────────────────────────┐
   Words signifying          Words signifying          Words signifying
     other words               other signs                 things
(Signs of the same signs)  (Signs of other signs)      (Signs of things)
```
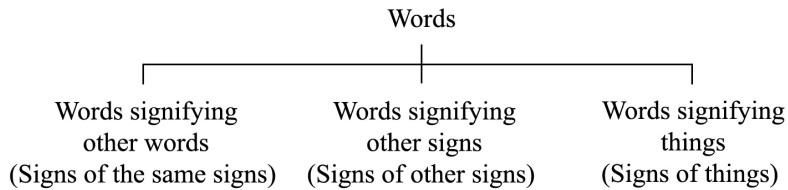
Figure 7. The signification of words

Of the three members listed in the division, Augustine leaves out the third one (words that signify things that are not signs), deferring its discussion to a later time, and proceeds with the discussion of the first two. The consideration of the genus of signs shown by means of other signs, thus, revolves around a bifurcation that is spelled out as follows:

1)   Through signs we teach or call to mind the same signs (as, for instance, a word that signifies another word);
2)   Through signs we teach or call to mind other signs (as, for instance, the word /*gesture*/ – which is an audible sign – is used to signify a gestural sign; or written signs, which are signs of spoken words).

This further bifurcation can be added to the *tripertita distributio* as shown in the chart below:

```
         ┌─────────────────────────────────────┐
       Signs                                  Things
         │                          ┌────────────┴────────────┐
  Signs shown by            Things shown by          Things shown by
   means of signs             doing things            means of signs
   ┌─────┴─────┐
Signs of the      Signs of
same signs       other signs
```
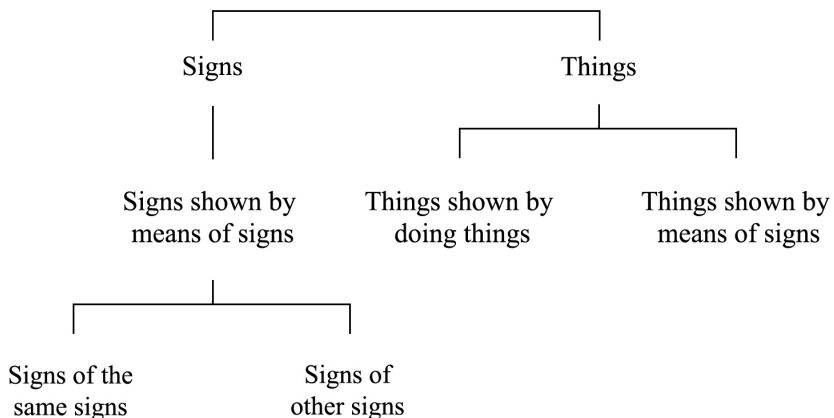
Figure 8. Signs shown by signs

2.6.1. Object language and meta-language:
signs of things and signs of signs

The discussion of the various divisions of signs leads to a detailed excursus on what, in modern parlance, goes under the designation of the extension of names. Augustine leads Adeodatus to a disquisition of those signs that are words – which are also perceived through the senses.

The word is defined as that which is uttered by an articulate voice with some significance. *Verba scripta* (written words), however, are signs of spoken words, thus constituting an example of those kinds of signs signifying other signs: "It thus happens that when a word is read a sign is made in the eyes by which that sign which pertain to the ears comes into the mind".[35] Thus, *verba scripta* are catalogued amongst the *signa signorum*, for written words are intended as signs of spoken words. Since written words are visible signs (for they are perceived through sight) and spoken words are audible signs (for the are perceived through hearing), it follows, logically, that *verba scripta* are visible signs of audible signs.

The second type of sign distinguished under the genus of *signa signorum* is *nomen*. Since the term *nomen* is used in the treatise with different meanings, at this juncture it is convenient to spell out some preliminary clarifications of terminology. Throughout the *De magistro*, *nomen* is thought of as:

a.   A name;
b.   A noun;
c.   The word /*nomen*/.

It is useful to bear in mind such a threefold distinction of the meaning of *nomen*, since it occurs that this term is used in the same chapter with reference to different meanings, which are often intertwined with one another, thus rendering the discourse particularly ambiguous.

The intricate and puzzling nature of the subject matter is illustrated by means of a very pregnant metaphor:[36]

> *Aug*. Nam verbis de verbis agere tam implicatum est, quam digitos digitis in-serere et confricare, ubi vix dinoscitur nisi ab eo ipso, qui id agit, quid digit pruriant et qui auxilientur prurientibus.

> (*Aug*. – For discussing words with words is as entangled as interlocking and rubbing the fingers with the fingers, in which case it may scarcely be distinguished, except by the one himself who does it, which fingers itch and which give aid to the itching.)[37]

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[35]   *Mag*. 4,7 (trans. Leckie, *Concerning the Teacher,* 13).
[36]   For a full discussion of Augustine's fascination with gestural metaphors, see Gary Genosko, «Augustine gave us a finger», *Semiotica* 104 (1/2): 1995, 81–97.
[37]   *Mag*. 5,14 (trans. Leckie, *Concerning the Teacher,* 20).

Nomen [noun] is defined as that which is said when we signify something, namely, that which each thing is called, as /*Romulus*/, /*Rome*/, /*virtue*/, a /*river*/ (*mag.* 4,7). At this point, the discussion concentrates upon the difference between nouns and the things they signify. Regarding this point, Augustine insists that the hiatus that separates the two entities – that which signifies and that which is signified – is pivotal. As it will become apparent in what follows, in the hierarchy of signification envisaged by Augustine, *res*, as compared with *signa*, which are merely instrumental and never completely apt to show the thing itself, have a privileged position. This is an idea that was to thread through many of his philosophical works and will be deepened in the *De doctrina christiana*. Thus, the question remains as to what is the gap that separates nouns from the things signified. The difference is qualified by positing that the former are signs, whereas the latter are not. Hence, the notion of "signifiable" (*significabilia*), a novel term that is introduced in order to label those things that can be signified by means of signs, while they themselves are not signs:

> *Aug*. Num ista quattuor nomina nullas res significant?
> *Ad*. Immo aliquas.
> *Aug*. Num nihil distat inter haec nomina et eas res, quae his significantur?
> *Ad*. Immo plurimum.
> *Aug*. Vellem abs te audire, quidnam id sit.
> *Ad*. Hoc vel in primis, quod haec signa sunt, illa non sunt.
> *Aug*. Placet ne appellemus significabilia ea, quae signis significari possunt et signa non sunt, sicut ea, quae videri possunt, visibilia nominamus, ut de his deinceps commodius disseramus?
>
> (*Aug*. – Do not these words signify things?
> *Ad*. – Indeed they do signify things.
> *Aug*. – Is there no difference between the names and the things which are signified by means of them?
> *Ad*. – A great deal of difference.
> *Aug*. – I should like to hear from you what it is.
> *Ad*. – This, in the first place, that the former are signs, while the latter are not.
> *Aug*. – Can we agree to call *signifiable* those things which can be signified by means of signs and yet are not signs, just as we call those things visible which can be seen, so that we may discuss these things more conveniently in proper order?)[38]

Indeed, just as there exists a difference between names and things, there is a difference between the written and the spoken word, being 'visible' and 'audible', respectively.

On the basis of the difference between nouns and the things signified by them, Augustine leads the reader to the pivotal ideation of the meta-designation. The four nouns /*Romulus*/, /*Rome*/, /*virtue*/, and /*river*/, as mentioned supra, designate certain things, whether these are tangible realities (such as the capital

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[38]   *Mag.* 4,7 (trans. Leckie, *Concerning the Teacher,* 13).

of Italy or a specific river) or abstract entities (such as virtue). However, */Romulus/*, */Rome/*, */virtue/*, */river/*, and all the other nouns may, in turn, be subject to designation, inasmuch as the word */name/* designates them all. This is the reason for the distinction between words that designate other things and words that designate other words. Indeed, not all words have the same meta-designative power. This fundamental idea can be schematized as follows:

Name
|
Noun   Noun
| |
River   River
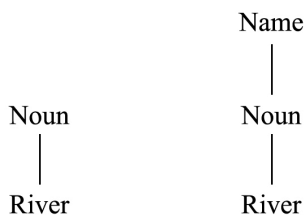
Figure 9. Signs of things and signs of signs

Following this line of thought, Augustine, in a very sophisticated analysis, maintains that the word */name/* is an *audible sign of audible signs* – in other words, */name/* is a sign of signs (or, a meta-sign) – whereas all the previously listed examples of nouns (*/Romulus/*, */Rome/*, */virtue/*, and */river/*) are simply audible signs, namely, they are signs of *things* rather than *signs of signs*, and, as such, they display a different meta-linguistic capacity.

This bifurcation can be represented as follows:

Audible signs
|
Signs of things   Signs of signs
(Audible signs of things)   (Audible signs of audible signs)
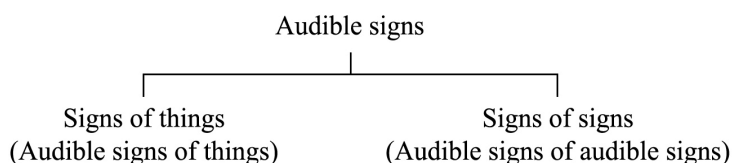
Figure 10. Audible signs

2.6.2. 'Noun' is a word too

For Augustine, *verbum* [word] is everything that "is uttered with some signification by an articulate voice",[39] and it is extended to nouns, too. It is worth noting that such a definition of *verbum*, however, does not include written words.

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[39]   *Mag.* 4,9 (trans. Leckie, *Concerning the Teacher,* 14).

Once again, it is important to notice the semantic ambiguity of term *verbum*, which has a threefold meaning in the text:

a) a word;
b) a verb;
c) the word /*verbum*/.

Given the abovementioned definition of *verbum* [word], it follows that /*noun*/ is a word, too, since it falls under the definition (it is uttered with some signification by the articulate voice). Proceeding with a chain of definitions that follow a deductive-reasoning pattern, one can see that when it is uttered /*word*/, also noun is signified and, therefore, /*word*/ is a sign of /*noun*/. Mutatis mutandis, /*noun*/, in turn, is a sign of /*river*/ as well as many other nouns, and /*river*/ is sign of a visible thing (that reality designated by the audible sign /*river*/):

> *Aug*. Concedis igitur his duabus syllabis, quas edimus, cum dicimus verbum, nomen quoque significari et ob hoc illud huius signum esse.
> *Ad*. Concedo.
> *Aug*. Hoc quoque respondeas velim: cum verbum signum sit nominis et nomen signum sit fluminis et flumen signum sit rei quae iam videri potest, ut inter hanc rem et flumem, id est signum eius et inter hoc signum et nomen, quod huius signi signum est dixisti quid intersit, quid interesse arbitraris inter signum nominis quod verbum esse comperimus et ipsum nomen, cuius signum est?

> (*Aug*. – You grant, therefore, that by these two syllables which we pronounce when we say "verbum" [word] *name* [noun] is also signified, and that, accordingly, *word* is a sign of *name*.
> *Ad*. – I agree.
> *Aug*. – I also want you to answer this. Since *word* is a sign of *name*, and *name* is a sign of *river*, and *river* is a sign of a thing which can now be seen, so that between what can be seen and *river* which is its sign, and between this sign and the name which you have said to be is sign, there is a difference, what do you think is the difference between the sign of *name*, which we find to be *word*, and name itself of which it is the sign?)[40]

Along these lines, Adeodatus concludes that everything that is signified by a name [noun] is also signified by a word, inasmuch as /*name*/ is a word too. Conversely, not all those things that are signified by /*word*/ are signified also by a /*noun*/. In a nutshell, in regard to the extension of words and nouns, the two concepts are not co-extensive. As a matter of fact, /*word*/ has a wider extension than /*noun*/, and in turn, /*noun*/ has a wider extension than the single nouns /*Romulus*/, /*Rome*/, /*virtue*/ and /*river*/. This is so inasmuch as /*noun*/ designates all nouns and not exclusively the ones mentioned. In conclusion, /*river*/, which

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[40] *Mag.* 4,9 (trans. Leckie, *Concerning the Teacher,* 15).

is a noun, can be said to be both a noun and a word, since nouns are words, too (Guzzo 1927: 39).

The difference in extension of these concepts may be summarized as follows:

Verbum (word)

Nomen (name as noun)

All others noun
(*/Romulus/, /Rome/ , /virtue/ , /river/*)
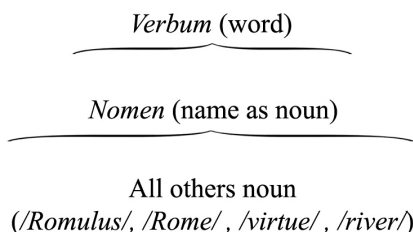
Figure 11. The extension of *verbum* (word) and *nomen* (noun)

To conclude, for Augustine the difference between a word and a noun is the following: the former is "the sign of that sign which signifies no other signs", while the latter is "sign of that sign which in turn signifies other signs". [41]

Just as every horse is an animal, but not every animal is a horse, by the same token every noun is a word, but not every word is a noun. Thus, word is the genus to which the noun is subordinate. The same proportion is extended to the relation between the sign, which is the general category, and the word, which is a species of the genus *sign*: every word is a sign, and not vice versa.

2.6.3. Reflexive signs

Throughout this research, it has been claimed that signs derive their own natures from the fact that they signify something else. Augustine is careful enough to show that certain signs are very peculiar in this respect, since the signs themselves are encompassed among their significata, that is, what they signify. Indeed, amongst the genus of *signa signorum*, there is a subclass of signs that have a particular feature: namely, among the things signified these signs also signify themselves:

> *Aug*. Num omnia signa tibi videntur aliud significare quam sunt, sicut hoc trisyllabum, cum dicimus animal, nullo modo idem significat quod est ipsum?
> *Ad*. Non sane; nam cum dicimus signum, non solum signa cetera quaecumque sunt, sed etiam se ipsum significat; est enim verbum et utique omnia verba signa sunt.

> (*Aug*. – Do all signs seem to you to signify something other than what they are, as when we say "animal" this three-syllable word in no way signifies what it is itself?

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[41] *Mag*. 4,9 (trans. Leckie, *Concerning the Teacher,* 15).

Ad. – Surely not, for when we say "sign" it signifies not only other signs, what-ever they are, but it also signifies itself; for it is a word and all words certainly are signs.)[42]

Such signs, which can be termed as "self-reflexive" (Alici 1976: 21) or self-signifying signs, are at once:

a. *Signum* [sign];
b. *Verbum* [word],
c. *Nomen* [noun].

Signum [sign] not only signifies the innumerable and particular types of signs, but signifies also itself, by virtue of the fact that /*sign*/ is also a word and, as has been said, all words are signs. The same logic holds for the *verbum* [word], inasmuch as everything that is uttered by an articulate voice and has significance is included in the genus, without exception of the word /*verbum*/. The same can be said for *nomen* [noun], for it signifies every species of nouns, as well as itself.

It is worth noting, however, that from the notion of self-signifying signs is, however, excluded the tetrasyllable 'conjunction' since the things it signifies are not names.

2.6.4. Inter-designation and reciprocal signs

A further issue that needs to be pondered is whether there exist signs that signify each other mutually (*signa mutua*), to the extent that one sign is signified by the other, and vice-versa. The four-syllable *conjunctio* [con-junction] is ruled out from this genus of signs from the outset. The reason for this exclusion is that the things signified by it, as for instance, "*si* [if], *vel* [or], *nam* [for], *namque* [for indeed], *nisi* [except], *ergo* [therefore], *quoniam* [whereas], and the like, are not reciprocal, since the items enumerated are signified by *conjunctio*, but it in turn is not signified by any of them".[43]

To Adeodatus' inquisitiveness of knowing what are the signs that mutually signify, Augustine replies in the following terms. To start with, he holds that /*noun*/ and /*word*/, when uttered, are two words. Likewise, /*noun*/ and /*word*/ are also two nouns. This said, this proportion is posited: as *noun* is signified by means of a word, so *word* is signified by means of a noun. Thus, the question remains as to what is the difference that exists between the two terms.

Adeodatus' approach reiterates the same tenet expounded previously, which, to be accurate, can be thus synthesized: every noun – including the term /*noun*/ itself – is a word, but not the other way around, although /*word*/ itself is a noun. This explication, which correctly stresses the difference between the extension

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[42] *Mag*. 4,9 (trans. Leckie, *Concerning the Teacher,* 16).
[43] *Mag*. 5,11 (trans. Leckie, *Concerning the Teacher,* 17).

of word and noun, is, however, curiously dismissed by Augustine without further ado.

Augustine intends to show that both noun and word have instead an equal extension, and yet they have distinct significations. To this end, word and noun are compared to visible and coloured things, which, despite having a co-extensive extension (what is visible is coloured, and vice-versa), differ in their significance. He further qualifies the difference between word and noun – resorting to their etymological derivation, clarifying, at this point, also the process that is implicit in speaking:

> *Aug.* Omne, quod cum aliquo significatu articulata voce prorumpit, animadvertis ut opinor et aurem verberare, ut sentiri, et memoriae mandari, ut nosci possit.

> (*Aug.* – You observe, I think, that everything which is expressed by the articulate voice with some signification both strikes the ear so that it can be sensed and is committed to memory so that it can be known.)[44]

Thus, two things are at stake when one speaks; the one pertains to the senses (hearing), the other pertains to the mind (memory). *Verbum* (word), which derives from *verbere* (striking), invests the aural organs; *nomen* (noun), from *noscere* (to known), involves the mental faculties and therefore entails the process of knowing.

In comparison to Adeodatus, who seems to address the issue from the correct angle, Augustine's argument is not only roundabout but also weaker and too stretched. In what way, then, should the thesis that every word is a noun be understood?

In order to interpret accurately Augustine's thought, it is worth pointing out, in the light of Guzzo (1927: 47), that the various parts of speech – nouns included – could be considered from two different points of view, namely the grammatical and the logical:

> In grammar, "noun" – more commonly today we say a "substantive" – is one amongst the parts of speech; conjunctions, verbs, etc. are *other* parts of speech, not "nouns". Yet, logically, conjunctions, verbs, pronouns, etc. designate, ex-press, that is, *name* something too: and if they *name* it, in this logical sense and not grammatical, are *names*, even though in grammar, these would be parts of speech different from substantives.[45] (Guzzo 1927: 47)

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[44] *Mag.* 5,12 (trans. Leckie, *Concerning the Teacher,* 19).

[45] My own translation from Italian: «In grammatica 'nome' – noi diciamo oggi più comunemente 'sostantivo' – è una tr ale parti del discorso; congiunzioni, verbi, ecc. sono *altre* parti del discorso, non 'nomi'. Ma, logicamente, anche le congiunzioni, ancge i verbi, anche i pronomi, ecc., designano, esprimono, cioè *nominano* qualche cosa: e se la *nominano*, in questo senso logico, non grammaticale, sono nomi, se anche, in grammatica, siano parti del discorso diverse dai sostantivi» (Guzzo 1927: 47).

When Augustine specified that a word is a noun and a noun is a word, one must interpret this principle from the logical perspective. In this sense, it can be said that the naming functions of words is granted by the fact that every word designates something, even though, from the grammatical viewpoint, this word may not be a noun but rather another part of speech.

Augustine supports his argument with several examples – pronouns and conjunctions – which precisely are thought of as names from the point of view of logic, and yet from the vantage point of grammar are indeed labelled as other parts of speech.

Without resorting to the authority of Cicero, who in the *Verrines* called the preposition *coram* (before) a noun, and stressing that the name is that with which one names something, it can be observed that in the expression of the Apostle Paul, "In Christ there was not is and is not, but is was in Him", also the verb */is/* is a name inasmuch as it designates what was in him. However, if one wonders what part of speech */is/* stands for, one would undoubtedly answer that it is a verb, without hesitation.

Thus, every part of speech signifies something, and on the basis of such signification, it derives its naming function; and if it has a name, it is called by that name, and if it is called by a name, it is a noun, as is discerned in different languages (*mag*. 4,15).

In order to strengthen his argument even in the eyes of those who are unwilling to understand, Augustine turns to the highest authority in the field of knowledge of the Latin language: Marcus Tullius Cicero, who teaches that a complete sentence, which is a pronouncement, is comprised of a noun and a verb. Analysing grammatically the propositions "A man takes his seats" and "A horse runs", it is immediately noted that in each of them there is only one noun and one verb. Yet if both propositions were formed only from the verb – */sit/* or */runs/* – one could not absolutely identify the subject who perform these actions. Therefore, in order to complete them the verb must be placed next to the name. The same rule can be extended to other parts of speech, such as conjunctions. To simplify we cite the following example.

Augustine says:

> *Aug*. Adtende cetera et finge nos videre aliquid longius et incertum habere, utrum animal sit an saxum vel quid aliud, me que tibi dicere: quia homo est, animal est nonne temere dicerem?

> (*Aug*. – But attend to the rest. Suppose we see something remote and are uncertain whether it be an animal or a stone or something else, and suppose I say to you: "Because it is a man, it is an animal". Would I not speak rashly?)[46]

Adeodatus concurs with Augustine that the expression is hasty and that to speak rightly, one ought to say: "If it is a man, it is an animal". Both acknowledge that in the propositions cited above, */if/* is used appropriately while the use of

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[46] *Mag*. 5,16 (trans. Leckie, *Concerning the Teacher,* 24).

/*because*/ is inappropriate. At this juncture, Augustine introduces some sentences in which the two conjunctions become nouns: "If pleases"; "because offends", showing accordingly that the two conjunctions are nouns and, coupled with verbs, form complete sentences.

2.6.5. Signs signifying themselves

Among the signs that signify each other, there is a further variety that deserves attention, namely, "those signs [which] mutually signify each other, differing only in sound, and which signify themselves as well as all the other parts of speech".[47] This issue concerns the relation between nouns and *vocabula* [words]. Being coextensive – nouns are *vocabula* [words] and *vocabula* [words] are nouns – they seem to differ only in respect to the sound of the syllables.

On the contrary, upon closer inspection, the difference that separates them seems clear. Here Augustine calls attention to the twofold meaning of *nomen*:

   a.   As a name (*nomen* in the general sense);
   b.   As a noun (*nomen* in the particular sense);

Nomen can thus be understood with a generic or specific meaning. *Nomen* in general [name] is that which designates any part of speech (nouns included); *nomen* in particular [noun] is that particular part of speech, labelled as noun or substantive. Thus, *nomen* in particular [noun] is one of the eight parts of speech, which does not encompass the other seven.

The difference between nouns and *vocabula* [words] becomes apparent when *nomen* is taken in its specific meaning, as a noun, rather than in its general sense. The two concepts, therefore, are distinguished not only for the sound of the syllables, but also because *vocabula* [words] are not included in the eight parts of speech, whereas nouns are. However, if *nomen* is taken exclusively in its generic meaning, then the two terms signify each other. Moreover, both *nomen* [name] and *vocabula* [words] include themselves among the names these two concepts signify.

Conversely, when *nomen* is compared to ὄνομα ("onoma") the situation is different, for these words are distinguished for the different sound used in Latin and Greek languages only. Thus, they form a separate subclass of signs within the type of signs signifying each other:

> *Aug.* Peruentum est ergo ad ea signa, quae se ipsa significent et aliud ab alio invicem significetur, et quicquid ab uno hoc et ab alio et nihil praeter sonum inter se differant; nam hoc quartum modo invenimus; tria enim superiora, et de nomine et verbo intelliguntur.
> *Ad.* Omnino peruentum.

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[47] *Mag*. 6,17 (trans. Leckie, *Concerning the Teacher,* 25).

(*Aug.* – Then we have discovered those signs which (1) signify themselves, and (2) of which each is signified reciprocally by the other; (3) whatever is signified by one is signified by the other, (4) sound being the only difference between them. Of these only the fourth is a new discovery; for the three former are understood of *noun* and of *word* [*verbum*].
Ad. – It is entirely clear.)[48]

From what has been said, we can infer that there is a fourfold typology of signs that is arranged according to this logic:

Some signs signify each other mutually:

I. Some signs are *unequal* in extension;
Signum (sign) and *verbum* (word) are unequal in extension, since all words are signs but not all signs are words.

II. Some signs are *equal* in extension;
Verbum (word) and *nomen* (name) have the same extension, since every word (taken in its general and logical sense) designates something, and therefore is a name.

III. Some signs signify also themselves;
Signum (sign), *verbum* (word), *nomen* (noun) signify themselves among the things they signify.

IV. Some signs are *identical* and differ only in sound.
Nomen has the same extension of ὄνομα ("onoma"), so they differ only in the sound of syllables.

The various divisions of signs envisaged in the *De magistro* can be schematized as shown below:

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[48]   *Mag.* 6,18 (trans. Leckie, Concerning the Teacher, 26).

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                    Signs shown by                        Things
                    means of signs
                                           Things shown by      Things shown by
                                            doing things         means of signs


    Self-signifying signs      Signs that do        Reciprocal signs
    (signum, verbum, nomen)    not signify each     (verbum, signum)
                               other mutually
                               (conjunctio)


                    Signs unequal        Signs equal        Identical signs
                    in extension         in extension        that differ
                    (signum, verbum)     (verbum, nomen)     only in sound
                                                            (nomen, onoma)
```

Figure 12. An outline of the division of signs in the *De magistro*

2.7. Relation of signs to reality

The randomness in the order of presentation of the subjects discussed in the *De magistro* is only apparent. On closer inspection, the dialogue is structured according to a rigorous logic. As we have seen supra, a discussion of signs and signification entails the treatment of the issues of intra-designation and inter-designation, namely, the relations of signs with themselves as well as of signs with other signs. Yet a full-fledged discussion on the subject of signification must come to terms with the pivotal issue of the relation between signs and reality. As a matter of fact, all the previous disquisition of the nature and varieties of signs served as a basis to discuss this point.

After the recapitulation of Adeodatus, who is praised by his father for the precision of his review and the order in the exposition of what he had learned thus far, Augustine takes up the issue of signs that signify objective realities.

Through a fine dialectical tactic and at times misleading questions, Augustine draws attention to a natural law of reason that rules the signification by means of signs, according to which, once heard, signs carry the mind of the listener immediately towards the thing signified by the signs. Such a law of speaking operates automatically and inadvertently even when signs are discussed with reference to their sounds only. Indeed, one may converse of words *qua* words or of things that words signify.

Indeed, if one were asked, as in the purposively ambiguous Augustinian example, if the sign /*homo*/ [man] is a man, the interlocutor would most probably be puzzled by such a request, since this is a mere tautology, which obfuscates the specificity of the question asked. And yet such an example shows

that the attention of the human mind, when triggered by words, oscillates between two poles, namely, the *significable* – the thing signified by the sign (man as a reality) – and /*homo*/ as a verbal sign, that is, a name. Augustine's example, which is based on a skilful equivocation, shows that it is very common to confuse and overlap different levels of semiosis: on the one hand, the noun /*homo*/ taken as a verbal sign in the object language and, on the other, man as *significable* (something that is subject to signification, but itself is not regarded as a sign). Nonetheless, in virtue of the aforementioned natural law of speaking, the mind of the listener is immediately prompted to consider the things signified and, therefore, to marvel at the of question whether the word /*homo*/ is equal to man as a reality, as a rational, mortal animal.

2.8. The hierarchy of signification

On the background of the distinction between *signa* and *res*, Augustine envisaged a true "hierarchy of signification" (Clark 1977: 6), where four elements enter into a relation of subordination:

    (1) *nomen*, the noun;
    (2) *res*, the thing signified;
    (3) *cognitio nominis*, the cognition of the noun;
    (4) *cognitio rei*, the cognition of the thing.

He sets his objectives as follows:

1) The thing signified is worth more than the sign that signifies the thing;
2) The cognition of the thing signified is worth more than of the cognition of the sign that signifies the thing.

Given such premises, the hierarchy Augustine conceives stands as follows:

1. *Res* – the thing signified;
2. *Nomen* – the noun;
3. *Cognitio rei* – the cognition of the thing signified;
4. *Cognitio nominis* – the cognition of the noun.

Thus, Augustine maintains the pre-eminence of things (*res*) over the signs (*signa*) and, respectively, of the cognition of the thing over the cognition of the noun. He thus envisages a relation of subordination according to the principle that everything that stands for something else is worth less than the thing of which it is the surrogate:

> *Aug.* Proinde intellegas volo, res quae significantur, pluris quam signa esse pendendas. Quicquid enim propter aliud est, vilius sit necesse est, quam id propter quod est, nisi tu aliud exstimas.
>
> (*Aug.* – Now then, I wish you to understand that things which are signified are more to be depended upon than signs. For whatever exists because of another must of necessity be inferior to that because of which it exists, unless you think otherwise.)[49]

This view is challenged by Adeodatus, who acutely objects that, in the case of things considered as filthy, such as *coenum* (filth), the sign is superior to the thing signified, thus departing from the rule set by his interlocutor. Indeed, we place the sign before the thing, insofar as hearing the word *coenum* is far more acceptable than perceiving the thing signified with other senses.

Extending this relation to the sign and to the cognition that is gained by means of it, Augustine asks Adeodatus for what purpose one says *coenum*. He correctly answers by explaining that the sign's function is to indicate a certain thing to someone else in order to warn or admonish him. The purpose of speaking – teaching – is placed prior to speaking itself, as the former is a function of the second. Accordingly, the knowledge of the thing should be given primacy over the sign, as the *definiendum* is worth more than the *definiens*. By the same token, one must eat to live and not vice versa, as the *cultor ventris*[50] would like in the Pauline epistle, and one speaks in order to teach and not the opposite.

The issue of the *signum-res* nexus and the relationship of subordination in which they stand in respect to each other is left open and will be taken up in another work, the *De doctrina christiana*, which we will deal with later (in Chapter 3).

Adeodatus, misinterpreting, sets forth the following relationship: if the noun is worth more than the thing signified, accordingly, the knowledge of the noun ought to be superior to the knowledge of the thing. This argument, which may seem sound, is refuted by an analysis of the word *vitium*. If, between the sign *vitium* and the thing it signifies, one must prefer the first to the second, this does not justify the extension of the same relation of subordination to the other two terms – that is, to place the knowledge of the noun before the knowledge of the thing (namely, the experience of vices). Indeed, the knowledge of the thing – knowing the vices in order to avert them – is worth more than the knowledge of the noun *vitium*; this does not alter the fact that, with regard to real vice, the word *vitium* ought to be preferred.

In conclusion, Augustine prioritizes the direct experience of reality over the knowledge of signs, thus stressing the supremacy of *res* over *signum*: the

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[49] *Mag.* 9,2 (trans. Leckie, *Concerning the Teacher*, 35).
[50] Cultor ventris is a «worshipper of the stomach […] who lives for the sake of eating» (Sandnes 2004: 255).

concrete knowledge of vices and virtues is worth more than their respective signs, as the latter are only instrumental to knowledge.

2.9. Augustine's theory of showing

Augustine is regarded as one of the first thinkers who envisaged a theory of showing (Sebeok 1986: 657). This is the logical conclusion of the idea that *res* are more valuable than *signa*. The next logical step is to prove that certain things can be shown without recourse to signs.

Although it is not explicitly pointed out in the text, two types of showing could be inferred from reading the dialogue:

    a.   Showing as an intentional act;
    b.   Showing as an unintentional act.

Some scholars spelled out such a distinction, pointing out that there is a type of learning that is general (or natural) and another type that is intentional (Valentini 1936: 84). While the latter presupposes an intentional communication, the former does not entail a recourse to it, and it operates through three main modalities:

    1.   From the enactment of an action;
    2.   From nature;
    3.   From history.

Of these two kinds of showing, we shall now be concerned with the second type. When the dialogue seemed to converge with Adeodatus' thesis – nothing can be shown without signs – Augustine poses a counter-objection:

> *Aug.* Quid? Si ex te quaererem, quid sit ambulare, surgeres que et id ageres, nonne re ipsa potius quam verbis ad me docendum aut ullis aliis signis utereris?

> (*Aug.* – What if I were to ask you what walking is, and you should get up and walk. Would it not be shown me through the thing itself rather than through words, or would you use some other signs?)[51]

Embarrassed by his superficiality, Adeodatus acknowledges that there are many other things like eating, drinking, sitting, standing up, shouting (as well as others) that can be shown by themselves and not by means of signs. He, then, is invited by Augustine to ponder: if a person, who is not aware of what the word "to walk" means, asks someone else who, at that specific moment is making the very same action, how could he explain its meaning? Adeodatus suggests

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[51]   *Mag.* 3,6 (trans. Leckie, *Concerning the Teacher*, 10).

walking a little more quickly so that, noting the acceleration of the pace, the other should deduce its meaning.

Augustine clarifies that the answer given could mislead the interlocutor for he could believe that the action of walking is tantamount to hurrying, whereas the two actions are not in a biunivocal relationship. One can walk briskly as well as many other actions can be enacted at an accelerated rhythm, yet the essence of walking is not 'hurrying'.

Adeodatus, reassessing his position, takes stock of the situation:

> *Ad*. Fateor non nos posse rem monstrare sine signo, si cum id agimus inter-rogemur; si enim nihil addamus, putabit qui rogat nolle nos ostendere contempto que se in eo quod agebamus perseverare. Sed si de his roget, quae agere possumus, nec eo tamen tempore quo agimus roget, possumus post eius inter-rogationem id agendo re ipsa potius quam signo demonstrare quod rogat, nisi forte loquentem me interroget, quid sit loqui; quicquid enim dixero, ut eum doceam, loquar necesse est.

> (*Ad.* – I admit that we cannot show a thing without a sign if we are questioned while we are in the act of doing it. For if we add nothing, the questioner will think that we do not wish to show him and will suppose that, to ridicule him, we are continuing what we are doing. But if he asks about things which we are able to do, and yet does not ask while we are in the act of doing them, we can, by doing what he asks after his question, show him what he asks by means of the thing itself rather than by a sign. Unless perhaps the questioner should ask me what speaking is while I am in the act of speaking, since when I say anything in order to teach him the answer to this question it is necessary for me to speak.)[52]

Thus ends the third chapter of the dialogue, establishing that, except for speaking, other actions can be shown ostensibly, provided that (i) the actions subject to question can be enacted and that (ii) the question does not happen simultaneously with the making of the action itself. Thus, the two interlocutors contemplate that, in addition to things that are indicated by means of signs – whether words or gestures – there are others that can be signified through their execution immediately after having posed a question concerning the action.

Exhausted the treatment of signs signifying things, Augustine goes on to look at those things that may be shown without signs, thus re-examining the issue raised in the third chapter of the dialogue and concluded with the thesis that, except for speaking, one may show the thing itself by enacting it, when this is an action that can be performed if the person is not doing it while he is asked about its meaning.

At chapter ten, Adeodatus completely reverses the thesis substantiated earlier, claiming that both speaking and teaching may be signified without signs. What was previously regarded as an exception to the rule (actions may be shown through performance, except for speaking and teaching) at this point turns into the essence that illustrates the *modus operandi* of such signification

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[52] *Mag.* 3,6 (trans. Leckie, *Concerning the Teacher*, 11).

with no signs (speaking and teaching are the only two actions that can be shown by executing them):

> *Ad.* Ego vero etiam atque etiam genus hoc totum considerans nihil adhuc invenio, quod sine signo valeat doceri, nisi forte locutionem, et si forte id ipsum quispiam quaerat, quid sit docere. Video enim me quicquid post eius interrogationem fecero, ut discat, ab ea ipsa re non discere quam sibi demonstrari cupit; nam si me cessantem, ut dictum est, vel aliud agentem roget quispiam, quid sit ambulare, et ego statim ambulando eum quod rogavit sine signo coner docere, unde cavebo, ne id tantum putet esse ambulare quantum ego ambulavero? Quod si putaverit, decipietur; quisquis enim plus minus ve quam ego ambulaverit, hunc ille ambulasse non arbitrabitur. Et quod de hoc uno verbo dixi, transit in omnia, quae sine signo monstrari posse consenseram, praeter duo illa, quae excepimus.

> (*Ad.* – Running through the items of this whole genus time and again, I do not find anything in it which can be taught without some sign, except perhaps speaking and also possibly teaching. For I see that whatever I do after his question in order that he may learn, the questioner does not learn from the thing itself which he desires to have shown him. For if I am asked what walking is when I am still, or doing something else, and if I, by walking immediately, try to teach without a sign what has been asked – all of which has been discussed earlier – then how shall I avoid having the asker think that walking consists in walking only so far as I walked? And if he did think that he would be misinformed, for if someone walked not so far or farther than I did the questioner would think that this individual had not walked. And what I have said about this one word will be true of all the others which we thought could be shown without a sign, except the ones we excluded [talking and teaching.])[53]

It is the task of Augustine to show that also speaking and teaching do not make an exception to the general principle according to which nothing can be shown without recourse to signs and, therefore, without a process of signification. Indeed, does not showing what is speaking by means of speaking imply the use of words? And is not speaking itself a means of expression? Likewise, does not expressing what teaching means through the same act of teaching, rest upon the use of language as a semiotic system warranting such an expression?

Augustine urges his son to think upon the difference that exists between speaking and teaching (*mag.* 10,30). For Adeodatus, one teaches by means of words, thus by speaking, as well as by means of other kinds of signs. Thus, from this perspective, teaching is more general in regard to speaking. According to Augustine, on the contrary, the relation between these two actions is of a different nature, as by 'speaking' he meant, more generally, 'signifying' (Guzzo 1929: 82). Not by accident, the following question appertaining to the contrast between speaking and signifying is solved by acknowledging that one signifies for the sake of teaching, the one being the means, the other the end: "*Aug.* – If

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[53]   *Mag.* 10,29 (trans. Leckie, *Concerning the Teacher*, 39–40).

then we signify that we may teach and do not teach in order to signify, teaching is one thing, signifying another".[54] Having established this proportion, Augustine proves that Adeodatus' hypothesis – one can teach without signs when the question is about what is teaching – is unsound, as teaching presupposes signifying. Indeed, those who teach what is teaching, do so by means of signs.

If teaching and signifying are two different things, and if the former relies on the latter (that is, teaching relies on the use of signs), this means that teaching cannot be shown by means of itself.

Thus, Augustine concludes:

> *Aug.* Quam ob rem nihil adhuc inventum est, quod monstrari per se ipsum queat praeter locutionem, quae inter alia se quoque significat; quae tamen cum etiam ipsa signorum sit, nondum prorsus extat, quod sine signis docere posse videatur.

> (*Aug.* – Consequently, nothing has yet been found which can be shown through itself except speaking which also signifies itself as well as other things. Yet since this is a sign also it is still not entirely clear what things can be taught without the aid of signs.)[55]

The conclusion reached up to this point is that nothing can be expressed without any sign. It was said that teaching entails speaking, and the latter implies the use of words and, thus, of signs. The corollary to this is that not only is speech able to express other things as well as being the basis for other actions (as, precisely, teaching), but it also signifies itself. In other words, Augustine is fully aware that the symbolism of languages accounts for a self-reflexing ability and a potential for meta-description. To borrow a technical term coined within the Tartu-Moscow school of semiotics, language is thought of as a "primary modeling system", that is, a semiotic system having the capacity – which is foreign to other semiotic systems – to signify both itself as well as other semiotic systems.[56]

2.9.1 Unintentional showing: knowledge by sight

Having placated Adeodatus's doubts by the reassuring intervention of Augustine, the dialogue goes back to the *nodus dolens*, reconsidering, through a novel example, the issue of those things that can be shown without signs.

To this end, Augustine submits to Adeodatus a case of examination in which a man, ignorant about the deceptions set for birds by means of canes and birdlime, were to meet a bird-catcher who, provided with his tools, at that instant was not intent on practicing his art but merely on walking. At the sight

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[54] *Mag.* 10,29 (trans. Leckie, *Concerning the Teacher*, 40).

[55] *Mag.* 10,30 (trans. Leckie, *Concerning the Teacher*, 41).

[56] For a full discussion of the concept of «primary modeling systems» in light of Juri M. Lotman's semiotics, see Remo Gramigna, «The place of language among sign systems: Juri Lotman and Émile Benveniste», *Sign Systems Studies* 41(2/3) (2013): 339–354.

of the bird-catcher, the man quickened his pace as is usual in similar cases, thought and wondered, with astonishment, what the equipment was there for. The bird-catcher, for his part, feeling as if he was under observation, drew his tools in order to catch some birds, with the purpose of making himself known. This way, the bird-catcher would teach his onlooker what he wanted to know, without signs but by means of the thing itself:

> *Aug.* Nam quaero abs te, si quisquam ignarus deceptionis avium, quae calamis et visco affectatur, obuiam fieret aucupi armis quidem suis instructo non tamen aucupanti, sed iter agenti, quo viso premeret gradum se cum que, ut fit, admirans cogitaret et quaereret quidnam sibi hominis ille vellet ornatus, auceps autem cum in se videret adtentum, ostentandi se studio cannas expediret et prope animadversam aliquam aviculam fistula et accipitre figeret subigeret et caperet, nonne illum spectatorem suum doceret nullo significatu, sed re ipsa quod ille scire cupiebat?

> (*Aug.* – For consider, if someone unskilled in the art of bird-catching, which is done with reeds and bird-lime, should happen upon a fowler, carrying his instruments as he walked along though not fowling at the time, he would hasten to follow and in wonderment he would reflect and ask himself, as indeed he might, what the man's equipment meant. Now if the fowler, seeing himself watched, were to exhibit his art, and skilfully employ the reed, and then noting a little bird nearby, if he were to charm, approach, and capture it with his reed and hawk, would the fowler not teach his observer without the use of signification, but rather by means of the thing itself which the observer desired to know?)[57]

The concern of Adeodatus, who does not see the difference between this and the analogous cases treated earlier, is dispelled by a caveat added by Augustine in order to substantiate his argument. The discriminating factor that ensures the teaching that takes place by means of the demonstration of the thing itself rather than by sign-mediation lies in the disposition of the mind of the one who observes, whose intelligence is such that it enables him to deduce the essence of the performed technique from what he has observed:

> *Aug.* Facile est hac cura te exuere; addo enim, si ille intellegens esset, ut ex hoc quod vidit, totum illud genus artis agnosceret; satis est namque ad rem et de quibusdam rebus tametsi non omnibus et quosdam homines doceri posse sine signo.

> (*Aug.* – It is easy to free you from that worry. For I suggest that an observer might be intelligent enough to recognize the whole complexity of the art from what he saw. It is enough for our purpose if certain men can be taught without signs about some things, if indeed not about all things.)[58]

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[57]   *Mag.* 10,32 (trans. Leckie, *Concerning the Teacher*, 42).
[58]   *Mag.* 10,32 (trans. Leckie, *Concerning the Teacher*, 43).

Having made this clarification, Augustine re-establishes the original stance, postulating, indeed, that some can teach some things without signs:

> *Ad.* Hoc etiam ego possum illi addere: si enim sit bene intellegens, paucis passi-bus ambulatione monstrata totum quid sit ambulare cognoscet.
> *Aug.* Facias per me licet nec tantum nihil resisto, verum etiam faveo; vides enim ab utroque nostrum id effici, ut quaedam quidam doceri sine signis queant falsum que illud sit, quod nobis paulo ante videbatur nihil esse omnino, quod sine signis possit ostendi.

> (*Ad*. – To that I can add that if the learner be very intelligent he will know what walking is fully when it has been shown by a few steps.
> *Aug*. – That is agreeable. And I not only do not object, but I approve of your statement. For you see that the conclusion has been reached by both of us, namely, that some men can be taught certain things without signs, and that what we thought awhile back is false, that is, that there is nothing at all which can be shown without signs.)[59]

In the remainder of the work, Augustine ceases the dialogue and begins what is termed as the *oratio perpetua*, that is, the continuous speech of Augustine. Only at the end is Adeodatus brought back into the discourse, and concludes by acknowledging the human teacher for having led him towards the divine teacher.

Having ascertained that some things may be shown without the medium of any sign, Augustine enumerates other similar examples, from theatrical spec-tacles – where actors represent things without signs – to natural and divine spec-tacles in which the universe reveals itself through natural phenomena such as the moon and other celestial bodies, the earth and the seas:

> *Aug.* Iam enim ex his non unum aliquid aut alterum, sed milia rerum animo occurrunt, quae nullo signo dato per se ipsa monstrentur. Quid enim dubitemus oro te? Nam ut hominum omittam innumerabilia spectacula in omnibus theatris sine signo ipsis rebus exhibentium solem certe istum lucem que haec omia perfundentem atque vestientem, lunam et cetera sidera, terras et maria quaeque in his innumerabiliter gignuntur, nonne per se ipsa exhibet atque ostendit deus et natura cernentibus?

> (*Aug*. – For now of that sort, not one thing only or another, but thousands of things occur to the mind, which may be shown through themselves when no sign has been given. Why then do we hesitate, I pray you? For passing over the innumerable spectacles of men in every theatre where things are shown through themselves without signs, surely the sun and this light bathing and clothing all things, the moon and the other stars, the lands and the seas, and all things which are generated in them without a number, are all exhibited and shown through themselves by God and nature to those who perceive them.)[60]

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[59] *Mag.* 10,32 (trans. Leckie, *Concerning the Teacher*, 43).
[60] *Mag.* 10,32 (trans. Leckie, *Concerning the Teacher*, 43).

The example of the fowler and the intelligent onlooker discussed above reveals the intentionality on behalf of the first, who, having noticed that he was the subject of attention, intends to show his dexterity to the one who observes it. Thus, the intentionality-factor on the part of the bird-catcher in showing his skill to the other agent, as well as the condition, added by Augustine, that the onlooker is intelligent enough to draw the necessary conclusions from what he observed, are equally key elements for the interpretation of the example. Nonetheless, this does not mean that the fowler wishes to communicate intentionally to the spectator what the meaning of his art and his tools is. Therefore, there exists a subtle but fundamental difference between providing the observer with an opportunity for learning and presupposing a communicative intentionality on the part of the bird-catcher, which cannot be inferred from the examples as described by Augustine.

This point was raised by Myles Fredric Burnyeat (1987: 14–15) who writes:

> The birdcatcher knows that he is being watched by someone who wants to know what his equipment is for and he catches a bird with the intention of satisfying the spectator's desire to know. That is all. It is not said or implied that the birdcatcher has the further (Gricean) intention that the spectator should realize that he is putting on the show for this very purpose, in order that the spectator may learn from it what he is so curious to know. In no sense is the birdcatcher trying to communicate the information that the equipment is for catching birds.

That is why Augustine, after having expounded the case of the bird-catcher, then proceeds with a list of examples where natural phenomena in themselves are presented to the ones who observe them. It is the universe that shows itself to the eyes of men as a divine spectacle.

In semiotic terms, and probably going beyond what Augustine himself would have said, it could be affirmed that he anticipated a 'semiotics of the natural world'. Moreover, it is revealing that he considers in a work of this maturity, the *De doctrina christiana*, that the *signa naturalia* as a distinct species of signs occurs without intention. These signs can be interpreted as a source of information by an interpreter. The correlation between the divine ostension which is mentioned in the *De magistro*, and the "natural signs" briefly treated in the *De doctrina christiana,* is a nexus that has gone unnoticed by the majority of interpreters. Arguably, this can be interpreted instead as an element of continuity in Augustine's thought.

2.10. The symbolism of language

It is now worthwhile to shed light on the language analysis that forms a conspicuous part of the treatise. The *De magistro* opens with a question by Augustine, as incisive as it is unexpected, on the purpose of speech. First introduced at the very outset of the work, the theme of language returns at the end of the dialogue in what looks like an elliptical or circular structure.

Undoubtedly, it is revealing that Augustine's opening words introduce *ex abrupto* a reference to speech (*loqui*) and an enquiry into its functions, for this is not a mere mention but the tuning fork, as it were, used by the author to set the thematic pitch of the dialogue:

> *Aug*. Quid tibi videmur efficere uelle, cum loquimur?
>
> (*Aug*. – What does it seem to you we wish to accomplish when we speak?)[61]

Indeed, as pointed out by Charles Connaghan (2004: 19), the language analysis laid out at the outset of the dialogue is instrumental to the enquiry about knowledge acquisition and the way in which knowledge is transmitted. Since speech is one of the main modalities by means of which knowledge is communicated among men, an investigation of the conditions and possibilities of knowing rests, at any rate, upon an enquiry into the nature and functions of speech. Thus, the opening question of the *De magistro* is a necessary and preliminary corollary to the enquiry concerning the nature of knowing.

Furthermore, in the incipit of the treatise is glimpsed the dual-nature of interpretation of the Augustinian method: the study of language and its purposes presupposes language itself as a means for discussion. Thus, as in a meta-linguistic and dialectical exercise, language is found as an object and as a subject of the dialogue. Succinctly, language is discussed by means of language, just as teaching is discussed in the same act of teaching.

Adeodatus answers that by speaking we intend either to teach (*docere*) or to learn (*discere*):

> *Ad.* Quantum quidem mihi nunc occurrit, aut docere aut discere.
>
> (*Ad.* – As it occurs to me now, either to teach or to learn.)[62]

Alfonso R. Gonzalez (1986: 198) observed that the use of the disjunctive conjunction in the form of *aut ... aut ...* expresses the provisional, introductory nature of Adeodatus' answer and is an index of his dilemmatic style. The two purposes of speech, teaching (*docere*) and learning (*discere*), however, do not satisfy the question of the interlocutor. Augustine, in fact, while in agreement that when we speak we intend to teach (*docere*), dissents from his son with regard to the alleged purpose of learning something (*discere*). To the question posed by Augustine, whether by speaking one learns something, Adeodatus replies that one learns also by asking questions. This statement is confuted by Augustine, who argues that questions, too, do have a function of teaching and, consequently, "in speaking we desire only that we may teach".[63]

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[61]   *Mag*. 1,1 (trans. Leckie, *Concerning the Teacher*, 3).
[62]   *Mag*. 1,1 (trans. Leckie, *Concerning the Teacher*, 3).
[63]   *Mag*. 1,1 (trans. Leckie, *Concerning the Teacher*, 3).

2.10.1. Definition and functions of speech

Speaking as teaching (*docere*) is the first function of speech outlined in the treatise. This, however, does not exhaust the subject, since the issue is far more complex. Upon closer scrutiny, indeed, the functions of speech that can be drawn from the dialogue are four:

1) Speaking as *docere* (teaching);
2) Speaking as *commemorare* (reminding);
3) Speaking as *admonere* (stimulating to know);
4) Speaking as *significare loquentis mentem* (to express the thought of the speaker) (Longo 1994: 12).

It is important to clarify from the outset that the verb *docere* (to teach) is used in this work in the general sense of "making known" or "communicating knowledge".[64] Teaching, therefore, ought to be interpreted in a broader sense and not only limited to its pedagogical-educative value. The meaning of *docere* that Augustine had in mind has to do with the conditions of the possibility of knowledge and the ways in which knowledge itself is conveyed and inter-subjectively transmitted. Ultimately, this is about an epistemological problem.

The purposes of speech are gradually introduced, with a provisional and indefinite style that characterizes almost the entire dialogue. This trait becomes, at times, more pronounced. As remarked by Colleran (1945: 3), "here there is not the scientific order, the finished conclusiveness, the precision of terminology that would contribute much to the correct understanding and just evaluation of the work".

Augustine's own definition of speech is tailored against the background of two additional communicative forms evoked by his son in the first chapter of the treatise, since they both entail the use of language. Right after, indeed, speaking is compared with singing and praying. It is by means of this comparison that the very first occurrence of *loqui* found in the dialogue is sketched out. Moreover, this discussion leads to an explication of additional functions of speech that are not limited to *docere*.

The notion of speech (*loqui*) is first introduced by Adeodatus, who intends it as a simple emission of words:

> *Ad*. […] Loqui quam verba promere.
>
> (*Ad* – […] speaking is only expressing words.)[65]

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[64] A. Guzzo (1927: 20) noted that *docere* stands for «to warn», «to inform» someone, or «to communicate», «to express», «to signify» to others our own will. For A. Mandouze (1975: 793), «one is doomed to understand nothing of the *De magistro* if one insists on translating *docere* by a word of invariably prescriptive type such as 'to teach'». According to C. Ando (1994: 47), «teaching, as Augustine construes it, encompasses practically all communication».

[65] *Mag*. 1,1 (trans. Leckie, *Concerning the Teacher*, 3).

This definition will be proved to be provisional, rather general and, ultimately, misleading. The doubt that speaking consists only in teaching makes Adeodatus produce two counterexamples, singing and praying, considered as exceptions to the general principle that with speech we want nothing more than to teach, insofar as both involve the expression of words and, therefore, the use of language.

After having briefly dwelt on the connection between melody and word, Adeodatus emphasises the difference between speaking, singing and praying, comparing the former to the other two forms of communication.

Let us consider his first objection: singing. It is a verbal expression that, insofar as it can be made by one person only, does not teach anything to anyone, lacking both the intention to teach someone as well as an interlocutor to be addressed. Augustine writes in this regard:

> *Aug.* At ego puto esse quoddam genus docendi per commemorationem, magnum sane, quod in hac nostra sermocinatione res ipsa indicabit. Sed si tu non arbitraris nos discere cum recordamur nec docere illum qui commemorat, non resisto tibi et duas iam loquendi causas constituo, aut ut doceamus aut ut commemoremus vel alios uel nos ipsos; quod etiam dum cantamus efficimus; an tibi non videtur?

> (*Aug.* – Ah, but I think there is a kind of teaching by means of reminding, indeed a very important kind, which will be revealed in this dialogue of ours. But, if you do not think that we learn when we remember things, and that the man does not teach who reminds, I shall not object. And now I posit two reasons for speaking: either that we may teach, or that we may remind either others or ourselves; and the latter is what we do when we sing. Or does it not seem so to you?)[66]

This passage introduced a new notion into the conversation – the concept of memory (*commemoratio*), which will prove to be not only a pivotal theme of the dialogue but also a further function of speech. Indeed, the reminding of something to oneself or others (*commemorare*), coupled with *docere*, is the second function of speech singled out in the dialogue.

At this juncture it is worth noting, along with Connaghan (2004: 25), that for Augustine the notion of *commemoratio* has a twofold meaning: on the one hand, there lies the concept of *commemorare* (to remind), which concerns the act of teaching and is understood as reminding someone else of something through language. On the other hand, there is the notion of *ricordari* (to remember), which is slightly different inasmuch as it relates to the process of learning, and it means to be able to recall something to one's mind. As Connaghan (2004: 25) put it, "*Commemoratio*, therefore, involves two similar but distinct processes, the reminding of others and the recollecting to oneself".

It is important to stress that whereas the function of language as teaching is ruthlessly challenged throughout the dialogue, ultimately leading to the para-doxical conclusion that verbal signs do not have the office of teaching, the

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[66]   *Mag.* 1,1 (trans. Leckie, *Concerning the Teacher*, 3–4).

function of *commemorare*, on the contrary – in its twofold meaning of reminding/remembering – is constant throughout the whole treatise (Longo 1994: 20). This is an issue not sufficiently emphasized by the interpreters that often tend to emphasize the function of *docere* and downplay the other one (*commemorare*).

Returning to the first counterexample, singing is further qualified by Adeodatus, who rebuts that no one sings in order to remember, but simply to delight. Instead, Augustine specifies that music and speech are not the same thing, insofar as singing is a mere modulation of the voice and, as such, can occur both in conjunction with the word as well as in isolation from it, as sheer melody. Therefore, singing, unlike speaking, does not necessarily presuppose language. The singing of birds that produces melodies, not being words, and the melody instrumentally produced with flutes and harps are examples brought in order to corroborate Augustine's hypothesis (*mag*. 1,1).

The second objection enumerated by Adeodatus toward the general principle that with speech we do not wish anything but teaching, is the prayer: "while we are praying we are certainly speaking, and yet it is not right to believe that God is either taught anything by us or that He is reminded".[67]

Speaking and praying must be distinguished, for they serve different functions. On the surface, the prayer implies the use of language for its expression (indeed, for Adeodatus when we pray we simultaneously do speak). It is, however, misleading to grant to the prayer the same functions of speech. Undoubtedly, it is a paradox to think that men can teach or remind something to God himself by means of the prayer. The latter is, therefore, for Adeodatus, an exception to the thesis that speaking answers the purpose of either reminding or teaching.

Immediately dismissing this objection, Augustine, in turn, implicitly refers to the twofold dimension of inwardness-outwardness, and he postulates, on one hand, a nexus between praying and inwardness and, on the other, the connection of speech with outwardness. This is a fundamental idea in Augustine's thought, which proves to be pivotal for the enquiry concerning sincerity and mendacity, to which we will devote a special discussion (in Chapter 4).

The function of externalization, proper to language, is altogether absent in the prayer, which, on the contrary, is an inner and individual act, secret and silent, which as such does not require uttered words. Praying is akin to the speaking of a silent language – "speaking within oneself" as put by Augustine. This explains why, as pointed out in the dialogue, it was prescribed by the sacred scriptures to pray in "closed rooms", that is, in the inwardness of the soul,[68] with the exceptions of priests, who, expressing with words their own

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[67] *Mag*. 1,2 (trans. Leckie, *Concerning the Teacher*, 4): «*Ad*. Uideretur, nisi me moueret quod dum oramus utique loquimur, nec tamen deum aut doceri aliquid a nobis aut commemorari fas est credere».

[68] The evangelic passage quoted by Augustine (Matthew 6: 5–6) says, «And when you pray, do not be like the hypocrites, for they love to pray standing in the synagogues and on the street corners to be seen by others. Truly I tell you, they have received their reward in

thoughts, intend to communicate with men (rather than with God) in order that they would elevate to God (*mag.* 1,2). Ultimately, the objection of Augustine to the counterargument of Adeodatus is based on the relation between praying and inwardness. True prayer is altogether an inner act that does not involve the expression of words.

It is manifest that the analysis and confutation of Adeodatus' counter-examples are instrumental to Augustine, for they lead to a more fine-tuned definition of speech. Remodelling the very generic and tentative notion of *loqui* formerly couched by his son – *loqui quam verba promere* (speaking is only expressing words) – Augustine redefines the concept, spelling out a more sophisticated formula:

> *Aug.* Qui enim loquitur, suae voluntatis signum foras dat per articulatum sonum.
>
> (*Aug.* – For he who speaks expresses the sign of his will by means of articulate sound.)[69]

In line with the definition of *loqui* as outlined in the *De magistro* by the words of Augustine, the one who speaks manifests outwardly his will by means of signs, phonic and articulated. Thus, three members are tied together in such a definition: the one who speaks gives (*foras dat*) an external sign of his own will (*suae voluntatis signum*), by means of an articulate sound (*per articulatum sonum*).

The signifying mechanism of *loqui* is illustrated in the diagram below:

Suae voluntatis signum ➡ *Per articulatum sonum*

⬆

Foras dat
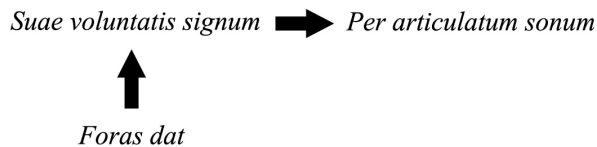
Figure 13. The signifying mechanism of speaking

This definition of *loqui* mirrors the one previously outlined in the *De dialectica* – which was examined at length before (in Chapter 1) – where speaking was thought of as the giving of a sign by means of the articulate sound (*vox articulata*):

> Loqui est articuata voce signum dare. Articulatam autem dico quae comprehendi litteris potest.

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full. But when you pray, go into your room, close the door and pray to your Father, who is unseen. Then your Father, who sees what is done in secret, will reward you».

[69] *Mag.* 1,2 (trans. Leckie, *Concerning the Teacher*, 4).

(To speak is to give a sign by means of an articulate utterance. By an articulate I mean one which can be expressed in letters.)[70]

This parallel shows some continuity in Augustine's vision of speech, which is coherent and remains constant in many of his works. In the *De trinitate*, the word serves the function of communicating and externalizing ideas and thoughts,[71] and in the *De fide et symbolo* speaking of the *verbum dei*, Augustine takes this opportunity to dwell also upon human language: he articulates how in speaking, we try, insofar as it is possible, to transfer our mind, our thought, over to the hearer to be grasped and held by him also.[72] Although man resorts to signs in order to externalize what he has within himself, the speaker's "soul" can never be known completely, which makes language an imperfect tool of communication. Augustine in the *De magistro*, as well as in other works, does not fail to emphasize this imperfection of language that is manifested in various ways, from the ambiguity of words to the will to assert what is false that is the *proprium* of the lie (see Chapter 4).

Such picture of language is reiterated throughout the dialogue, and at 4,8 *verbum* (word) is defined as everything that is proffered with the articulate voice and has significance:

> *Aug*. […] ut verbum sit, quod cum aliquo significatu articulata voce profertur.

> (*Aug*. – A word is that which is uttered by the articulate voice with some meaning.)[73]

It is, however, important to note that in the *De magistro* the expression *vox articulata* is generally coupled with the locution *cum aliquo significatu* (with some significance). This sets aside the uses of the term *vox articulata* in the De dialectica (that which can be trasnscribed in letters) and in the *De magistro* (the link between a phonic expression and its meaning).

Moreover, in the *De magistro* there is a shift in the conception of language from a triadic model to a binary one, as evidenced from the following excerpt:

> *Aug*. In quo tamen signo cum duo sint, sonus et significatio […]

> (*Aug*. – Since, however, two factors are involved with the sign, namely, sound and signification […])[74]

In this passage, Augustine theorized a binary model of the linguistic sign intended as the combination of two entities, *sonus* and *significatio*, thus advocating for a model that will be taken up by much of the linguistics and

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[70]   *Dial.* 5.
[71]   *Trin.* 15,11–20.
[72]   *F. et sym.* 3,4.
[73]   *Mag*. 4,8 (trans. Leckie, *Concerning the Teacher*, 13).
[74]   *Mag*. 10,34 (trans. Leckie, *Concerning the Teacher*, 44).

semiotics of the twentieth century.[75] I have argued elsewhere that an extension of this binary model of the linguistic sign to the concept of sign *tout cour*, following in Jakobson's footsteps, is misleading (Gramigna 2014). Indeed, a similar equation does not give justice to the depth and sophistication of the Augustinian conception of *signum*.

2.11. Opacity and transparency of signs

Although the *De magistro* posits that one of the functions of speech is to express the mind of the speaker, the dialogue does not fail to notice that the power of words in this regard is limited in its capacity. Words are caught in a deep contradiction, for on one hand, their intent is to reveal one's mind, and on the other, they are always imperfect means of communication. Indeed, there are numerous hindrances that hamper the capacity of words as a means of communication *inter homines*. In the dialogue is already glimpsed a subject that will be treated at length by Augustine, which leads to a genuine typology of misunderstandings that span from linguistic errors and *lapsus linguae* to the voluntary uttering of lies in order to mislead the listener.

The cases briefly listed in the dialogue are the following:

a. One knows what has been said, although the speaker himself does not know;
b. Lying and deceiving;
c. When something which has been committed to memory and often repeated is expressed by one who is preoccupied with other things (when we sing a hymn);
d. When against our will we make a slip in speech, for in this case, too, signs are expressed which are not of the things which we have in mind;
e. When he who speaks signifies the thing which he is thinking, but for the most part only to himself and certain others, while he does not signify the same thing to the one to whom he speaks nor to some others.

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[75] «Some interpreters of Saussurian doctrine are prone to believe that his theory of the two-fold structure of linguistic entities is a novelty, but Saussure's approach to the sign both in concepts and terms originates, in fact, from a tradition lasting over two thousand years. His definition of the total *signe* as a combination of *signifiant* and *signifié* literally corresponds both to the Stoic *semeion* consisting of two primordial aspects – *semainon* and *semainomenon* – and to St. Augustine's adaptation of the ancient Greek model: *signum = signans + signatum*» (Jakobson 1971a [1959]: 267). For a full discussion on this subject, see Remo Gramigna, «Roman Jakobson on signs» (2014), *Blityri* 3 (1–2), 177–207.

2.12. Signs don't teach: Augustine's "semiotic scepticism" and the "admonitive" office of signs

The treatise shows an unexpected change of direction for what concerns the functions of speech. Augustine argues, through a *reductio ad absurdum* and after a long and difficult analysis, that, as it stands, nothing is learned by means of signs. This leads to the conclusion, however paradoxical it may seem, that signs do not lead to knowledge. In doing so, Augustine reiterates the same paradox that is at the kernel of Plato's *Meno*:

> *Aug.* Quod si diligentius consideramus, fortasse nihil inveniens, quod per sua signa discatur. Cum enim mihi signum datur, si nescientem me invenit, cuius rei signum sit, docere me nihil potest; si vero scientem, quid disco per signum?

> (*Aug.* – If we consider this more carefully, then perhaps you may find there is nothing which is learned by means of signs. For when a sign is given me, if it finds me not knowing of what thing it is a sign, it can teach me nothing, but if it finds me knowing the thing of which it is a sign, what do I learn from the sign?)[76]

This is the theoretical background against which Augustine reassesses the function of speech. If teaching is intended as an exchange of new knowledge between two subjects, no sign can be said to undertake such an office – since if the cognition of what the sign signifies is lacking, the sign does not lead to anything new. Furthermore, without such a prior cognition, a sign altogether cannot be recognized as such by an interpreter who lacks such competence. Conversely, if someone is already competent, being aware of the significance of a particular sign, when this sign is given to him, it is in plain sight that the sign-receiver will not apprehend anything new from that sign (*mag.* 10,33). Augustine's stance was interpreted as a thesis of "semiotic scepticism", for "the sign is, strictly speaking, useless" (Simone 1969: 112–113).[77] To state that signs do not have value *tout court* is probably a too stretched position. However, signs themselves do not teach anything, although they show a purely instrumental value that yet must be explained.

The thesis that nothing is learned by means of signs certainly deserves further qualification. In order to explain this concept, the dialogue discusses a series of examples. The first one contemplated is a word whose meaning is very obscure: '*saraballae*' (head covering) (*mag.* 10,33). This example relates to the episode narrated by Daniel – of his companions Hananiah, Azariah, and Mishael thrown into a fiery furnace by the tyrant Nebuchadnezzar and were miraculously unharmed, so that their tunics did not even change colour: *Et*

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[76]   *Mag.* 10,33 (trans. Leckie, *Concerning the Teacher*, 43–44).
[77]   My translation from Italian: «il segno è, propriamente parlando, inutile» (Simone 1969: 112–113).

saraballae corum non sunt immutatae (Dan., III, 94).[78] A person, who is completely unaware of the word '*saraballae*', could hardly infer its significance (*significatio*) entirely from perceiving only the sound of the word (*sonus*). It is clear that the cognition of what a sign is significant of is a necessary condition in order for a word to be perceived as such by the one who hears the sound. Without this prior cognition, it would remain merely an incomprehensible sound, for it is deprived of its significance due to the lack of competence of the interpreter. Thus, the word as such, by means of its sound only, does not lead to the significance that it is meant to convey. Indeed, having heard the word '*saraballae*' does not imply teaching what this particular word signifies to the one who does not already possess such a knowledge (*mag*. 10,33). Hence, hearing the sound of a word does not lead to knowing the significance that it conveys. In reality, the meaning of a particular thing is learned through direct experience of reality – for instance, by seeing it. Indeed, one learns what is 'head' and 'covering' not by having heard it being mentioned by means of an articulate sound, but through sight. Hence, two models of knowing are spelled out throughout the dialogue: telling and showing.

Augustine, at this juncture, states what follows:

> *Aug*. Ita magis signum re cognita quam signo dato ipsa res discitur.

> (*Aug*. – Therefore that the sign is learned after the thing is cognized is rather more the case than that the thing itself is learned after the sign is given.)[79]

In order to examine the issue in greater depth, Augustine contemplates a second example in which the word *caput* (head) is heard for the first time and, without knowing what it signifies, one seeks to understand what this sign stands for. Augustine clarifies that the question does not concern the real object that is signified (the part of the body called *caput*), but it relates to the knowledge of the sign – which is lacking as long as one does not know of what thing it is the sign (*mag* 10,34). Although he does not overtly point this out, a sign without significance – that is, a sign whose meaning is unfamiliar or is unknown – has little value. Without the knowledge of the sign, the word *caput* is a sounding voice only, and thus not a sign.

Indeed, the thesis previously held that signs – and especially verbal signs – have the purpose of teaching is diametrically reversed to hold exactly the contrary: namely, that nothing is taught by means of signs. Indeed, after a lengthy excursus on the symbolism of language, it is established that the value (*utilitas*) of words lies in a rather different realm than the office of teaching – namely, admonishing the sign-receiver in order to lead him in the search for knowledge. The semiotic part of the *De magistro* reaches its climax with the conclusion that signs, even though they do not convey the knowledge of the thing, have the function of directing the attention of the one who perceives

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[78] «Their *sarabarae* were not changed» (Dan. 3: 27).

[79] *Mag*. 10,33 (trans. Leckie, *Concerning the Teacher*, 44).

them. Hence, their *utilitas*, purely instrumental, lies mainly in having an "admonitive" function for the sign-receiver. Commenting on this point, Augustine writes:

> *Aug*. Non enim, cum rem ipsam didici, verbis alienis credidi, sed oculis meis; illis tamen fortasse ut adtenderem credidi, id est ut aspectu quaererem, quid viderem.

> (*Aug*. – For when I learned the thing itself I was not indebted to the words of others but to my eyes; yet perhaps I accepted their words in order to attend, that is, in order that I might find what was to be seen.)[80]

Although this conclusion is partially negative, failing to envisage that signs have no teaching function, Augustine does not disparage the office of words, to which he still grants a limited yet important, function. Signs, indeed, are far from being useless; however, they urge the sign-receiver to actively seek for signification by directing the attention to things:

> *Aug*. Hactenus verba valuerunt, quibus ut plurimum tribuam, admonent tantum, ut quaeramus res, non exhibent ut norimus. Is me autem aliquid docet, qui vel oculis, vel ulli corporis sensui vel ipsi etiam menti praebet ea, quae cognoscere volo.

> (*Aug*. – To give them as much credit as possible, words possess only sufficient efficacy to remind us in order that we may seek things, but not to exhibit the things so that we may know them. He teaches me something, moreover, who presents to my eyes or to any other bodily sense or even to my mind itself those things which I wish to know.)[81]

According to Guzzo, Augustine's direction of research is a "theory of expression" (a *semiotics*, we would say today), which however remains incomplete, inasmuch as the "admonitive" function of signs is not fully-developed, but simply evoked (Guzzo 1927: 93).

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[80]   *Mag*. 10,35 (trans. Leckie, *Concerning the Teacher*, 46).
[81]   *Mag*. 11,36 (trans. Leckie, *Concerning the Teacher*, 46).

3. OF THINGS AND SIGNS IN AUGUSTINE'S
DE DOCTRINA CHRISTIANA

3.1 Setting the significance of the
De doctrina christiana

Augustine devoted a study *ex professo* to the subject of signification: *De doctrina christiana*. This treatise probably fulfils the promise of returning to the subject of the utility of words (*utilitas verborum*) in a subsequent enquiry that Augustine made eight years before in the *De magistro*: "But we shall, God willing, inquire at some other time about the utility of words, which if it is well considered is no mean matter".[1] For Augustine words are the signs par excellence and the semiotics of the word is paramount for interpreting the signs of the Bible.

Augustine's treatise presents a variety of relevant themes woven into its pages, some of which became subjects in their own right. H. R. Drobner, in his excellent summary of recent scholarship on Augustine's works, enumerates three main branches of research on the *De doctrina christiana*:

1) "Augustine's theory relating the acts of 'enjoying' (*frui*) and 'using'(*uti*) objects surrounding us;
2) His theory of signs (*signa*), and
3) His critique of the rules of Tyconius" (Drobner 2000: 25).[2]

It is noteworthy, however, that the historian Robert Markus (1996) initiated the study on "interpretative communities" with reference to the *De doctrina christiana* – that is to say, the idea that "meaning has meaning only in communities: linguistic, textual and interpretative communities, constituted by shared traditions of speaking, reading and interpreting" (Markus 1996: xi). This is a highly interesting facet of Augustine's scholarship and should be included in the list of the relevant branches of research outlined above.

Because this is a much-travelled scholarly ground, we must now determine the special province of our enquiry. The present chapter deals with one corner of the issue – namely, to study, *sub specie semiotica*, Augustine's *De doctrina christiana*. Yet this is in no way intended to claim that Augustine's aim in writing the treatise was to establish a science of signs. Indisputably, this was never his primary intention. As we have noted, the context of the work remains theological-hermeneutical. Yet Augustine included in his treatise a theory of

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[1]   *Mag.* 14,46. (trans. Leckie, *Concerning the Teacher*, 55).
[2]   I was not aware of H. R. Drobner's research had not Tarmo Toom's *Thought Clothed with Sound. Augustine's Christological Hermeneutics in De doctrina Christiana* (2002) pointed me in that direction. For a review of additional literature on the *De doctrina christiana*, see Eugene Kevane, «St. Augustine as an educator in the recent literature», *The American Ecclesiastical Review* 152 (1965), 217–232.

signs, which he expounded particularly in Book II, and he relied on his expertise as a skillful master of rhetoric to tailor such a theory. Augustine was the heir of a rich and long-lasting tradition of ancient theories of the sign, and he made use of this tradition for setting forth his own theory, which is, in some respect, original. Ultimately, the scope of the present chapter is assessing Augustine's sign theory with a keener eye to its legacy to contemporary semiotics, yet bearing always in mind the inherently instrumental character of Augustine's undertaking.

More specifically, what follows examines four main questions:

1) To discuss Augustine's definition of *signum* against the background of the concept of *res*;
2) To explore the debate around the long-lasting division between *signa naturalia* and *signa data* and discuss its sources;
3) To examine the place of intentionality in Augustine's theory of signs;
4) To explore the various divisions of signs.

The abovementioned issues are essential nodes within Augustine's approach to signs, and they also amount to pertinent research areas within the history of semiotics. However, such theoretical nodes are particularly cumbersome and have been the source of several misconstructions with reverberations within semiotic scholarship too.

In order to facilitate the presentation of the subject matter, a general background on the treatise in its entirety is initially provided. It follows a brief review of the scope, the method and the structure of the treatise with the aim of providing the reader with sufficient background knowledge about the source text. Looking at the structure of the work will hopefully benefit the gauging of its content, too. It is essential to bear this general background in mind if the nature of Augustine's theory of signs is to be comprehensively appraised.

3.2. The debate around the *De doctrina christiana*

At the age of 43, Augustine set himself a task that, borrowing a formula from Cicero,[3] he described as "great and arduous" (*magnum onus et arduum*)[4]: to provide the students (*studiosi*) of the Bible with a set of rules (*praecepta*) for interpreting the Sacred Scriptures.[5] Before giving these rules Augustine sets forth a theory of signs. With this precise intent, in the year 396 A.D. Augustine began the drafting of the *De doctrina christiana*, which he did not complete until 427.[6]

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[3] Cic. *Orator*, 10,33.

[4] *Doctr. chr.* 1,1 (trans. Robertson, *On Christian Doctrine*, 7).

[5] *Doctr. chr. Prooem*. 1.

[6] The date of composition of the treatise and its genesis is subject to debate and much has been written in this regard. I will not dwell on the history of the composition of the tract in

The *De doctrina christiana* comprises four books and a *Prooemium*. In Book I, Augustine divides the treatise into two main parts, which he terms as "invention" and "exposition". The two parts discuss the search for the method of scriptural interpretation – *modus inveniendi quae intellegenda sunt* (Books I–III) – and the method with which to show the interpretation – *modus proferendi quae intellect sunt* – respectively. The first part includes Books I–III, while the second part coincides with Book IV. Atkinson (1979: 15) claims that such a division derives from Cicero's *De partitione oratoria*.

Like the *De magistro*, the *De doctrina christiana* too has raised numerous interpretations regarding the form, the content, and the circumstances of its composition. Indeed, the subject matter, the nature and purpose of the treatise, the date in which Augustine penned the text and the date of publication of its various parts, its title, the target audience Augustine intended to address, the precise sources for the numerous divisions of the subject matter – all these issues are yet to be conclusively answered. Gerald Press's overall appraisal of the work is, therefore, understandable: "there is no agreement about what the *De doctrina christiana* is actually about" (Press 1980: 100). This is rather surprising considering the importance of this treatise within Western philosophy and theology. A comprehensive enquiry in all the abovementioned areas of research would definitely transcend the limits of the present study. In what follows, thus, we outline the main points of the debate around the work and refer to the relevant specialized studies for further details on specific issues.[7]

Although it is clear that Augustine's intention was to lay down and convey a set of precepts for the interpretation of the Sacred Scriptures, the target audience of the work is still a disputed question. In the preface, Augustine writes that he wishes to teach the "students" (*studiosi*) of the Scriptures and those who are willing to learn.[8] The debate revolves around the meaning of the word *studiosi*, which Augustine employs throughout the text. Such a term has a twofold meaning: one narrow and one broad. In the narrow sense, this word refers exclusively to the clergy and, in the broad sense, it indicates all those who intend to venture into the study of the Scriptures. The term *studiosi* is, thus, ambiguous because it could mean both. Did Augustine intend to address his work exclusively to the clergy, or did he have a more generic target in mind so that the book meant for anyone interested in studying the Scriptures?

There is a fundamental split in the secondary literature regarding this point. Franz X. Eggersdorfer (1907) opts for a narrow view and argues that Augustine wrote his work as a handbook for the clergy only. For Belford D. Jackson

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detail. For this issue, see E. Hill, «*De doctrina christiana*: A Suggestion», *Studia Patristica*, VI (1962), 443–446; Eugene Kevane, «Augustine's *De doctrina christiana*: A treatise on Christian Education», *Recherches Augustiniennes*, 4 (1966), 97–133.

[7] For a review of views and controversies about many of such issues, see Eugene Kevane, «Augustine's *De doctrina christiana*: A treatise on Christian Education», *Recherches Augustiniennes*, 4 (1966), 97–133. The author provides abundant references to the relevant secondary literature as well.

[8] *Doctr. chr. Prooem* 1. (trans. Robertson, *On Christian Doctrine*, 3).

(1967: 32), the term means all those that studied the Scriptures and that were or would have been teaching within the church. Thus, Jackson argues that Augustine addressed the *De doctrina christiana* to them. E. Kevane advances the suggestion that "Augustine has adolescent young people in mind when writing his treatise" and that the book addresses "teachers and to those, like Bishop Aurelius, who are responsible for the planning of teaching and the supervision of teachers" (Kevane 1966: 101–102).

The editorial circumstances of the *De doctrina christiana* are quite unique and intricate. As pointed out before, the treatise in its entirety consists of four books and a preface (*Prooemium*). Yet Augustine did not edit all four books consecutively. In the *Retractationes*, he provides sufficient evidence regarding the plan of the composition of the work:

> Libros de doctrina Christiana, cum inperfectos conperissem, perficere malui quam eis sic relictis ad alia retractanda transire. Conplevi ergo tertium, qui scriptus fuerat usque ad eum locum, ubi commemoratum est ex evangelio testimonium de muliere quae fermentum in abscondit tribus mensuris farinae, donec totum fermentaretur'. Addidi etiam novissimum librum, et quattuor libris opus illud inplevi, quorum primi tres adiuvant ut scripturae intellegantur, quartus autem quomodo quae intellegimus proferenda sint.

> (When I discovered that the books, On Christian Instruction, were not completed, I chose to finish them rather than leave them as they were and go on to the reexamination of other works. Accordingly, I completed the third book which had been written up to the place where mention is made of a passage from the Gospel about the woman who "buried leaven in three measures of flour until all of it was leavened". I then added a last book and thus completed this work in four books. The first three of these are a help to the understanding of the Scriptures, while the fourth explains how we are to present what we understand.)[9]

Augustine, thus, penned the *De doctrina christiana* in two separate stages. While writing the *Retractationes* he realized that the *De doctrina christiana* was truncated. He, then, interrupted the composition of the *Retractationes* and finalized the uncompleted *De doctrina christiana*. Initially, Augustine wrote the first three books of the treatise (he stopped at Book III, Chapter 25). Then, he completed the abridged third book and, in addition, wrote a completely new one. The latter became the fourth and final part of the work.

There has been a lot of debate around the date of the two parts of the treatise and it is still a disputed matter whether Augustine wrote the *Prooemium* before the composition of the four books or after it. We need not be concerned with the details of this intriguing issue because several accurate studies have already treated it at length.[10]

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[9]   *Retr.* 30,1 (trans. Bogan, *The Retractations*, 125).
[10]   On the subject of the date of the two parts of the *De doctrina christiana*, see Atkinson (1979: I–XI). See also Alberto Pincherle, «Sulla composizione del 'De doctrina christiana'

The title Augustine selected for his treatise is, at best, puzzling, and it has been the subject of long and heated speculations. Not surprisingly, Kevane (1966: 103) claims that it is a "mysterious" and "disconcerting" title. The *De doctrina christiana* has been generally translated in English as "On Christian Doctrine" (Robertson 1958) or as "On Christian Teaching" (Green 1995). Likewise, the translations of the title in Italian are not dissimilar, opting for "La Dottrina Cristiana" (Alici 1989; Belli 1920; Capone 1840) or "L'Istruzione Cristiana" (Simonetti 1994). However, to date there is no adequate equivalent in the English-speaking world apt to capture the significance of Augustine's title in its fullness and depth. Indeed, several scholars have pointed out the inaccuracy of such translations. Kevane (1966) has argued against using the English term "doctrine" in place of *doctrina* because the active meaning conveyed by the term *doctrina* gets lost in translation. He argues that "doctrine" in English has a passive connotation and, thus, is not an accurate translation to convey the nuances of the term *doctrina*, whose meaning involves an "active process of teaching" (Kevane 1966: 122). We shall see shortly how this word entails an active element. Atkinson (1979: 1), too, has expressed perplexity towards the term "doctrine" as an adequate translation for *doctrina*, not only for the reason Kevane pointed out, but also because "Christian Doctrine" refers to "a particular branch of theology and could be applied only to book 1 of the work". Sullivan (1930: 44), instead, has argued that Augustine used the term *doctrina* "in the classical sense of 'teaching' or 'instruction'".

Undoubtedly, the crux of the matter lies in the meaning of *doctrina* and how this word should be properly understood. The indeterminacy of Augustine's title ultimately derives from the meaning one assigns to this term. Indeed, *doctrina* is a rather elusive word, especially if one seeks to discern only one conclusive, precise, and definite meaning that encapsulates it. Press (1980: 103) has shown that such an approach is rather fruitless because *doctrina* is a multilayered term, and it is all too easy to interpret it as a single-sided concept. In a similar vein, Erickson (1985: 106) has regarded *doctrina* as a "multidimensional concept" and as "the most significant passage" of the entire work.

In general terms, two kinds of interpretations can be discerned regarding the meaning of *doctrina*: a broad and a narrow interpretation. The first approach coincides with the historian Henri-Irénée Marrou's seminal work, *St. Augustin et la Fin de la Culture Antique* (1938). He has interpreted *doctrina* in a broad sense as "Christian culture" and has concluded:

> [*De doctrina christiana* is] un traité en quatre livres consacré expressément à la culture chrétienne, *de Doctrina christiana*, ouvre longuement méditée et mûrie où saint Augustin nous a exposé tout l'essentiel du point de vue auquel il s'ent arrêté à la fin de sa vie sur la culture intellectuelle, sa place dans sa vie, son but, sa technique, ses méthodes [...] Elle se resume d'un mot, celui-la-même qu'Augustin a choisi comme titre pour l'ouvrage où il a traité *ex professo* du

di S. Agostino», *Storiografia e storia. Studi in onore di Eugenio Duprè Theseider, Volume* 2 (1974), 541–559.

sujet qui nous occupe: *doctrina christiana*, un culture chrétienne […] un culture entièrement consacrée à Dieu. (Marrou 1938: 332)

Indisputably, Marrou's view has been highly influential. It is, however, worth noting that, before Marrou, Eggersdorfer (1907) argued for a narrower interpretation. Eggersdorfer envisaged Augustine's undertaking as tailored to a specific target and with a particular aim, namely, the teaching of the clergy. Marrou's thesis, thus, grew somewhat as reaction to Eggersdorfer's precedent argument.[11] We need not discuss in detail these two opposing approaches here.[12] Instead, we should look more closely how the meaning of "doctrina" can be spelled out.

There is absolutely no conclusive argument in the secondary literature on the subject as to how the meaning of the term *doctrina* must be understood. Nearly all scholars, however, have stressed that, when Augustine was writing, this term was indeed polysemous. Moreover, both Marrou (1934) and Kevane (1966) have noticed that *doctrina* involves both the act of teaching and learning. Thus, this concept entails an active element. This explains the difficulties in translating such a word into English. Capitalizing on the richness and on the semantical depth that *doctrina* possessed in the *Latinitas*, Augustine employed it in a new context, which was religious and Christian.

The term *doctrina* has a very ancient and rich semantic history. In one of the most outstanding studies on the subject, Marrou (1934) has shown the indebtedness of Augustine's use of this term to the previous tradition. Because Marrou's 1934 paper is by far less known than his seminal monograph, *Saint Augustin et la Fin de la Culture Antique* (1938), and because it is curiously not so often referenced in the debate on the meaning of *doctrina*, it is worth reviewing his initial thesis.

In his research conducted in 1934, Marrou examined the terms *doctrina* and *disciplina* under the reciprocal light that one shed upon the other because, initially, their meaning can hardly be discerned. Scrupulously reviewing the similarities and differences between the two terms, Marrou explained that *doctrina* derives from *docere* (teaching) and *disciplina* from *discere* (learning) and that their root was initially pagan. The historian argued that both terms mean "enseignement" and refer to the subject matter of systematic and scientific teaching. In this respect, thus, *doctrina* and *disciplina* are synonyms (Marrou 1934: 6). Yet *doctrina*, in contrast to *disciplina*, has a more strictly intellectual character, and it seldom refers to "culture" in the active sense of the word – as an effort towards the cultivation of a science of the spirit (Marrou 1934: 6). The concept of *disciplina*, instead, has a pedigree in military education and it refers to slavishly and rigorously following a set of prescribed rules. By making

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[11]   For details on the controversy between Eggersdorfer and Marrou, see Eugene Kevane, «Augustine's *De doctrina christiana*: A treatise on Christian Education», *Recherches Augustiniennes*, 4 (1966), 105–109.

[12]   For a discussion on Marrou's interpretation, see Kevane (1966: 105–109).

references to Augustine's works, Marrou showed that the bishop of Hippo employed both *doctrina* and *disciplina* with the meanings outlined above.

In light of Marrou's study, it is evident that Augustine's selection of the word *doctrina* for the title of his treatise draws on an ancient and well-known tradition that harkens back to Cicero, who was the father of the term. Augustine retained from this tradition the meaning of *doctrina* as a peculiar kind of teaching that involves, at one and the same time, both teaching and learning. He then transposed this meaning from the pagan context into the ecclesiastical one. Skilfully tracing the semantic history of the term from its inception to the reception in the ecclesiastical Latin, Marrou (1934: 14–15) pointed out that the transfer of *doctrina* from one context to another ultimately altered its original meaning. As a result, the initial proximity of the terms *doctrina* and *disciplina* became gradually diluted and the word *doctrina* acquired new connotations while it lost others.

From this discussion, it can be gleaned that the notion of *doctrina* presents a highly complex set of ideas, and is not readily reducible to any one single concept. Thus, the title *De doctrina christiana* synthesizes a plurality of meanings that are transposed into the context of Christian exegesis. The stakes of using the term *doctrina* are high because the word conveys a bundle of meanings, which makes it hard to grasp for the contemporary reader. And yet *doctrina* refers back to the active sense of teaching and learning, to a set of knowledge (a science) that can be mastered by setting the good intent and by means of tireless devotion and, ultimately, to the teaching of God.

As a corollary, we should emphasize that Augustine used the term *doctrina* also with reference to the theory of signs. As we shall see in what follows, he writes that every doctrine is either a "doctrine of things" (*Doctrina rerum*) or a "doctrine of signs" (*Doctrina signorum*). Because Augustine refers to the theory of signs as "doctrina", here he probably uses this term to mean a set of knowledge – a science – devoted to a specific subject (signs). This explains why semiotics is referred to – after J. Locke – as the "doctrine of signs". As is clear, however, this meaning is already present in Augustine.[13]

3.3. The scope of the *De doctrina christiana*

In the preface (*Prooemium*), Augustine protects himself against possible reproaches. The prologue of the book is significant for two main reasons: first, because here Augustine clarifies the scope of his enquiry; second, because while

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[13] For a discussion of the notion of «doctrine of signs», see John Deely (1982b), «Semiotic' as the doctrine of signs», *Ars Semeiotica* 1/3, 41–68; «On the notion doctrine of signs», Appendix I in Deely, J. *Introducing Semiotic: Its History and Doctrine* (1982a), Bloomington, Indiana University Press.

dealing with his potential critics he provides further reflections on the nature of the work itself.[14]

The incipit of the treatise testifies that Augustine's intention was drafting a handful of principles for interpreting the Scriptures and for setting such a method down for posterity:

> Sunt praecepta quaedam tractandarum scripturarum, quae studiosis earum video non incommode posse tradi, ut non solum legendo alios, qui divinarum litterarum operta aperuerunt, sed etiam ipsi aperiendo proficiant.

> (There are certain precepts for treating the Scriptures which I think may not inconveniently be transmitted to students, so that they may profit not only from reading the work of expositors but also in their own explanations of the sacred writings to others).[15]

The set of rules or principles (*praecepta*) discussed in the book is instrumental both for interpreting the Bible through reading the text, as well as for those who become teachers themselves and, in turn, will pass on to future generations the knowledge they have acquired. Thus, Augustine's method shows a double utility because it can be used both for learning and teaching. By positing that the rules for interpreting the Scriptures have a twofold function, the preface tacitly relates to the overall theme of the book, which is epitomized by the word *doctrina*. As noted before, such a term is highly significant, and its meaning is rich and ancient. The word entails a twofold sense because it involves both the active process of teaching and learning, as well as the subject matter – what is taught and learned (Marrou 1934).

In the *Prooemium*, Augustine mitigates, at the outset, the potential criticisms of his work. To this end, he follows the argumentative figure of the *praesumptio* (presumption or anticipation), whose aim is to prevent eventual objections in order to confute them in advance. He divides the detractors of his undertaking into three main categories:[16]

1) Those who criticize the work because they fail to understand the content;
2) Those who understand the content and nonetheless are not able to use it. Because they cannot benefit from the rules offered to them, they regard such a method as unnecessary *tout court*;

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[14]   On the prologue of the *De doctrina christiana*, see Eugene Kevane, «Paideia and anti-paideia: The *prooemium* of St. Augustine's *De doctrina christiana*», *Augustinian Studies* 1 (1970), 153–180. See also Ulrich Duchrow, «Zum Prolog von Augustins De doctrina christiana», *Vigiliae Christianae* 17 (1963), 165–172; Luigi Alici, «Il primo libro del 'De doctrina christiana', o della mediazione impossibile», in «*De doctrina christiana*» *di Agostino d'Ippona*, Roma, Città Nuova (1995), 11–37.

[15]   *Doctr. chr. Prooem* 1. (trans. Robertson, *On Christian Doctrine*, 3).

[16]   *Doctr. chr. Prooem* 2.

3) Those who consider the set of *praecepta* as superfluous. They variously insist on the dispensability of the mediation of men for learning how to understand the Scriptures.

These three kinds of opponents are left unanimous. Out of the three, the third one receives more attention than the others. Here, Augustine outlines a real typology of textual reception based on the strategy with which the audience relates to the text. He replies firmly to all of them by resorting to an approach that is recurrent throughout his works (see the discussion in Chapter 2), the *digito ostendo*, namely, the pointing finger as a sign of an object. In this passage, Augustine anticipates a specific type of sign that he will take up later on (in Book II). Indeed, there Augustine refers to hand gestures as visual signs ("Some signify many things through the motions of their hands" – he mentions actors who "give signs to those who understand with the motions of all their members as if narrating things to their eyes") and "banners and military standards".[17] It is instructive to notice that Augustine deals with his potential critique by relying on the *sign-object* distinction as the basis for his counter-argument. This point is often overlooked. The passage is particularly poignant because the *sign-object* distinction is a metaphor for the Augustinian approach in its entirety. Indeed, throughout the treatise he contends that "things are learned by signs".[18] Augustine, thus, postulates an epistemological relation between the knowledge of things and the learning through signs that a subject can experience. This is why he pays a great deal of attention to signs of all sorts. Signs are the gateways to things. It goes without saying that, in the case that the signs are not intelligible and cannot be grasped due to the negligence of the interpreter who is unable to discern them, things cannot be learned altogether. Augustine uses this type of counterargument against the first kind of critique and it refers to the connection between the sign and the thing signified, which becomes intelligible through the sign. In other words, Augustine brings out vividly a link between apprehension of signs and knowledge of things.

Moreover, in the preface, he envisages an analogy between sight and under-standing. He compares non-understanding with short-sightedness. For Augustine, the critics of the first kind are like those who do not have enough sight even for discerning the sign that directs them to the object – "If they wished to see the old or the new moon or some very small star which I was pointing to with my finger and they did not have keen enough sight even to see my finger".[19] The negligence which is in the eye of the beholder cannot be imputed as a sufficient reason to censor Augustine's undertaking. Along the same lines, the second type of critic is seen as parallel to those who, despite being able to distinguish the sign (the finger pointing), yet fail to see the object to which the sign is pointing to (the moon). The third type of critic insists that the human

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[17] *Doctr. chr.* 2,3 (trans. Robertson, *On Christian Doctrine*, 35).

[18] *Doctr. chr.* 1,2 (trans. Robertson, *On Christian Doctrine*, 8).

[19] *Doctr. chr. Prooem* 3 (trans. Robertson, *On Christian Doctrine*, 4).

mediation for approaching the Bible is without value and is unnecessary altogether. These critics pride themselves on understanding the Scriptures without resorting to any of the rules imparted to them by other men. Thus, they dismiss any intermediary in approaching the Scriptures. They rely on insights received from the divine illumination, as a pure effect of a gift from God. Thus, they regard Augustine's intent as superfluous and instead advocate for bypassing the mediation of any human teacher for the apprehension of the Bible. Augustine tempers their enthusiasm by reminding them that anyone – without exception – must have been schooled in how to read by other men nonetheless. Moreover, every man has acquired language by means of hearing it spoken by others. Likewise, any foreign language is learned by listening to other members of the linguistic community speaking it or by someone who teaches it to them. The teaching to others and the intergenerational transmission of knowledge by means of teaching is pivotal and should not be dismissed. This contention is somewhat different from the thesis unravelled in the *De magistro*, where, as we have noted (in Chapter 2), sign mediation is vigorously challenged.

3.4. The method of division and the structure of the treatise

Unlike the *De magistro*, where – as pointed out earlier (in Chapter 2) – there is an apparent fragmentariness and lack of organic development, the *De doctrina christiana* shows a systematic treatment of the subject matter. The structure of the treatise follows the principle of division and subdivision (*divisio* and *partitio*) of the content. However, Augustine's method of making partitions is not original. This method has a long pedigree and was used in antiquity in technical treatises. The characteristic feature of such a model is the close relationship between the subject treated and the structure of the treatise. In order words, the theory (the subject matter) shapes the structure of the work. Moreover, each partition of the subject treated is of fundamental importance both in reference to the other partitions as well as to the entire book (Atkinson 1979: 13).

Both Jackson and Atkinson point out that numerous works in antiquity exhibited a similar form. Jackson (1967: 42) identifies the roots of such a scientific method (*scientia*) of division in several ancient authors, hearkening back to Plato. Along the same lines, Atkinson (1979: 14) notices that a similar method is traceable in works of the first century B.C. (such as Varro's *Res rusticae*, Vitruvius' *De architectura*), in works of the first century A.D. (such as Celsus' *Libri medicinae*, Gaius' *Institutione*s), as well as in works of rhetoric (such as Cicero's *De partitione oratoria* and the *Rhetorica ad Herennium*). The author argues that Augustine must have been familiar with such a systematic method of division by reading Varro, and she points out remarkable similarities between Augustine's *De doctrina christiana* and Cicero's *De partitione*

oratoria. The latter work is the one that influenced Augustine the most (Atkinson 1979: 15–16).

We are not so much concerned here with studying the sources of Augustine's method of partition. As noted above, both Jackson (1967) and Atkinson (1979), independently, discussed this issue and reached similar conclusions: a) Augustine used a systematic method for making divisions, which was a commonplace in antiquity; b) such a method was used in the context of rhetoric as well as in logic; c) through this method, Augustine achieved clarity and precision in the exposition of the subject matter. However, although Jackson and Atkinson draw similar conclusions, they disagree on the sources for Augustine's method.[20]

This issue is not only remarkable in its own right – because it shows that Augustine follows an ancient tradition for structuring his own work, and therefore, in this regard he is less original than one might think – but it also has relevant implications for the topic of the present research. Indeed, all the divisions Augustine makes within the theory of signs result from an application of such a method of partition to the subject treated, namely, signs (*signa*). This means that the division of signs Augustine envisages in the *De doctrina christiana* is in fact the result of applying this method of scientific partition to the subject treated, namely, signs. We will see that although Augustine lists several divisions of *signa*, he does not treat all of them exhaustively because some signs (as for instance the signs of animals), although part of the general subject treated and, as such, deserving to be mentioned, nonetheless fall outside the scope of his enquiry.

Throughout the book, Augustine points out eleven divisions, as shown in the diagram below:

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[20] It is somewhat curious and, however, inaccurate, that Atkinson (1979: 28) reproached Jackson for failing to note this issue in his own study of the *De doctrina*. This is definitely not the case.

Omnis trattatio scripturae

Modus inveniendi
(Books 1 - 3)

Modus proferendi
(Book 4)

Doctrina
(1.2)

Res
(Book 1)

Signa
(Books 2-3)

Fruendum   Utendum   Fruuntur
et
utuntur

Naturalia   Data

Bestiae   Homines

Ad oculum   Ad arium   Ad caetera
sensum   sensum   sensa

Litterae   Verba

Scriputura divina

Aperte   Obscura

Ignota   Ambigua

Propria   Verbum   Locutio   Translata   Propria   Translata

Doctrinae in
gentilibus

Doctrinae in gentilibus

Instituerunt homines   Divinitus instituas

Partim   Partim non   Ad sensus   Ad ratione
superstitiosum superstitiosum   corporis   animi

Magiche artes,   Partim   Partim
aruspices   superflua   commoda et
et augures,   necessaria
ligaturae

Signa histrionum   Cultus
picturae   corporis
statuae   littera et
fictae   linguae
fabulae

Figure 14. The structure of the *De doctrina christiana*

Out of eleven divisions, seven concern the theory of signs. Consequently, these are the nodes that we must study more closely:

1. The distinction of *res* and *signa*;
2. The distinction of *signa naturalia* and *signa data*;
3. The distinction of the signs of men and the signs of animals;
4. The distinction of words and other signs used by men;
5. The distinction of the written and spoken word;
6. The distinction of *signa ignota* and *signa ambigua*;
7. The distinction of *signa propria* and *signa translata*.

In what follows, we proceed with a discussion of each division.

3.5. Things and signs

After clearing out the way for potential criticisms in the prologue, Augustine begins the first book of his *De doctrina christiana* with these words:

> Omnis doctrina vel rerum est vel signorum, sed res per signa discuntur. Proprie autem nunc res appellavi, quae non ad significandum aliquid adhibentur, sicuti est lignum, lapis, pecus atque huiusmodi cetera, sed non illud lignum, quod in aquas amaras Moysen misisse legimus, ut amaritudine carerent, neque ille lapis, quem Iacob sibi ad caput posuerat, neque illud pecus quod pro filio immolavit Abraham. Hae namque ita res sunt, ut aliarum etiam signa sint rerum.
>
> Sunt autem alia signa, quorum omnis usus in significando est, sicuti sunt verba. Nemo enim utitur verbis nisi aliquid significandi gratia. Ex quo intellegitur quid appellem signa; res eas videlicet quae, ad significandum aliquid adhibentur. Quam ob rem omne signum etiam res aliqua est; quod enim nulla res est, omnino nihil est; non autem omnis res etiam signum est.
>
> Et ideo in hac divisione rerum atque signorum, cum de rebus loquemur, ita loquemur, ut etiamsi earum aliquae adhiberi ad significandum possint, non impediant partitionem, qua prius de rebus, postea de signis disseremus, memoriter que teneamus id nunc in rebus considerandum esse, quod sunt, non quod aliud etiam praeter se ipsas significant.

> (All doctrine concerns either things or signs, but things are learnt by signs. Strictly speaking, I have called a "thing" that which is not used to signify something else, like wood, stone, cattle, and so on; but not that wood concerning which we read that Moses casts it into bitter waters that their bitterness might be dispelled, nor that stone which Jacob placed at his head, nor that beast which Abraham sacrificed in place of his son. For these are things in such a way that they are also signs of other things. There are other signs whose whole use is in signifying, like words. For no one uses words except for the purpose of signifying something. From this may be understood what we call "signs"; they are things used to signify something. Thus every sign is also a thing, for that which is not a thing is nothing at all; but not every thing is also a sign. And thus in this distinction between things and signs, when we speak of things, we shall so speak

that, although some of them may be used to signify something else, this fact shall not disturb the arrangement we have made to speak of things as such first and of signs later. We should bear in mind that now we are to consider what things are, not what they signify beyond themselves.)[21]

The first fundamental distinction in regard to signs outlined in the *De doctrina christiana* is, thus, the division between "things" (*res*) and "signs" (*signa*). The abovementioned excerpt is rather dense and contains valuable information that deserves attention. Before qualifying the relevant points, however, some preliminary remarks are necessary.

The term *res* in Augustine is highly complex and polysemic. This concept has a long pedigree and its philosophical and semantic history is as rich as it is difficult.[22] The term has been generally translated in English as "thing" or "something" and seldom as "reality".[23] As said earlier, studies conducted within semiotics, except for Todorov (1977) who partially treated the topic, have generally focused on Augustine's definition of the "sign" (*signum*) and have emphasized the characteristics of farsightedness, a high degree of generality, and powerful synthesis that this notion possess with respect to previous traditions (Todorov 1977; Manetti 1987; Deely 2009; Eco 1981; Eco 1984). Nonetheless, by placing emphasis on the definition of *signum*, contemporary semiotics has almost completely dismissed Augustine's concept of *res,* which, at any rate, is as essential as its congener concept of the sign. We shall see, in fact, that conceptualizing the concept of *signum* without resorting to the notion of *res*, that is, out of context, is incomplete and does not align with Augustine's own thought.

Previous research of the meaning of *res* in Augustine has been rare (Simone 1969; Catapano 2017; Jackson 1967). In light of the centrality that the doublet *res/signum* plays in Augustine's thought, this is certainly striking.

In contrast to previous studies on the *De doctrina christiana* conducted within semiotics, we begin with a different premise. While these studies typically tend to over-emphasize Augustine's concept of *signum* at the expense of the notion of *res*, the present work begins the study of *signum* with a philosophical discussion of the concept of *res* and its possible sources. We argue that this approach is in line with Augustine's own plan of the work. It will be seen how in the *De doctrina christiana* and elsewhere (see, for instance, the dialogue *De magistro* as well as the *De dialectica*), *res* and *signum* are discussed one in reference to the other. In point of fact, the division *res/signum* is consistent

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[21]   *Doctr. chr.* 2,2 (trans. Robertson, *On Christian Doctrine*, 8–9).

[22]   A propos to the history of the concept of *res*, see the outstanding review of this term written by Jean-François Courtine, in Barbara Cassin (ed.) *Dictionary of Untranslatables. A Philosophical Lexicon* (2014)*,* Princeton and Oxford, Princeton University Press, especially 897–898 for a discussion of *res* in Augustine.

[23]   In *The Philosophy of Teaching: A Study in the Symbolism of Language* (1924), which is a translation of Augustine's *De magistro* in English, Fr. Francis E. Tourscher used the term «reality» as a translation for *res*.

throughout Augustine's works and should not be overlooked. The concept of *res*, thus, deserves equal attention as the notion of *signum*.

This said, let us now discuss the excerpt from Book I quoted above and outline the definitions of the concept. Initially, we identify two different definitions of *res*, one narrow and one broad:

Definition 1:

[…] Quae non ad significandum aliquid adhibentur.

([…] That which is not used to signify something else).[24]

Definition 2:

[…] Quod enim nulla res est, omnino nihil est.

([…] That which is not a thing is nothing at all).[25]

Both Karel Kuypers and Belford D. Jackson notice that such definitions refer to a twofold meaning of the term *res* and, therefore, must be distinguished one from the other. While Kuypers (1934: 78) identifies a "narrow" ("eng") and a "broader" ("weit") meaning of *res*,[26] Jackson (1967; 1969) distinguishes a "proper" and "improper" use of the notion. Definitions 1 and 2 outlined above overlap with the "narrow" or "proper" use of the term *res*, and with the "broader" or "improper" use of *res*, respectively.

In order to emphasize the different meanings that the word *res* takes for Augustine in the two formulations outlined above and to avoid terminological confusions, we refer to Definition 1 and Definition 2 adopting our own terminology. In what follows, thus, we will refer to a *primary* and a *secondary* meaning of the concept of *res*.

However, Augustine did not explicitly spell out the distinction exactly in the terms described above. Here, one should go beyond Augustine and deduct the distinction between "narrow/broad", "proper/improper" or "primary/secondary" from the tacit logic implied in the text. Indeed, Augustine did employ the term "proper" (*proprie*) in the first definition of *res*. In its "proper" use, *res* is that which is not used to signify something else.

The "improper" use of *res* must be inferred from the second definition because Augustine did not provide a term for it. Thus, the opposition "proper/improper" or "narrow/broad" must be extrapolated in order to draw a line between the two definitions of *res*, as both Kuypers and Jackson have done. The

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[24] *Doctr. chr.* 2,2 (trans. Robertson, *On Christian Doctrine*, 8).

[25] *Doctr. chr.* 2,2 (trans. Robertson, *On Christian Doctrine*, 9).

[26] «Der allgemeine aufbau beruht auf der unterscheidung zwischen sache und zeichen. Sache hat eine weitere und eine engere Bedeutung» (Kuypers 1934: 78).

"improper" definition of *res* qualifies the concept as *anything whatsoever that is* (Jackson 1967: 64).

Let us now describe the two meanings more in depth.

3.5.1. The primary meaning of *res*

Initially, Augustine discriminates the notion of *res* negatively against the concept of *signum*: *res* is a thing that is not *signum*. Indeed, *res* are described as things which are not employed to signify something. Here, Augustine sketches out with some care the division between *res* and *signum* as an opposition between things that *do not signify* and things that *do signify*. Accordingly, *res* are things that do not signify other things, whereas *signa* are things that do signify other things. Thus, the discriminating factor is the capability of signifying that things may have versus the absence of such a feature. Augustine provides illustrations of things that do not signify, like "wood, stone, cattle and so on".[27]

However, there is more to it. In fact, there is a subtle distinction to be considered. Objective entities can serve a significative function. Wood, stone, cattle can be signs of other things, without ceasing to exist as things. The piece of wood that Moses threw into the water to remove any trace of bitterness, the stone which Jacob used as a resting place for his head, and the sheep which Abraham sacrificed in place of his son are employed for signifying something else, thus such objective entities are also signs. However, this type of signs, as it were, is of a mixed nature because these signs are equally things and signs at the same time. This *thing-sign* is somewhat an intermediary category between *res* (things) and *signa* (signs). Augustine coins the term *signum translatum* in order to refer to this particular kind of sign. The nature of the *signum translatum* can be grasped with more ease if one considers it in relation to the *signum proprium*, which is a sign whose sole function is to signify, such as words. We have, then, the following threefold distinction:

1. *res*;
2. *signum translatum*;
3. *signum proprium.*

This triplet of concepts can be distinguished according to whether such entities retain their nature of things (and to what degree) and whether they signify other things.

From here, it follows that, the difference between things and signs could be conceived in terms of degrees. Signs may retain their nature of things, and we may call such a property – going beyond Augustine – the "thingness" of signs, as it were. This quality can be more or less accentuated or calibrated differently. *Signa translata* are somewhat of a middle ground in between *res proprie* and

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[27]   *Doctr. chr.* 2,2 (trans. Robertson, *On Christian Doctrine*, 8).

signum proprium. We can imagine this as a degree of thingness of the sign that is gradually diluted when one arrives to the *signum proprium*. We can represent this difference with a schema:

(a) *Res proprie* – things that do not signify;
(b) *Signum translatum* – things that signify something else and yet retain their nature of things up to a certain degree;
(c) *Signum proprium* – things whose whole nature is rounded off the quality of signification. They retain little of their nature as things. They are used only for the purpose of signifying.

3.5.2. The secondary meaning of *res*

Let us now consider the secondary meaning of the notion. Here the concept of *res* is envisaged in quite an extensive and general sense as anything whatsoever that is, because what does not exist cannot be anything – "that which is not a thing is nothing at all".[28] From this perspective, *res* is the wider category that encompasses anything that is, including the notion of *signum* (Jackson 1967: 65). In other words, *signum* is a specification of the genus *res*.

To sum up, the two definitions of *res* outlined above – primary and secondary – account for two different types of relationships between things and signs: one is a relationship of opposition and the other one a relationship of inclusion. While the primary meaning of *res* rests upon a relation of opposition to the notion *signum* – things are that which are not used to signify – the secondary meaning of *res* is based on a relation of inclusion in respect to the concept of *signum* – signs are things, too, because that which is not cannot exist altogether.

The schemes below show the two definitions of *res* and the types of relations between *res* and *signum* that each definition presupposes:

Res_p	$Signum$
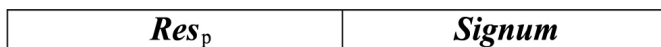
Figure 15. The primary meaning of *res*

Res_s	
Res_p	$Signum$

Figure 16. The secondary meaning of *res*

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[28] *Doctr. chr.* 2,2 (trans. Robertson, *On Christian Doctrine*, 9).

Figure 15 depicts the primary meaning of the concept of *res* (*Res*$_p$). Here, *res* and *signum* define in relation to one another. To reiterate: *res* are things that do not signify other things. Raffaele Simone (1969: 105) has called this notion the semiotic definition of *res* ("la definizione semiotica di *res*"). This is an *either/or* type of relationship in which the two horns oppose one another. Thus, such a relationship is negative and oppositional: what is *res* is not *signum* and vice-versa.

Figure 16 presents the secondary meaning of the concept of *res* (*Res*$_s$). This illustration differs from the former one (Fig. 15) because here *signum* is thought of as a subcategory of the more general concept of *res*. This entails that, in one respect, a sign is a thing, too. Augustine posits that every sign is always a thing because what is nothing cannot be anything at all. At any rate, the sign too, must be something. It is useful to bear such a distinction in mind because Augustine in Book II returns to it as a background for the discussion about signs.

In conclusion, by looking at the secondary meaning of the concept of *res*, *res* and *signum* are not coextensive: the sign is always a thing; yet not all things are signs.

3.6. Augustine's sources for the division *res/signum*

Numerous and accurate studies of the sources of the *De doctrina christiana* have shown Augustine's tribute to the previous tradition. Such enquiries have typically focused on the relationship between Book IV of the treatise and ancient rhetoric (Eskridge 1903; Sullivan 1930). In contrast, few researches have addressed the problem of the philosophical roots of the concept of *res* in Augustine and its sources. Both Jackson (1967) and Atkinson (1979) provide some essential clues on the subject that are worth reviewing.

Augustine deals with the "doctrine of things" (*doctrina rerum*) in Book I of the *De doctrina christiana*. Atkinson (1979: 17–18) suggests Cicero, who distinguished between *res a*nd *verba* in relation to the *vis oratoris*, as a possible source of Augustine. Undoubtedly, this is an obvious source for Augustine, and it is well documented that Cicero had a profound influence on him (Testard 1958). Although Atkinson's suggestion is sound, the author remarks that, unlike Augustine, Cicero did not conceive of words as signs. For Cicero *signum* was a technical term used as "a part of a class of rhetorical argument", and for this reason, his influence on Augustine for the division *res/signum* is less evident (Atkinson 1979: 18).

Jackson notes that the *res/signum* distinction was a commonplace in the Latin tradition, so much so that this opposition is found in numerous authors – Cicero, Quintilian, Varro, Seneca. All these scholars referred to a similar distinction, although the terminology they employed from time to time was not uniform. Indeed, the term *res* couples with a range of various terms – *signum*, *verbum*, *nomen*, *vocabulum*, *vox* – depending on the writers' disciplinary

backgrounds (Jackson 1967: 65). Summarizing Jackson's results, we can single out three main meanings of the concept of *res* (Jackson 1967: 65–67). The terms used in each opposition vary from context to context:

(1) *Res – verbum* (the subject of a discussion – what is said);
(2) *Res – verba* (facts – words);
(3) *Res – vocabula* (meaning – term).

Originating in the context of forensic rhetoric, Jackson explains that the first opposition refers to what one is talking about as opposed to the talking itself. Indeed, in rhetorical tradition, the terms *res* and *verbum* were used to distinguish the subject or content of a discussion (*res*) and what was said about it (*verbum*), respectively. Both Cicero and Quintilian used such a doublet. For Cicero, *res* is the content of an orator. More precisely, in Quintilian, the opposition between *verba* and *res* consists of the mismatch between the writer's written word and his own intention (Eden 1987: 77).

The second type of distinction Jackson outlines is based on the Ciceronian motto *Rerum enim copia, verborum copiam gignit* ("a full supply of facts begets a full supply of words"). This division relates to the opposition between "knowledge of facts and ability with words". The third type of distinction originates in the contexts of logic and semantics, and it refers to the meaning (*res*) of a term (*vocabula*) (Jackson 1967: 66).

There are two crucial conclusions Jackson draws:

(1) although the oppositions *res/verbum* and *res/vocabula* are generally traceable through numerous authors, *res* is rarely used in opposition to *signum*, as instead did Augustine;[29]
(2) Augustine's use of the concept of *res* shows a "high degree of generalization" (Jackson 1967: 68). This particularly broad use of the term sets Augustine apart from the previous tradition.

To conclude, Augustine, in a stroke of genius, synthesizes in one word all the connotations that the previous rhetorical, forensic and semantic traditions assigned to concept of *res*. In other words, his concept is so broad and general as to include all the earlier uses of the term: *res* as the subject of a discussion, *res* as a fact, *res* as a meaning of a term or as an event, are all encompassed in Augustine's concept of *res* (Jackson 1967: 68). Here lies Augustine's originality: (a) in contrast to the previous tradition, he explicitly used *res* in opposition to *signum*; (b) he included under the same head an array of meanings that were formerly used in different contexts and are now grouped under the same umbrella term.

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[29] Jackson mentions a single instance of this by referring again to Cicero, who, in the context of a legal debate in forensic rhetoric, refers to murder as *res* and blood as *signum* of the murder. And when it appears, as in Cicero's case, it is out of a linguistic context to denote the «evidence pointing to an event» (Jackson 1967: 68).

Hitherto, we have discussed the meaning of *res* and its possible sources. Now we must examine how Augustine used such a term in his other works. To trace the meaning of the term in the entire Augustinian corpus would exceed the scope of the present study. Thus, we limit our enquiry by looking at how Augustine used such a term in the works relevant for the present research, namely, in the *Dialectica* and in the *De magistro*.

As revealed in Chapter 1, in the *De dialectica*, Augustine defines *res* as "whatever is sensed or is understood or hidden" (*Res est quidquid vel sentitur vel intelligitur vel latet*).[30] In this context, *res* is the external referent, the object. It is the corporeal thing perceived directly through the senses or the incorporeal thing grasped by the mind or what remains hidden both from direct sense perception and from the mind. This is all we can glean from Augustine's earlier treatise.

In the *De magistro*, we can trace back both the primary and secondary meaning of the concept of *res* outlined in the *De doctrina christiana* and discussed above. Almost no one, except for Giovanni Catapano (2017) has pointed out this parallel with clarity and precision. As we wrote in Chapter 2, the semiotics of the *De magistro* is based on the division between things and signs. In the dialogue, Augustine defines *res* as "those things which can be signified by means of signs and yet are not signs" (*ea quae signis significari possunt et signa non sunt*).[31] He calls those things which are not signs "signifiable" (*significabilia*). The opposition between things that signify/things that do not signify is similar to the primary meaning of *res* and is retained in the *De doctrina christiana*.

If one carefully reads the dialogue, one can realize that the secondary meaning of *res* as described in the *De doctrina christiana* is traceable to the *De magistro* as well. First Augustine and his son agree that a sign must signify something *(Aug.* – Can a sign be a sign unless it signifies something? *Ad.* – It cannot).[32] Then it is also posited that a sign must also be something because that which is not cannot be something:

> (*Ad*. – What does *nihil* [nothing] signify except that which is not?
> *Aug*. – Perhaps you are right. But I cannot agree with you because of your recent admission, namely, that a sign is not a sign unless it signifies something. And that which is not cannot in any way be something. Accordingly, the second word in the line is not a sign because of the fact it does not signify anything, which would mean that we have agreed falsely that all words are signs or that every sign signifies something.)[33]

If one reads Augustine's statement in the *De magistro* "that which is not cannot in any way be something" in light of the secondary definition of *res* he gives in

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[30]   *Dial.* 5 (trans. Jackson, *De Dialectica*, 87).
[31]   *Mag.* 4,8 (trans. Leckie, *Concerning the Teacher*, 13).
[32]   *Mag.* 2,3 (trans. Leckie, *Concerning the Teacher*, 6).
[33]   *Mag*. 2,3. (trans. Leckie, *Concerning the Teacher*, 6–7).

the *De doctrina christiana*, "what is not a thing does not exist", one can realize the remarkable similarity. It is clear that the distinction *res*/*signum* is consistent throughout the works analyzed and holds a central place in Augustine's semiotics.

3.7. Types of *res* and division between enjoyment (*frui*) and use (*uti*)

We now discuss the next division Augustine takes up in Book I, namely, the distinction between "enjoyment" (*frui*) and "use" (*uti*). As said earlier, this subject became a branch of research in its own right.[34] We shall, thus, limit the present discussion only to the implications that the division *frui/uti* has for the distinction between *res*/*signa*.

Augustine defines what is "enjoyment" (*frui*) and "use" (*uti*) as follows:

> Frui est enim amore inhaerere, alicui rei propter se ipsam. Uti autem, quod in usum venerit, ad id, quod amas obtinendum referre, si tamen amandum est. Nam usus inlicitus abusus potius vel abusio nominanda est.

> (To enjoy something is to cling to it with love for its own sake. To use something, however, is to employ it in obtaining that which you love, provided that it is worthy of love. For an illicit use should be called rather a waste or an abuse.)[35]

Frui, thus, refers to the enjoyment of a thing for its own sake, while *uti* refers to the use of anything that can be employed in order to obtain what is to be enjoyed. On the basis of this distinction, Augustine points out a threefold division of *res*:

1) Things which are to be enjoyed (*res quibus fruendum est*);
2) Things which are to be used (*res quibus utendum est*);
3) Things which are to be enjoyed and used (*res quibus utendumet fruendum est*).[36]

Todorov provides an interesting interpretation of the *frui/uti* distinction, which we now seek to elaborate further. He writes:

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[34] On the *frui/uti* distinction, see O. O'Donovan, «Usus and fruitio in Augustine, De Doctrina Christiana I», *Journal of Theological Studies* 33, Pt. 2, (1982), 361–397.

[35] *Doctr. chr.* 1,4 (trans. Robertson, *On Christian Doctrine*, 9).

[36] *Doctr. chr.* 1,3 (trans. Robertson, *On Christian Doctrine*, 9) : «Res ergo aliae sunt, quibus fruendum est, aliae quibus utendum, aliae quae fruuntur et utuntur. Illae quibus fruendum est nos beatos faciunt. Istis quibus utendum est, tendentes ad beatitudinem adiuvamur et quasi adminiculamur, ut ad illas, quae nos beatos faciunt, pervenire atque his inhaerere possimus».

The articulation between signs and things is further developed through the articulation between two basic processes, use and enjoyment. The second distinction is located in fact within the category of things but things used are transitive, like signs, and things enjoyed are intransitive (here we have a category that allows us to oppose things to signs). (Todorov 1982: [1977]: 41)

Todorov's insight is worth considering and can be further developed. Along the same lines, Giovanni Manetti (1987) and Rowan Williams (1989) have reached similar conclusions. They all suggest that things and signs can be distinguished through the scheme *frui/uti*. Prescinding from an ethical and theological consideration of the issue, this division can be understood through the doublet transitive/intransitive. Accordingly, things to be used, as well as signs, are considered as transitive, whereas things to be enjoyed are intransitive. Thus, extending the same logic to the division of things and signs, the former are intransitive while the latter are transitive (Fig. 16):
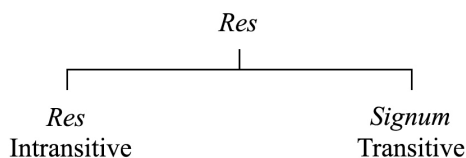
Figure 17. The *res/signum* division in light of their intransitive/transitive character

This is a theme that deserves careful handling. Although we endorse Todorov's suggestion, it is still relevant to assess to what extent his view overlaps with Augustine's own thought. To be sure, Augustine does not cast explicitly the scheme of enjoyment and use in terms of transitivity or intransitivity of the object enjoyed or used, nor does he overtly state that the division *frui/uti* should be superimposed onto the doublet *res/signum*. However, there is abundant evidence that the somewhat unsophisticated distinction of *propter se/propter aliud*, namely, things considered in reference to themselves or in reference to something else, is at the kernel of the division of things and signs and should be maintained. There is a corollary to this that must be added to this picture. If we cast things and signs in these terms, it might seem that the division between the two classes is sharp and unassailable. In reality, the boundary between *res* and *signa* is less rigid than one might be led to think. We return to this contention below.

3.8. Augustine's concept of the sign (*signum*):
nature and definitions

Augustine treats the subject of signs chiefly in Book II of the *De doctrina christiana*, whose title is, revealingly, *De signis* or *Doctrina signorum*. In Book III, he takes up the issue of ambiguous signs (*signa ambigua*) and provides remedies for dealing with ambiguities and obscurities in the interpretation of the Sacred Scriptures. Both Jackson (1969) and Deely (2009) succinctly remark that the theory of signs in the *De doctrina christiana* is slight. Undoubtedly, this is the case, especially if this theory is compared with the exposition of signs in the *De magistro*, which is Augustine's lengthiest treatment on the subject. Although condensed in terms of space, the sign theory of the *De doctrina christiana* is remarkable nonetheless.

Augustine outlines three times the definition of the sign (*signum*). The first two definitions are explicit; the third one is implicit.

First, Augustine formulates a more succinct definition of the sign in Book I, in the context of a discussion of the concept of *res*. Then, he spells it out further with more precision in Book II, in the context of a treatment *ex professo* of signs, with a second definition. Accordingly, let us divide our analysis into two parts. First, we discuss the earliest definition of *signum*, and then we proceed to a detailed exposition of the second formulation. We will discuss the implicit definition of *signum* at last.

3.8.1. *Signum*: the initial formulation

The earliest reference to the notion of *signum* in the text is the following:

> Signa, res […] quae ad significandum aliquid adhibentur.
>
> (Signs are things used to signify something.)[37]

The first formulation of *signum* is broad and generic. Yet it is not quite an explicit definition. Augustine does not qualify what is the mechanism of signifying and how it should be understood. Moreover, this definition does not explore how signs relate to the things signified. This issue, discussed at length in the *De magistro*, is not accurately expounded in the *De doctrina christiana*. This led Todorov (1982 [1977]: 40) to conclude that in the *De doctrina christiana* the concept of *res*, conceived as a referent of the sign, is neglected.

Augustine states that the sign *must* signify another thing. It is precisely in virtue of this distinctive feature that the sign acquires its own status. Although this point may seem obvious to the contemporary reader, it should be not taken for granted. In contrast to things, signs possess a peculiar status. As pointed out

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[37] *Doctr. chr.* 2,2 (trans. Robertson, *On Christian Doctrine*, 8).

earlier, the sign is always a thing, too. The first definition of *signum* reiterates this principle. As compared to *res*, *signum* is a thing of a specific kind because signs are things, and yet at the same time they are also signs of other things. Thus, signs possess a twofold nature: on one hand, signs are things, and on the other hand, they are *propter aliud*, that is, something that stands for something else. Indeed, signs and things differ in one respect – that the sign *must* signify other things, whereas the *res* must not. Elsewhere, Augustine explicitly remarks that a sign is a sign only if it signifies another thing: "Can a sign be a sign unless it signifies something?".[38] To express this point in a more contemporary language, the distinctive feature of the sign lies in its relational nature. The sign is a thing that relates to something different than the sign itself. The relation of the sign to something different than the sign itself is altogether absent in things that are not signs, which Augustine calls *res*. Therefore, such a characteristic is essential to signs only and it serves as a point of bifurcation between the concept of *res* and the concept of *signum*.

There is a corollary to the definition of the sign that is worth pondering. Augustine explicitly and consistently conceives of the concept of *res* in a twofold way:

> Et ideo in hac divisione rerum atque signorum, cum de rebus loquemur, ita loquemur, ut etiamsi earum aliquae adhiberi ad significandum possint, non impediant partitionem, qua prius de rebus, postea de signis disseremus, memoriter que teneamus id nunc in rebus considerandum esse, quod sunt, non quod aliud etiam praeter se ipsas significant.

> (And thus in my distinction between things and signs, when we speak of things, we shall so speak that, although some of them may be used to signify something else, this fact shall not disturb the arrangement we have made to speak of things as such first and of signs later. We should bear in mind that now we are to consider what things are, not what they signify beyond themselves.)[39]

Res can be conceived either in itself or as referring to something else. These are two separate points of view, and one does not impinge on the other. From this vantage point, emphasis can be placed either on the thing in itself – existence – or on the thing as signifying something else – signification.[40] It is clear that the initial definition of the sign outlined above conceives of *res* from the point of view of its signification rather than its existence. This means placing emphasis on the aspect of signification of things, irrespective of a consideration of their own existence.

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[38] *Mag.* 2,3
[39] *Doctr. chr.* 1,6. (trans. Robertson, *On Christian Doctrine*, 8).
[40] J. Deely has argued that «by e*xistence* here we should understand what exists independently of human awareness, not those many objects and facets of objects that exist only in and as a consequence of human awareness and social life» (Deely 2009: 36).

3.8.2. The "classical" definition of *signum*

We shall now discuss Augustine's second definition of *signum*:

> Signum est enim res praeter speciem, quam ingerit sensibus, aliud aliquid ex se faciens in cogitationem venire.

> (A sign is a thing which causes us to think of something beyond the impression the thing itself makes upon the senses.)[41]

Described in Book II, such a definition became canonical. Deely (2009: 37) refers to it as the "tentative first formula for 'sign in general'".[42] This definition is a refinement of the preceding description. It is more complex than the earlier one because it shows a significant degree of sophistication. The two formulations of the concept *signum* share one common feature: both definitions qualify *signum* as *res*. Yet here Augustine offers a more fine-grained definition by encapsulating in the formula a reference to "the mechanism of signifying" (Jackson 1969: 12). Indeed, Augustine not only points out that a sign is "some thing" (*enim res*) that stands for another thing, but he also qualifies the relationship in which the terms stand. Indeed, Augustine points out that the sign entails a twofold process. On the one hand, something is perceived through the senses, and on the other hand, something else – which is different from the impression gained through the sense perception – is conveyed to the mind.

This formula clearly echoes the notion of *signum* that Augustine singled out out in the *De dialectica*. As pointed out earlier (in Chapter 1), for Augustine the sign entails a sensible and an intelligible dimension. This aspect is present in both definitions of the sign outlined in the *De dialectica* as well as in the *De doctrina christiana*. Yet the two works employ a slightly different terminology. While in the *De dialectica* Augustine uses the term "mind", in the *De doctrina christiana* he opts for the word "thought" or "thinking" (*cogitatio*) (Jackson 1969: 12; Todorov 1982 [1977]: 52). This is not a substantial difference because the similarity of the two definitions outweighs the discrepancy.

There is a further general definition of the sign that could be added to the two definitions discussed above. This third definition is implicit and must be inferred from the definition of *signa naturalia* ("natural signs"), which Augustine makes later on. Indeed, Engels (1962: 367) aptly notes that the definition of *signa naturalia* includes within itself an additional definition of the sign, which is more general. Signs are those which:

> praeter se aliud aliquid ex se cognosci faci [unt].

> (makes us aware of something beyond themselves).[43]

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[41] *Doctr. chr.* 2,1. (trans. Robertson, *On Christian Doctrine*, 34).
[42] For Jackson (1969: 11), instead, «both definitions are general».
[43] *Doctr. chr.* 2,2. (trans. Robertson, *On Christian Doctrine*, 34).

If we add this definition to the other two discussed earlier, then we have three definitions of signs in the *De doctrina christiana*. We can recapitulate all three definitions of *signum* discussed so far:

(1) Signs are things used to signify something;
(2) A sign is a thing which causes us to think of something beyond the impression the thing itself makes upon the senses;
(3) A sign makes us aware of something beyond themselves.

Augustine provides four illustrations of signs:

1. The track of an animal taken as a visual cue by an interpreter;
2. The sight of smoke as a sign of fire;
3. The hearing of someone's voice as a sign indicating the emotions that agitate one's heart;
4. The trumpet sound (precisely a "tuba") used as a military sign to indicate to soldiers whether to proceed or retreat on a battlefield.

Interestingly, Augustine's list does not include words as signs yet. This does not mean that Augustine restricts the notion of *signum* to non-linguistic signs. On the contrary, as we will soon see, he extends it to words, which play a preeminent role in the treatise. Yet words are discussed in a subsequent part of the chapter, in conjunction with the division of *signa data*.

The examples of signs listed above are remarkably similar to those outlined in the *De magistro*, where Augustine refers both to the military ensigns (*signa militaria*) as well as to the sight of smoke as a sign of fire, which the *De doctrina christiana* thus reiterates. Notably, the example of smoke signifying fire was commonplace in ancient theories of signification, several illustrations of which are found in the Stoics. Shortly after dividing signs into *naturalia* and *data*, Augustine returns to the list of illustrations and divides the four examples accordingly. We shall return to this point shortly. Let us now dwell on the triadic nature of Augustine's conception of the sign.

3.9. The sign relation as triadic

There have been enlightening discussions of Augustine's theory of signs. The earliest and most prominent accounts on his concept of the sign (with special reference to the *De doctrina christiana*) are the studies of the British historian Robert A. Markus (1957) and the American philosopher Belford D. Jackson (1967; 1969).

Augustine's definition of *signum* is generally regarded as involving a triadic relation. Markus (1957: 71–72) argues that the three terms of this relation are: 1) the object or *significatum*, 2) the thing itself, and 3) the subject. Along the same lines, Jackson (1969: 13) holds that the three terms involved in the sign

relation are 1) "the sign", 2) "what is signified by it", and 3) "the subject to whom the sign indicates something".

It should, however, not sound paradoxical the claim made earlier that the sign is bi-dimensional in its nature and yet that the sign relation is instead triadic. These two features of the sign must be read as complementary rather than as contradictory. In this section, we proceed to a more detailed exposition and critical assessment of the argument that the sign relation in Augustine is triadic. First, we present a critical review of Markus' thesis.

Undoubtedly, Markus' *Augustine on signs* (1957) has been a groundbreaking work because it paved the way to the study of signification and signs in Augustine prescinding from the context of sacramental theology. His essay was reprinted as a part of a larger collection entitled *Signs and Meanings: World and Text in Ancient Christianity* (1996). Notably, to our knowledge, he was not only the first one who emphasized the triadic nature of Augustine's definition of *signum*, but he was also one of the rare scholars who interpreted Augustine's theory of signs in light of Peirce's semiotics.[44] Whereas the first aspect of Markus' study has been widely acknowledged in Augustinian scholarship, the second aspect has not received significant attention. Not only is Markus' take on Augustine's sign theory influenced by an evident Peircean approach, but he also explicitly compared Augustine's division of signs with Peirce's three types of signs (index, icon, and symbol). In fact, Markus' study included an appendix devoted to a terminological comparison between Augustine and Peirce with reference to signs typology. So far as we know, we have no substantial attention given to such a parallel, and because this is a corner of Markus' paper that overtly bridges Augustine's sign theory with contemporary semiotics, it is definitely an aspect worth studying.

As noted earlier, for Markus, three things occur in Augustine's definition of the sign: "A sign […] is an element in a situation in which three terms are related. These we may call the object or *significatum* for which the sign stands, the thing itself, and the subject to whom the sign stands for the object signified" (Markus 1957: 71–72). Markus (1957: 82) aptly claims that this view anticipated Peirce's definition of the sign as "something which stands to somebody for something in some respect or capacity". Markus' model was effective in emphasizing the triadic nature of Augustine's definition of *signum*, yet we have some reservations regarding his interpretation of Peirce. We argue that the effects of Markus' triadic model of the sign relation are not applicable to the comparison between Augustine's and Peirce's conceptions of the sign as outlined in the appendix of Markus' study (Markus 1957: 82–83).

At any rate, Markus provides a comparison that does not overlap with Peirce's view and ultimately conceals Augustine's thought. Indeed, Markus equates the notion of the "subject" or "interpreter" – which is one of the three

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[44] For a discussion of Augustine and Peirce, see T. L. Short, *Peirce's Theory of signs* (2007) especially chapter 1, paragraph 6, «Aristotle, the Stoics, St. Augustine»; see also R. H. Ayers «Language theory and analysis in Augustine», *Scottish Journal of Theology* 29, 1 (1976): 1–12.

terms in Augustine's definition of the sign – with Peirce's notion of the *interpretant*. In the appendix attached to his study, Markus takes Peirce's terminology to be as follows:

> *Sign (Representamen) – Object – Subject (Interpretant)*: This is Peirce's terminology, and it coincides closely with Augustine's. (Markus 1957: 82, italics in original)

Then, he compares the three terms outlined above with Augustine's terminology, which he describes as follows:

> *Sign – Object (Significatum) – Subject*

It is clear that Markus envisages an analogy between Peirce and Augustine in which Peirce's concept of the *interpretant* overlaps with the term *subject* in Augustine. Although Markus (1957: 82) states that "the correlations of terminology noted here are given merely to avoid some of the opportunities for misunderstanding", in point of fact, such a parallel is a potential source of confusion. At any rate, according to Peirce, *interpretant* and *subject* (or interpreter) are not the same thing, as Markus instead seems to suggest. The confusion between *interpreter* and *interpretant* in reading Peirce's semiotic terminology is rather common. Indeed, Peirce used a rather idiosyncratic and highly cryptic jargon, and the two terms, on the surface, may resemble each other. Yet it is essential to avoid such drawbacks. To clarify, the notion of the *interpreter* stands for the sign-receiver, the agent who takes up the interpretation of a sign. To be sure, this notion became much more prominent because of C. Morris' own interpretation of Peirce, rather than Peirce himself. The *interpretant*, on the contrary, is something quite different. Indeed, Peirce defines the term *interpretant* as "a more developed sign" (CP 2.228).[45] Ultimately, the overlapping of the two notions – *interpreter* and *interpretant* – conceals Augustine's thought and distorts Peirce's account of signs. If one wants to maintain the parallel between Augustine and Peirce, then one must take the *interpreter* as the subject in the sign relation rather than the *interpretant* of the sign. It is somewhat curious, however, that throughout Markus' enquiry this pitfall is not evident and the author is consistent in using the term "subject" to refer aptly to the "interpreter". However, the appendix on terminology unhappily betrays such a view.

In addition to the triadic nature of Augustine's definition of the sign, there is a second aspect to be considered. This concerns the parallel Markus envisaged between Augustine's varieties of signs and Peirce's index, icon, and symbol, which is a corollary to the analogy between Peirce and Augustine. We shall return to this point only after having clarified Augustine's divisions of signs, since this is essential to our critical discussion.

As a conclusion of this discussion there is a something to ponder. The triadic nature of the sign relation is not explicit in Augustine. The presence of the

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[45] From a fragment of 1896 (MS 798).

subject-recipient, who *uses* something as a sign must be inferred from the definitions.

3.10. Sources of signs: the division between *signa naturalia* and *signa data*

The second essential branching concerning signs is the division between *signa naturalia* and *signa data*. Augustine defines *signa naturalia* as follows:

> Naturalia sunt, quae sine voluntate atque ullo appetitu significandi praeter se aliquid aliud ex se cognosci faciunt, sicuti est fumus significans ignem. Non enim volens significare id facit, sed rerum expertarum animadversione et notatione cognoscitur ignem subesse, etiam si fumus solus appareat.

> ([Natural signs are] those which, without any desire or intention of signifying, make us aware of something beyond themselves, like smoke which signifies fire. It does this without any will to signify, for even when smoke appears alone, observation and memory of experience with things bring a recognition of an underlying fire.)[46]

Augustine explains the meaning of *signa data* as follows:

> Data vero signa sunt, quae sibi quaeque viventia invicem dant ad demonstrandos, quantum possunt, motus animi sui vel sensa aut intellecta quaelibet. Nec ulla causa est nobis significandi, id est signi dandi, nisi ad depromendum et traiciendum in alterius animum id, quod animo gerit, qui signum dat. Horum igitur signorum genus, quantum ad homines attinet, considerare atque tractare statuimus, quia et signa diuinitus data, quae scripturis sanctis continentur, per homines nobis indicata sunt, qui ea conscripserunt.

> (Given signs are those which living creatures show to one other for the purpose of conveying, in so far as they are able, the emotions of their spirits or something which they have sensed or understood. Nor is there any reason for signifying, or for giving signs, except for bringing forth and transferring to another mind the action of the mind in the person who gives the sign. We propose to consider and to discuss this class of signs in so far as men are concerned with it, for even signs given by God and contained in the Holy Scriptures are of this type also, since they were presented to us by the men who wrote them.)[47]

By bringing forth the class of *signa naturalia*, Augustine refers to an existing debate on natural semiosis that was a commonplace when he was writing and, for this reason, it could not be entirely dismissed. In other words, the reference to the issue of natural signification matters because it is part of the division of

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[46] *Doctr. chr*. 2,2. (trans. Robertson, *On Christian Doctrine*, 34).
[47] *Doctr. chr*. 2,2. (trans. Robertson, *On Christian Doctrine*, 34–35, slightly modified).

signs but this is not the main subject of the treatise. A brief mention of it is therefore sufficient. Although Augustine mentions, in passing, the topic of natural signification as a part of the division of signs, the subject in fact falls outside the scope of his enquiry as not directly relevant (*alia quaestio*) for his enquiry. Augustine makes reference to such a division and then moves on to the real focus of his treatise, that is, the *signa data*. This point is worth pondering. Because he explicitly rules out the subject from his enquiry, a full assessment regarding *signa naturalia* in Augustine cannot be satisfactorily made. The sources for *signa naturalia* should be found elsewhere, and this would entail a separate study that tracks back the debate Augustine was referring to.

Augustine includes among the genus of *signa naturalia* several examples:

(1) the smoke as a sign of fire;
(2) the tracks (*vestigia*) of an animal in the environment;
(3) the face of an angry or a sad man or any other "movement of the soul" that unwillingly manifest itself through the physiognomics.

It is revealing that Augustine's illustrations are not exclusively confined to the realm of natural events or phenomena, but he also refers to what today goes under the rubric of non-verbal communication. Indeed, Augustine includes among natural signs the expressions of an angry or sad man as involuntary cues of one's emotions (anger or sadness) that are perceived and interpreted by an onlooker for whom such cues become meaningful. The examples provided indeed show the reference to an ancient debate on natural semiosis.[48]

Arguably, there is a striking analogy between Augustine and Aristotle with regard to the example of facial expression as natural signs. In the pseudo-Aristotelian treatise *Physiognomica*, Aristotle refers to the "doctrines of the semeiotics of human character" and he writes:

> Gesture and the varieties of facial expression are interpreted by their affinity to different emotions: if, for instance, when disagreeably affected, a man takes on the look which normally characterizes an angry person, irascibility is signified.[49]

Likewise, the illustration of smoke as a sign of fire also shows that Augustine is particularly cognizant of the Stoic theory of meaning. Although the fire is not visible, the common experience established a connection between the visible smoke and the (unseen) fire. Thus, smoke is taken as a sign of fire not in virtue of an arbitrary determination but because of a common recorded experience among mankind. In other words, such a knowledge – the inference that if there

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[48] On the large bibliography available on the tradition of the medics and their view on natural semiosis, see Charlotte L. Stough (1969) *Greek Skepticism. A Study in Epistemology*, Berkley and Los Angeles, University of California Press; H. C. Shands and J. D. Melzer (1975) «Clinical semiotics», *Language Sciences* 38, 21–24.

[49] *Physiognomica* (trans. T. Loveday and E. S. Forster, in *The Works of Aristotle*, Vol. VI, W. D. Ross, ed.) 806b, 29–32.

is smoke then there is fire – is acquired from a preexisting experience. Augustine's example clearly echoes the Stoic "admonitive sign", and he probably shapes the idea of *signum naturale* on the model of the Stoics. The latter distinguished between "Indicative sign" and "Admonitive sign":

> The object of our knowledge we find distinguished as either evident or obscure. That we can know of the things evident is plain, but can we know of the things obscure? Shall this be the case it must be by some sign, by some thing evident, and this sign be either by its own nature a priori and absolutely indicative of that which is obscure, or as one of two appearances formerly remarked by us, in connection and relation one with another, remind us of the other subject of that relation, now accidentally removed from apprehension. Thus, motion would be held to be an indicative sign of the principle of life, and smoke be an admonitive sign of fire, or scar of the wound. (Prentice 1858: 10)

The point of interest is that Augustine retains the idea of the "admonitive sign" and yet he adds to it the factor of volition or intentionality (*voluntas*), which he most likely draws from the field of forensic rhetoric, with which he was acquainted.

Initially – at least until Engel's study (1962) – the division between *signa naturalia* and *signa data* has not been properly understood. Because this branching has been a source of confusion, let us first elucidate Augustine's use of the terms.

Unhappily, there is no equivalent English translation for Augustine's terminology. The first member of the division – *signum naturale* – has been generally translated into English as "natural sign", while the second – *signum datum* – has been a hard nut to crack for the translators. Regrettably, the history of such a term is a quite infelicitous chapter in the history of ideas. *Signum datum* has been generally translated as "conventional sign". Robertson (1958), for instance, in his English translation of Augustine's text, used the term "conventional" as opposed to "natural". Likewise, G. Combès and J. Farges (1949: 238) in their French translation *S. Augustin*, *Le Magistère Chrétien* translated Augustine's terms according to the opposition natural/conventional. Many other scholars translated Augustine's terms along the same lines (Cenacchi 1985: 303). As a result, they bring Augustine's division *naturalia/data* under the larger rubric of natural versus conventional signs. A glance at the literature on semiotics testifies to the same association. Nöth, for instance, in his monumental *Handbook of Semiotics* writes, "Augustine opposed natural and conventional signs" (Nöth 1990: 107). The semiotic literature using the same distinction is abundant (Danesi 2014: 16).[50]

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[50] In semiotics, the distinction between «natural signs» and «given signs» led to the branching of the discipline into two distinct trends: a «semiotics of signification» and a «semiotics of communication». For a good overview on these two general trend lines, see Augusto Ponzio, *La semiotica in Italia*, Bari, Dedalo (1976), particularly the chapter «Comunicazione e significazione», 11–49.

Yet J. Engels (1962) pointed out that such a translation is inaccurate and profoundly misleading. He aptly argued that such a translation is a misconception because it conceals the ratio of Augustine's distinction. Engels realized that Augustine, with the distinction *naturale/datum*, did not intend to follow the motivated/unmotivated opposition, which became traditional from Plato's *Cratylus* onwards. Instead, it was apparent that Augustine's intention was to determine such opposition in virtue of the presence or absence of intentionality in the emission of signs. Engels suggests "given sign" ("donnés") as a more appropriate term for translating Augustine's *signum datum*. He correctly interprets Augustine's division of *signa naturalia* and *signa data* as opposition between non-intentional versus intentional signs. We endorse Engels' translation because it preserves Augustine's original intention. Jackson (1969), Todorov (1977) and Deely (2009) all acquiesce with Engels' conclusion.

In light of the terminological clarification discussed above, we can now proceed with a more detailed discussion of the division. *Signa naturalia* are "those which, without any desire or intention of signifying, make us aware of something beyond themselves, like smoke which signifies fire".[51] Natural signs, thus, signify independently from the will or desire to signify something else (*sine voluntate atque ullo appetitu significandi*). Natural signs are "preformed things of physical nature" and belong to "the analogical network of nature, [and] are preformed things or sensibles which invade the senses. They are not made by man, but rather they are said to be discovered" (Leckie 1938: xxx-xxi).

Signa data, on the contrary, are "those which living creatures show to one other for the purpose of conveying, in so far as they are able, the emotions of their spirits or something which they have sensed or understood".[52] This kind of sign is the product of a voluntary operation.

It is in plain sight that the discriminating factor for discerning the bifurcation of the two kinds of signs is the concept of *voluntas* (intention). This is pivotal for understanding Augustine's division. *Signa naturalia* signify without the intention to signify (*sine voluntate significandi*), thus the will is absent, whereas *signa data* are given intentionally in order to show or express (*ad demostrantum*) the movements of the sign-giver's mind (*motus animi)*, what one feels or thinks. This is why Engels argued against the use of the term "conventional signs" and favored the use of "given signs" because the element of intentionality remains concealed in the opposition natural/conventional.

To sum up, the difference between *signa naturalia* and *signa data* should be understood as an opposition between willed/not willed signs, and thus the concept of will is of cardinal importance. With good reason, the theory of signs of the *De doctrina christiana* has been called a "volitional theory" (Sirridge 2000). We also pointed out that this distinction was misunderstood. The root of this misconception is that the *naturalia/data* division was absorbed in the longlasting discussion of *nomos* and *physis* (convention and nature). The

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[51]   *Doctr. chr*. 2,2. (trans. Robertson, *On Christian Doctrine*, 34).
[52]   *Doctr. chr*. 2,2. (trans. Robertson, *On Christian Doctrine*, 34–35).

nominalism versus conventionalism debate need not concern us here, since the position of Augustine does not fit into this dualism. It suffices to say that the distinction between natural and conventional meaning has a long pedigree and that this was the background against which also Augustine's division was assessed.

3.10.1. The place of *voluntas* in Augustine's theory of signs: sources for Augustine's division

In what follows, we are concerned with three main questions: 1) because the ruling principle underlying the division *naturalia*/*data* is the concept of *voluntas*, an enquiry about the sources of this concept is relevant; 2) whether this is a systematic division or not; 3) whether this is a distinction of types of signs or of sources of signs.

The first node is particularly difficult. Previous studies conducted on Augustine's theory of signs have not identified one extant source that stands out for the division *naturalia/data* but rather a network of interrelated possible sources that are elaborated and synthesized in Augustine's position. Atkinson (1979) regards Aristotle as a plausible source for Augustine because they share several principles regarding the treatment of words. Like Augustine, Aristotle also regards words as signs or symbols. It is worth mentioning Aristotle's passage of the *De interpretatione*, where he discusses words:

> By a noun we mean a sound significant by convention […] The limitation 'by convention' was introduced because nothing is by nature a noun or name – it is only so when it becomes a symbol; inarticulate sounds such as those which brutes produce are significant, yet none of these constitute a noun.[53]

Like Augustine, Aristotle conceives of written words as signs of spoken words. Moreover, both concur that words express the "affection of the soul". Lastly, there is an apparent analogy between Augustine's distinction of *signa naturalia* and *signa data* and Aristotle's distinction between natural and conventional meaning (Atkinson 1979: 22).

Despite the numerous analogies between the two thinkers, unlike Augustine, Aristotle did not include the concept of the will in his treatment of signs. Nevertheless, there is a good reason to believe that Aristotle should not be dismissed as a source for Augustine (Atkinson 1979: 23). And yet, since Aristotle disregarded the notion of will in his theory, the question we seek to answer cannot be satisfactorily determined.

The Stoic theory of meaning identified two classes of beings, namely, the given and the non-given. The Stoics had a threefold division of non-given things: (1) completely non-given, (2) obscure at the time, and (3) obscure by

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[53] *De int*. 2: 16a19–29.

nature (Allen 1935: 16). The example of smoke signifying fire – which Augustine reiterates in his own theory – is catalogued among the second class of non-given things and later understood as "admonitive sign".

3.10.2. The debate on "natural signs" and "given signs"

There has been an interesting debate between Markus and Jackson on the accurate interpretation of Augustine's distinction between *signa naturalia/data*. As promised earlier, it is now time to return to Markus' interpretation and discuss a further node of his argument. This specifically concerns his reading of Augustine's natural/given signs.

On the basis of the triadic structure of the sign discussed above – sign, object, and subject – Markus initially interpreted the distinction of *signa naturalia* and *signa data* "according to whether the relation of dependence is between the sign and the object, or between the sign and the subject" (Markus 1957: 72). His triadic model of the sign is thus modelled in dyads in order to account for the distinction. Viewed from this theoretical perspective, *signa naturalia* entail a dyadic relation between sign and object, whereas *signa data* presuppose a two-term relation between sign and subject. Moreover, drawing on Peirce's semiotic terminology, Markus used the term "symptom" to refer to *signa naturalia* and "symbol" for *signa data*. This is how he describes the issue:

> I shall call this type of sign [*signa naturalia*] 'symptoms'. A 'symptom' […] is anything which 'goes together with' that of which it is taken to be the sign. It may be a 'symptom' in the conventional sense, a 'portent', or 'evidence' in a more general sense; it might depend on its *significatum* as an effect on its cause, as for instance, smoke depends on fire; it might be a part of a total condition as a rash is of measles; or it might give rise to its *significatum*, as a southwesterly wind may both bring and signify rain. (Markus 1957: 73)

> A 'symbol' in his [Peirce's] terminology denotes roughly the same sort of sign as Augustine's *signa data*: 'A symbol is a sign which refers to an object that it denotes by virtue of a law, usually an association of general ideas, which operates to cause the symbol to be interpreted as referring to that object'. (Markus 1957: 82)

We must express some reservations regarding Markus' interpretation of Augustine's distinction. The first point to be addressed is the claim that a symbol for Peirce amounts to a relation between sign and interpreter. In point of fact, both types of sign (index and symbol) have to do with the relation between the sign to its object. Thus, the separation of symptom and symbol "according to whether the relation of dependence is between the sign and the object, or between the sign and the subject" (Markus 1957: 72) does not hold, or at least does not overlap with Peirce's conception.

More importantly, however, Markus proposes, as the basis of the division, a ratio that does not overlap with Augustine's. Markus' interpretation reduces Augustine's natural signs to an argument of causality or real connection between signs and object. We express reservations towards such a parallel. As shown earlier, the crux of the matter is different – namely, whether the source of the sign is natural and involuntary or voluntary. Finally, Markus claims that "what we are dealing with is the distinction between the two fundamentally different types of sign" (Markus 1957: 74). This view is far from being accurate since what we are dealing with in Augustine's division is not a matter or *kind* but an explication of the *source* of signs: "The natural-conventional meaning dualism is a mode of classifying the origins of meanings. To argue from a difference in origin to a difference in kind is mistaken" (Rollin 1976: 94).

Jackson does not comment upon Markus' terminology, although he was critical in relation to Markus' interpretation of *signa data*. Markus' view that in the case of *signa data*, "the thing or event which is the sign is the product of the sign-maker's activity and owes its significance entirely to this" (Markus 1957: 73). Jackson pointed out a fundamental distinction in this regard. He noticed that "significance" and "occurrence" of signs are different issues that must be not blurred. This distinction, he claims, is pivotal to an understanding of Augustine's bifurcation of *signa naturalia* and *data*.

Contra Jackson (1969: 14), who holds that "Augustine does not comment in other places on the place of will in meaning", we contend that, although the distinction of *signa naturalia*/*data* is unique to the *De doctrina christiana*, Augustine did comment on the *voluntas* in signification in other of his writings. As a proof of this, we refer to the discussion we engaged in Chapter 2. Indeed, a hint of the distinction of willed/not willed signs is traceable already in the *De magistro*. This point is endorsed by Toom (2002: 170). Furthermore, in the next chapter we will show that a volitional theory of signs is fundamental to Augustine's writing devoted to the subject of the lie, which he crafted in terms of *false signs*.

3.11. The apprehension of signs among animals

Augustine defines *signa data* (given signs) as "those which living creatures mutually show to one another for the purpose of conveying, in so as far as there are able, the motions of their spirits or something which they have sensed or understood".[54] As said before, those signs are thought of as deliberate and intentionally given. Augustine insists on this point by stating that there is no reason to give a sign except for making manifest and conveying to another mind what one has in his own soul: "Nor is there any other reason for signifying, or for giving signs, except for bringing forth and transferring to another mind the action in the mind in the person who makes the sign".[55] Augustine is parti-

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[54] *Doctr. chr*. 2,2. (trans. Robertson, *On Christian Doctrine*, 34–35).
[55] *Doctr. chr*. 2,2. (trans. Robertson, *On Christian Doctrine*, 35).

cularly concerned with this kind of sign because the "signs given by God" (*signa divinitus data*) go under this rubric. This is so because signs of God are embedded into the sacred scriptures by the men who wrote them. This is why Augustine's treatment of signs is directed towards *signa data* and disregards the other types of sign: the other kinds of sign, although they are to be included in the general subject of *signa* and in the *doctrine* that studies them (*doctrina signorum*), are nonetheless irrelevant for the subject at hand. Augustine is clear and explicit in limiting his enquiry by focusing on the signs of men, and among the latter he focuses chiefly on "given signs" produced by men because the signs given by God and contained in the sacred scriptures were given by means of men who wrote them. This explain Augustine's selectiveness and the restriction of his focus to one particular class of signs.

Both men and animals do employ the *signa data*. This is an aspect that deserves attention. Despite the fact that among *signa data*, words, as we shall see, are the most common signs, this does not mean that *signa data* are an exclusive byproduct of men. On the contrary, there is abundant evidence that Augustine conceived of *signa data* as a kind of sign used among animals other than humans, too. The issue, however, is not treated with precision here, and it shows Augustine's hesitation in taking up an issue that is not directly relevant for his enquiry: "Augustine is uncertain whether or not noises of animals may be classed as deliberate, *signa data*" (Atkinson 1979: 24). Jackson (1969: 13) contends that Augustine's use of terms like *cogitatio* and *animus* may lead to think that *signa data* have an anthropomorphic connotation, yet the reference to "living creatures" he makes in the definition of this type of sign is general enough to include both men and other animals among the subjects who produce and employ such signs.

Throughout Book II, Augustine indeed explicitly refers to the signs of animals, although he rules out a discussion on this subject because it is not immediately relevant for his enquiry (*alia quaestio*):

> Habent etiam bestiae quaedam inter se signa quibus produnt appetitum animi sui. Nam et gallus gallinaceus reperto cibo dat signum vocis gallinae ut accurrat, et columbus gemitu columbam vocat vel ab ea vicissim vocatur, et multa huius-modi animadverti solent. Quae utrum, sicut vultus aut dolentis clamor, sine voluntate significandi sequantur motum animi an vere ad significandum dentur, alia quaestio est et ad rem quae agitur non pertinet. Quam partem ab hoc opere tamquam non necessariam removemus.

> (Animals also have signs which they use among themselves, by means of which they indicate their appetites. For a cock who finds food makes a sign with his voice to the hen so that she runs to him. And the dove calls his mate with a cry or is called by her in turn, and there are many similar examples which may be adduced. Whether these signs, or the expression or cry of a man in pain, express the motion of the spirit without intention of signifying or are truly shown as

signs is not in question here and does not pertain to our discussion, and we remove this division of the subject from this work as superfluous.)[56]

Undoubtedly, the excerpt quoted above is a clear hint for the zoosemiotician because *signa data* "include those actions of signs that are labeled today as 'zoösemiotic', the realm of animal communication with no involvement of words, but with clear intention and aim of communicating" (Deely 2009: 53). With this final note, however, Augustine does not fully satisfy the curiosity of the contemporary zoosemiotician. The passage shows a clear allusion to a long-lasting debate on the subject – the distinction between animals and men on the basis of the use of articulate or inarticulate sound was indeed a commonplace in antiquity – and proves that Augustine is very cognizant of this subject. Yet after having hinted toward the subject of animal signs and the crucial node of whether these signs are intentional or not, he dismisses the issue as not essential.

Yet the issue of whether animals which are not humans are endowed with the *voluntas significandi* (namely, the intention to signify) exerted its fascination upon contemporary scholars, especially semioticians. Indeed, Umberto Eco and his colleagues (R. Lambertini, C. Marmo, A. Tabarroni) conducted research on the subject, the results of which were published in the article "On animal language in the medieval classification of signs" (Eco et al. 1986) and were later republished in different volumes. The point of interest was that the so-called *latratus canis*, namely the dog's barking, as well as other animal pseudo-languages such as "the horse's whinney, the pigeon's coo, the cow's moo, the pig's oink has had an ambiguous position among the medieval theories of language and consequently it is placed in a different position within medieval classifications of signs" (Eco et al. 1986: 63–73).

Eco and colleagues argued that the *latratus canis* was catalogued under different rubrics within the medieval classifications of signs according to the model adopted from time to time, either a model of the sign in general (stemming from the Stoics) or a theory of *voces* (Aristotelian and Hippocratic in origin). This distinction corresponds to two different models of the sign: (1) signs as a particular class of natural events (signs in general) and (2) signs as verbal language signs (*voces*). Within the first line of thought, following the Stoic tradition and the Augustinian synthesis, the dog's barking was thought of as a given sign (*signa data*), whereas according to the second line of thought the *latratus canis* belonged to the realm of natural signs together with the wail of the infirm (Eco et al. 1986: 63–73). This ambiguity in classifying the sounds animals emit is indicative of the revolutionary shift Augustine inaugurated by linking together the theory of language with the theory of the sign. Only this shift allows Augustine to assess the *latratus canis* as an intentional sign, eliminating its connotation as *vox animalia*, which considered the dog's barking as a natural sign.

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[56] *Doctr. chr.* 2,2. (trans. Robertson, *On Christian Doctrine*, 35).

Augustine's uncertainty in treating the subject is revealing. First, "with a stroke of genius, Augustine, places among the *signa data*, without a tremor of a doubt, both the words of the Scriptures", but soon after he mitigates his claim showing a wavering position: "whether these signs, or the expression or cry of a man in pain, express the motion of the spirit without intention of signifying or are truly shown as signs" (Eco et al. 1986: 16).

Summing up Augustine's stance we can state that *signa data* include three orders of signs:

1) Signs of men;
2) Signs of God;
3) Signs of animals.

Signs of men are the real focus of Augustine's treatise. Signs of God are to be found in the Sacred Scriptures, and because the latter are made of written signs used by man, signs of men remain the primary focus of his enquiry. Augustine, however, shows a semiotic awareness of signs among animals. He is very cognizant of the debate on animal language versus men language in antiquity, yet because this is not his primary focus the issue is left aside. In this respect, Augustine shows some hesitation and ambiguity. Are animal signs and the cry of a man in pain ultimately to be placed among "natural signs" or "given signs"? Augustine hints towards a general statement – there are given signs amongst beasts too – yet he does not provide conclusive answers. It remains an open issue that falls outside his treatise whether this kind of sign is emitted intentionally or not. This is an *alia quaestio* for Augustine. The same can be said if one considers an additional case that, although not listed in the Augustinian example, finds a logical place is his classification – that is, words unwittingly uttered by men. This would probably be placed under the rubric of natural signs (Atkinson 1979: 25). It is clear that Augustine's division of *signa naturalia* and *signa data*, as well as the distinction between signs of animals and signs of men, shows some areas of ambiguity and indeterminacy.

3.12. Signs of men and their varieties

As pointed out before, *signa data* are thought of as deliberate and intentionally given signs. Augustine provides numerous examples that illustrate this species of sign. He classifies signs used by men according to the sense to which they belong. In other words, signs are arranged from the standpoint of sensory modality:

(1) Sight. Among *visual signs* Augustine includes:[57]
   a. Nodding;
   b. The motions of the hands;
   c. Gestures and the movements of their members by actors and pantomimes;
   d. Banners and military ensigns and standards (*vexilla*).
   e. Written words as visual signs of spoken words.
(2) Sound. Among the many signs that pertain to the sense of hearing, Augustine lists:
   a. Spoken words;
   b. The sound of the trumpet, the flute, and the harp.
(3) Smell. Among olfactory signs he includes the following:
   a. The odor of the ointment with which Jesus' feet were anointed.
(4) Taste.
   a. The Eucharist.
(5) Touch.
   a. The reference is to the healing of a woman who touches the hem of Jesus' garment.[58]

Among such a great variety of signs, words have the most important place. Indeed, words are thought of as the signs *par excellence*. In contrast to all the other signs, which are scant in number, words are both quantitatively and qualitatively predominant. Not only words are larger in number and widely used as compared to other signs, but they also possess a wider semiotic capacity, as it were: "words have come to be predominant among men for signifying whatever the mind conceives if they wish to communicate it to anyone".[59] Language is thought of as a system of signs and it is set aside from other signs systems because it can be used to signify and describe all other sign systems. This feature is unique to language. No other sign systems, except for language, can be employed to describe all the others systems of signs. For Augustine, this makes language logically superior to the other systems and, in this respect, more powerful.[60]

Linguistic signs (words), in turn, can be fixed as visible signs (written words). The fixation of signs is important because it provides the signs with the

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[57] He considers all these signs as "visible words" (*verba visibilia*). We already pointed out that Augustine in the preface envisaged an analogy between sight and understanding and used it as an argument to answer those who criticise his undertaking.

[58] Among signs which pertain to the other senses (smell, taste and touch), Augustine refers to the following illustrations: «Our Lord gave a sign with the odor of the ointment with which His feet were anointed; and the taste of the sacrament of His body and blood signified what He wished; and when the woman was healed by touching the hem of His garment, something was signified» (*Doc. chr*. 2,3).

[59] *Doc. chr*. 2,3 (trans. Robertson 35–36).

[60] I have treated this subject elsewhere in more details. See, Remo Gramigna (2013), «The place of language among sign systems: Juri Lotman and Émile Benveniste», *Sign Systems Studies* 41(2/3), 339–354.

possibility of duration in time. It is worth pointing out that the distinction of written words as signs of spoken word was already identified by Aristotle.

A further division of signs is between *signa ignota* (unknown signs) and *signa ambigua* (ambiguous signs). Both are thought of as impediments to the understanding of the Scriptures and are the two main reasons that hinder the comprehension of written signs. Moreover, signs are further discerned into *signa proria* (literal signs) and *signa translata* (figurative signs):

> Sunt autem signa uel propria uel translata. Propria dicuntur, cum his rebus significandis adhibentur propter quas sunt instituta, sicut dicimus bouem, cum intellegimus pecus quod omnes nobiscum latinae linguae homines hoc nomine uocant. Translata sunt, cum et ipsae res quas propriis uerbis significamus, ad aliquid aliud significandum usurpantur, sicut dicimus bouem et per has duas syllabas intellegimus pecus quod isto nomine appellari solet, sed rursus per illud pecus intellegimus evangelistam, quem significauit scriptura interpretante apostolo dicens, bouem triturantem non infrenabis.

> (They are called literal when they are used to designate those things on account of which they were instituted; thus we say *bos* [ox] when we mean an animal of a herd because all men are using the Latin language call it by that name just as we do. Figurative signs occur when that thing which we designate by a literal sign is used to signify something else; thus we say "ox" and by that syllable understand the animal which is ordinarily designated by that word, but again by that animal we understand an evangelist, as is signified in the Scripture, according to the interpretation of the Apostle, when it says, "Thou shalt not muzzle the ox that treadeth out the corn".)[61]

Both *signa ignota* (unknown signs) and *signa ambigua* (ambiguous signs) can be taken literally or figuratively, thus, yelding to the following matrix of signs:

(1) *Signa ignota*
     a. *Propria*
     b. *Translata*
(2) *Signa ambigua*
     a. *Propria*
     b. *Translata*

Although T. Todorov (1977) pointed out that there is a lack of coordination in Augustine divisions of *signa*, he formulated a typology of signs based on the interpretation of Augustine's *De doctrina christiana*. Todorov's classification is articulated in five main groups of signs arranged:

(1) According to the mode of transmission: visual/aural;
(2) According to origin and use: natural signs/intentional signs;
(3) According to social function: natural signs/conventional signs;

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[61] *Doctr. chr.* 2,10,15 (trans. Robertson, *On Christian Doctrine*, 35).

(4) According to the nature of the symbolic relation: proper/transposed;

(5) According to the nature of the designatum: sign/thing.

In the conclusive chapter of the present study, we will return to the divisions of signs Augustine outlined and will attempt to provide our own synthesis.

4. *MALA FIDE* COMMUNICATION: MISDIRECTION, MISLEADING AND LYING

Do we imagine that the heart of a man is not an abyss?
Is there, then, a deeper chasm?
Augustine

There is a common theme that runs throughout Augustine's works. Words are ineluctably caught in a perennial contradiction because, on one hand, verbal signs are necessary for the intersubjective expression of thoughts, intentions, and states of mind, and, on the other hand, they are imperfect means of communication. This vision is typically Augustinian. It is along this apparent contradiction – the expression of the inexpressible by means of words – that Augustine develops his view on language and communication.

Although man resorts to signs in order to externalize what he has within himself, the speaker's mind can never be known completely, which makes language an imperfect tool of communication. This imperfection of language is manifested in various ways, from the obscurity and ambiguity inherent in the word, to the will to actually speak what is false, which is a property of a lie.

Both the *De dialectica* and the *De magistro* show that the word can be ambiguous and obscure and, by its very nature, has some limits that may be an obstacle to the function which it fulfils. The power of the word, understood as the ability to convey meanings inter-subjectively intelligible and to affect the hearer, is counterbalanced by the intrinsic limitations that make speech ambiguous, obscure and guileful.

As set out above (in chapter 1), the *De dialectica* reveals that there are two kinds of impediments that may hinder the hearer from the attainment of what is signified by means of words. Obscurities and ambiguities, in all their variations, can impede, interfere with or limit the discernment of truth.

The same issue is taken up, in a slightly different fashion, in the *De doctrina christiana* within the paradigm of the interpretation of written texts. Every culture is expressed through texts and the text *par excellence* for the man of the Middle Ages was undoubtedly the Bible. Symbolism was a fundamental feature of the epoch in which Augustine penned his works. This type of culture starts from the presupposition of the inscrutability of texts. As Le Goff (1993: 46) pointed out, the medieval man is constantly asked to "decipher", and his modus operandi and his mentality are eminently "symbolic". Within this type of cultural milieu, texts are often considered as obscure and ambiguous. Written texts can be interpreted through the application of a very precise method of interpretation, namely, a set of rules that must be learned and passed on from generation to generation. Such rules serve the purpose of providing the guidance system for the correct decoding of texts in the forest of symbols. Indeed, Augustine is very cognizant in formulating the rules for textual interpretation so as to be able to decode the many obscurities and ambiguities found in the Bible.

Furthermore, the *De magistro* shows that, besides obscurities and ambiguities, there exist numerous hindrances that may become the sources of misunderstandings between sign-givers and sign-recipients. As noted in Chapter 3, in the *De magistro* Augustine envisaged a real typology of misunderstandings, which we report, once again, below:

a. One knows what has been said, although the speaker does not know;
b. Lying and deceiving;
c. When something which has been committed to memory and often repeated is expressed by one who is preoccupied with other things (when we sing a hymn);
d. When against our will we make a slip in speech, for in this case, too, signs are expressed which are not of the things which we have in mind.
e. When he who speaks signifies the thing which he is thinking, but for the most part only to himself and certain others, while he does not signify the same thing to the one to whom he speaks nor to some others.

In what follows, we take up an in depth analysis of point b), that is, the issue of lying and deceiving. Our contention is that not only is this subject of great interest for Augustine, but it is of intrinsic importance for a general theory of signs. For this reason, a study of the nature of the lie shoud be included in a work that deals with signs and signification. This is a feature of novelty because no one else, expect for Marcia L. Colish (1978), has underscored this point.

In order to analyse and explicate Augustine's doctrine of the *mendacium* (the lie), we rely principally on two of his works that dealt with the subject: the *De mendacio* and the *Contra mendacium*. This will be the conclusive chapter of the present dissertation. After the discussion and analysis of the problem of the lie in Augustine, we shall make some conclusive remarks on Augustine's theory of signs.

4.1. Truth and falsity of signs

Lie and deceit are very complex phenomena that take place in socio-cultural domains as well as in nature. Guy Durandin, in his study *Les Fondements du Mensonge* (1972), pointed out a parallel between deception and concealment – used either for offensive (prevarication) or defensive (survival) purposes – inasmuch as both these strategies alter the informational capital at the disposal of a living organism. Using a situation (also an unfavourable one) to one's own advantage is a common trait that can be traced both in terms of human relationships as well as those between different species (including between humans and other animals).[1] The *metis* of the Greeks is a good example of such logic.[2]

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[1]   Recent studies have investigated the subject of deception in animal communication with particular focus on the phenomenon of mimicry (Maran 2017; Martinelli 2004; 2007). The bibliography on this subject is vast. Useful indications can be found in R. Mitchell and N.

If it is true that social life depends upon the existence of mutual trust between the members of a society and that "all relationships of people rest upon the precondition that they know something about each other", as Georg Simmel (1906: 441) stated more than a century ago, the lie, thought of as a breakdown of trust and mutual confidence, can undermine the foundations of society itself. Lying is made possible due to the altering of the relationship between the one who puts through the lie and the one to whom it is intended – in regard to the access to knowledge as well as the distribution of power. The privileged position of the liar (both in terms of knowledge and power), as compared to the one to whom the lie is directed alters the relationship between the communicators, compromising its balance in favour of the one who lies.[3]

Concealment and coercion are two dimensions of lying. Moreover, deception can be seen as having an intrinsic connection with violence. This is particularly illuminated in the seminal study of Sissela Bok (2003 [1978]: 27), where deceit and violence are "the two forms of deliberate assault on human beings". The privilege inherent in the lie, as has been described, affects the exercise of power in an identical measure in which the access to knowledge confers supremacy. Therefore, there exists, for Bok, a biunivocal correspondence between deceit and power. The lie manifests an insidious influence through the manipulation of information to the extent that it coerces the choice-making process of the dupe.

The altering of information operates through the manipulation of signs. Lying, in fact, is nothing else but a corollary to the informative use that signs are called to fulfil. It goes without saying that since signs may be used to inform, they can be used as well in order to wilfully *mis*inform or misdirect someone else. Charles Morris has remarked this point:

> Lying is the deliberate use of signs to misinform someone, that is, to produce in someone the belief that certain signs are true which the producer himself believes to be false. The discourse of the liar may be highly convincing. The mere making of false statements is not lying, nor are the forms of misrepresentation lying – as in painting which portrays objects with characteristics which they do not in fact have. Lying is connected with the informative function, regardless of which kinds of signs are used for the purpose of misinforming. (Morris 1955 [1946]: 200)

Thompson (eds.), *Deception. Perspectives on Human and Nonhuman Deceit*, Albany, State University of New York Press, 1986.

[2]   «*Mêtis* is itself a power of cunning and deceit. It operates through disguise. In order to dupe its victim it assumes a form which masks, instead of revealing, its true being. In *mêtis* appearance and reality no longer correspond to one another but stand in contrast, producing an effect of illusion, apate which beguiles the adversary into error and leaves him as bemused by his defeat as by the spells of a magician» (Detienne, Vernant 1991 [1974]: 21).

[3]   In this chapter, we often use the term «liar» in order to refer to the subject who tells a lie. However, it would be more appropriate to use this expression to refer to those who have the habit of lying. For Augustine, the liar – in the proper sense of the word is the one who utters lies for the love of lying and out-of- habit. On this point, see section 4.13.4.

Undoubtedly, signs do provide man with the possibility of transcending the *hic et nunc*, thus creating an avenue for conceiving of possible worlds. The ways of signifying may take different modalities; some are informative and reliable, while others are fictitious, erroneous or mendacious. To put it with John Locke (1836: 281):

> For truth and falsehood [...] is not to be found but where signs are joined or separated, according to the agreement, or the disagreement of the things they stand for. The signs we chiefly use, are either ideas, or words, wherewith we make either mental or verbal propositions. Truth lies in so joining or separating these representatives as the things they stand for do in themselves agree or disagree; and falsehood in the contrary.

It is possible to lie in various ways and through various types of signs, via words and even by means of an eloquent silence (Colish 1978; Mazzeo 1962), or through gestures (Genosko 1995). Yet without signs, a lie would be altogether inconceivable. Hence, the concept of the sign became interlocked with the logic of the lie in the often-quoted formula of Umberto Eco: we should consider, as a sign, everything that can be used in order to lie (Eco 1975).[4] Ultimately, the study on the nature of the lie sheds light on the fundamental semiotic approach that is at the core of such a complex phenomenon and that is bound to the wider issue of information and communication.

Despite Eco's famous definition, however, semioticians, in comparison to philosophers,[5] theologians, psychologists, linguistists, journalists and political scientists, have devoted little attention to the subject of lying and deception, as witnessed by the paucity of semiotic research on the subject, despite a few exceptions (Anderson 1986; Danesi 2014; Eco 1997; Gramigna 2011; 2013; Levin 1974; Levin 1998; Maran 2017; Nöth 1997; Nuessel 2013; Pelc 1992; Sebeok 1975). To be sure, some interpreters did point out the significance for semiotics of Augustine's analysis of lying. Marcia L. Colish (1978: 16), for

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[4] It is worth noting that elsewhere Umberto Eco recanted this formula. In his later writings, he stated that semiotics is not to be conceived as a theory of lying but rather as a theory of how it is possible to say what is not the case: «La semiosi nasce perchè vogliamo parlare circa il mondo. Ma la si capisce se si intende la semiotica come la teoria – non della menzogna (e correggo una mia definizione del Trattato di semiotica generale) – bensì di come si possa dire ciò che non è il caso, o comunque ciò di cui non si può dire se sia il caso o no)» (Eco 1997: 37).

[5] The literature on the subject from the standpoint of analytical philosophy, philosophy of language, and linguisticts is vast. For a recent account on the subject, see Jennifer M. Saul, *Lying, Misleading, and What is Said. An Exploration in Philosophy of Language and Ethics* (Oxford, Oxford University Press, 2012). See also James E. Mahon «The definition of lying and deception», in *Standford Encyclopedia of Philosophy*, Standford, Standford University, 2008; A. Isenberg, «Deontology and the ethics of lying», *Philosophy and Phenomenological Research*, 24/4, 1964, 463–480; Frederick A. Siegler, «Lying», *American Philosophical Quarterly*, 3, 1966, 128–136; L. Coleman, P. Kay «Prototype semantics: the English word lie», *Language* 57/1, 1981, 26–44; F. D'Agostini, *Menzogna* (Torino: Bollati Boringhieri, 2012).

instance, held that the *De mendacio* and the *Contra mendacium* "contain Augustine's most detailed analysis of the semiotic significance and ethical import of lying". Augustine's semiotic import for what concerns his doctrine of the lie is, thus, acknowledged and yet left unattended. The ambition of the present chapter is, therefore, to fill in such gap.

The lie is often associated with deception and blurs with many other phenomena (simulation, feigning, hypocrisy, disguise, error, non-serious talk, and many others) that, despite sharing some similarities, must be distinct. A universally accepted definition of the lie does not yet exist and, at present, there is "no independent and objective means for identifying certain messages as lies or truth" (Bavelas et al. 1990: 175).

The field of study that focuses on lying and deception is fascinating as it is vast and complex. In order to delimit the province of our enquiry, the present chapter will focus all its efforts on what can be seen as Augustine's thought on the subject.

It is in plain sight, however, that the topic of lying, of its ethics, its lawfulness or wrongfulness, has drawn the commitment of various thinkers starting from the classical epoch until the present, formulating, on one hand, rigid and absolutist positions that prohibited any kind of mendacity, and, on the other, relatively flexible positions that admitted, exceptionally, the recourse to it.[6] In the Greek world, for instance, Aristotle was among those condemning the lie as mean and guilty, while Plato argued that sometimes one was allowed to lie to public magistrates to prevent evil in the interest of the polis. Among the Romans, despite there being a unanimous condemnation of lies, there were those who, like Cicero and Quintilian, felt it is right to resort to an "honest lie" (Dorszynski 1948: 15).

The discussion of this subject in the classical world is based mainly on two fundamental approaches: the first one conceives of the lie as a part of the general category of falsehood, which could concern either speaking or acting (Plato is one of the leaders of this first front). In this sense, both lie and error are treated as a part of the concept of falsehood. In fact, the word *pseudos,* in Greek, refers to "false" as either an error or a lie. The latter is conceived by the Greeks "mainly as an objective phenomenon, framed within the broad issue of non-truth" (Tagliapietra 2001: 189). The second approach, instead, typical of the position of the Stoics, is based on the intentionality of lies, a crucial feature that divorces lying from other types of false statements (Fleming 1993: 41). The same discussion that Augustine devoted to this subject, as we shall see, is based on the distinction between objective-falseness (an error) and subjective-falseness (a lie).

It is not surprising that a subject so ethically loaded found a privileged place among Catholic writers. During the Middle Ages, the Catholic-thought

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[6]   For an interdisciplinary overview on the subject of lying, see J. Vincent Marrelli, *Truthfulness, Deception, Lying across Cultures and Disciplines* (Napoli, Edizioni Scientifiche Italiane, 2004).

attributed so much importance to this issue that it raised awkward questions such as those that deal with the lawfulness of voluntarily asserting what is false in order to save a life or in order to make the life of a sick person less burdensome.

More than fifteen hundred years ago, Augustine raised the *magna quaestio* of the lie[7] and became a pioneer in this field. He provided the first systematic study on the lie, an analysis that will remain the *terminus a quo* – a place from which many other authors have taken their starting point and which was something to use as a comparison in the following centuries.[8]

Andrea Oddone has identified a twofold tendency among the Fathers of the Church in respect to the ethics of the lie: "moderate" and "intransigent" (Oddone 1931: 268). Augustine expressed a firm position concerning the morality of the lie: there should not be lying under any circumstances,[9] insofar as anyone who lies commits iniquity.[10] Due to this position, he was, with good reason, included among those who followed an "intransigent" tendency.

While the authority of the intransigent Augustinian position remained un-disputed, there were – at the time when he was writing – also partially discordant trends within Catholicism, which admitted, in particular cases and in specific circumstances, that it was permissible to lie. Notwithstanding the principle that the lie should be generally condemned, those who fall into the "moderate" trend allowed that, in some cases and under exceptional circum-stances, it would have been permissible to lie. On the less intransigent front, we can include, first of all, John Cassian, who advocated for the lawfulness of the lie, and St. Clement of Alexandria (in his *Stromata*), who, despite considering that the perfects never lie, admitted, by way of exception, an occasional and "therapeutic" deception, as the one to which doctors sometimes resort to in order to deceive their patients (Ramsey 1985: 517). To the aforementioned names should also be added St. John Chrysostom (in his *De Sacerdotio*), John Cassian, who admitted the recourse to a lie in case of absolute necessity in order to prevent a great evil (Dorszynski 1948: 17), Origin (in his *Stromatum*), St. Hilary of Poitiers (in his *Tractatus super Psalmos*) and John Climacus (in his *Scala Paradisi*).

Ultimately, the authority of Augustine did not prevent opening a debate among Catholic writers about the morality and ethics of the lie. In the remainder

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[7]   *Mend.* 1,1 (CSEL 41, 413): «Magna quaestio est de mendacio».

[8]   As Carla Casagrande and Silvana Vecchio (1987: 254) highlighted, «non è possibile parlare di menzogna nella cultura medievale al di fuori delle coordinate fissate da Agostino. Qualunque analisi intorno a questo tema, a qualunque livello si ponga, non solo presuppone inevitabilmente la riflessione agostiniana, ma si muove completamente all'interno dei parametri stabiliti una volta per tutte dal vescovo di Ippona». On the influence of Augustine's thought on later thinkers, see Rosier-Catach, «Les développements médiévaux de la théorie augustinienne du mensonge», *Hermès* 15–16 (1995), 87–99.

[9]   *Mend.* 21,42 (CSEL 41, 463): «Elucet itaque discussis omnibus nihil aliud illa testimonia scripturarum monere nisi nunquam esse omnino mentiendum».

[10] *Doc. chr.* 1,36: «Omnis autem qui mentitur, inique facit, et si cuiquam videtur utile aliquando esse mendacium, potest videri utilem aliquando esse iniquitatem».

of this chapter, it will be argued that exactly this context in which Augustine penned his *De mendacio* played a significant role in tailoring the definition of the lie that he subscribed to and that was passed on to us as being the true Augustinian definition.

4.2. Augustine's doctrine of the *mendacium*[11]

The lie (*mendacium*), with Augustine, becomes the object of a systematic analysis. He treats it *ex professo*, devoting two treatises to this subject: the *De mendacio* and the *Contra mendacium*.

The first tract was penned shortly before Augustine was appointed bishop of Hippo (395 AD), and it is an enquiry into the nature of mendacity in which he raises the question of the lawfulness of the lie, discusses some biblical passages related to the theme, and finally proposes a typology of eight species of lies (Muldowney 1952: 47).

We can list the key points of this work as follows:

1. What a lie is;
2. What its iniquity consists of;
3. What are the cases and the circumstances in which it is recommended, permitted or forbidden to lie;
4. What are the moral degrees of the lie (Augustine's eight-fold division of lies is ranked in order of decreasing seriousness).

The Bishop of Hippo returned to the same issue almost a quarter of a century later with a second work, the *Contra mendacium*, penned in 420 AD. Addressed to Consentius, a bishop of Hispanic origin with whom Augustine had undertaken an assiduous correspondence, the book raises the delicate question of lying to convert someone else. Indeed, in one of his letters, Consentius had expressly asked Augustine whether it were permissible for a Catholic Christian to pass off as an adept of Priscillian in order to infiltrate the Priscillianists themselves, which, at the time, were riddled with lies and deception.[12] In the *Retractationes*, one can infer the reason that prompted Augustine to address the problem:

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[11] A bibliography on the position of Augustine in respect to the subject of the lie is very vast. For a first overview on the subject, useful information can be found in the commented translation in Italian of Augustine's *De mendacio* by M. Bettetini: Agostino, *Sulla bugia*, (ed.) Maria Bettetini, Rusconi, Milano 1994. See also A. Tagliapietra, *Filosofia della bugia. Figure della menzogna nella storia del pensiero occidentale*, Momdadori, Milano 2001, 244–262. For an historical overview on the subject of the lie, from antiquity to modernity, see Gregory Müller, *Die Wahrhaftigkeitspflicht und die Problematik der Lüge*, Freiburg, Verlag Herder, 1962. Very useful are also the studies conducted by Feehan (1988; 1990; 1991) as well as Chisholm and Feehan (1977).

[12] For background on the Priscillianists, see Henry Chadwick, *Priscillian of Avila: The Occult and the Charismatic in the Early Church*, Oxford, Oxford University Press 1976.

At that time also, I wrote a book against lying. The purpose of this work was to track down the Priscillianist heretics who think that their heresy ought to be concealed, not only by denying, but also by lying. It seemed to certain Catholics, that they ought to pretend that they were Priscillianists in order to uncover their artifices. I composed this book to prevent this from being done.[13]

Questioning whether it is permissible to lie in the religious sphere (which, as we will see, is the most pernicious type of lie in Augustine's 8-fold gradation), the second opusculum has a more specific and limited object of study than the first treatise, which is more general. In the words of Boniface Ramsey (1985: 509), the *Contra mendacium* adds little to the doctrine of the earlier book, whereas according to Michel-Ange Gomez (1929: 5), the two works complement each other: the *De mendacio* is more comprehensive in its theoretical exposition, whereas the *Contra mendacium* exposes more practical aspects. The latter is an overt assault upon the lie, while the *De mendacio* discusses the process of research.[14]

Augustine himself, after the completion of his tracts, highlights the difference between the two treatises in the first book of the *Retractationes*, where, reviewing his previous works, he admits that the *De mendacio* seemed to him obscure, intricate and all together troublesome (*obscurus et anfractuosus et omnio molestus*).[15] For this reason, he had explicitly requested to remove the book from the collection of his works, but his request was not granted. Only later, after composing the *Contra mendacium*, did Augustine realize that the *De mendacio* comprised other important aspects that were absent in the other, for which reason he decided to retain his initial work.[16]

Unquestionably, *De mendacio* is a complex text and difficult to read, and the intricacy of the subject, which Augustine compares to the anfractuosity of a cavern – at one and the same time obscure and full of twists and turns[17] – tends to be a recurring aspect in his works. Although the two treatises treat the lie *ex professo*, Augustine's reflection on the subject is not limited to the two works cited and is frequently taken up in others: from the *Soliloquia*, to the *Enchiridion* and, as pointed out earlier (in Chapter 2), the *De magistro*, through the dispute with St. Jerome,[18] up to the *De trinitate*. Hereinafter, this chapter will illustrate the elements of continuity and rupture that are found in the doctrine of the *mendacium* in Augustine.

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[13]   *Retr.* 2,86. (trans. Sister M. Inez Bogan, *The Retractations*, 254–255).
[14]   *Retr.* 1,26.
[15]   *Retr.* 1,26.
[16]   *Retr.* 1,26.
[17]   *Mend.* 1,1 (CSEL 41, 413): «Latebrosa est enim nimis et quibusdam quasi cavernosis anfractibus saepe intentionem».
[18]   On the controversy between Augustine and Jerome cf. A. Oddone, SJ, «La dottrina di Sant'Agostino sulla menzogna e la controversia con San Girolamo», *Rivista di Filosofia neo-Scolastica* 23 (1931), 264–285.

4.3. Lying, speech, and the communication breakdown

The lie is, for Augustine, an act of speech and, as such, is catalogued amongst the "sins of the tongue" (Casagrande, Vecchio 1987). In order to examine Augustine's position on the nature of the lie in a clear and exhaustive way, we will briefly review, at the outset, the theory of language he subscribed to, inasmuch as lie and speech are inextricably intertwined one to the other. This serves as a basis for the discussion that follows.

The nexus between speech and lie (or, in a more general sense, between signs, lying, and the process of signification) justifies the undertaking of this subject within the present work that is concerned with the study of sign theory and signification in Augustine. These two subjects (signification and lying), we contend, are totally interwoven and should be treated in tandem because one presupposes the other. The lie, conceived both as a theoretical topic on its own as well as a very practical problem, is a good example of how to employ a semiotic in order to deal with urgent and very practical matters.[19]

Indeed, speech and lying are inextricably welded to information and signification. The lie is manifested through speech; thus, the use of language is an essential prerequisite for the lie to manifest itself. The issue of whether a non-verbal lie is altogether conceivable – that is, the phenomenon of simulation and hypocrisy – will be briefly discussed in due course. For the time being, we shall be concerned, however, with the nature of the lie seen as a speech act exclusively.

As shown by recent studies (Bettetini 2004: 7), the word (*verbum*), throughout the entirety of Augustine's work, is elevated to a role of excellence, and among the various types of signs available to man, it is viewed as the most important. As noted before (in Chapter 1), in the *De dialectica* Augustine defined the word as "a sign of any sort of thing. It is spoken by a speaker and can be understood by a hearer", and the sign, in turn, is defined as "something that is itself sensed and which indicates something beyond itself to the mind".[20] Augustine identified four elements of the sign (*verbum*, *dicibile*, *dictio* and *res*) and exposed the very limits of language summarizing the obscurity and ambiguity of the word. He considered that, prescinding from speech, there is something in the mind that is expressed by the word and which, in turn, is grasped through it by those who understand it (Jackson 1975: 127); this element is called the *dicibile*.

In the *De trinitate*, the word serves the function of communicating and externalizing ideas and thoughts,[21] and in the *De magistro* speaking of the theme of teaching (*docere*) Augustine dwells at length upon the function of speech. As we saw before (in Chapter 2), in the *De magistro* Augustine envisaged speaking as *significare loquentis mentem* (to express the thought of the speaker) so that it

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[19] It suffices to notice the revival of the issue of lying to others as reflected in the contemporary debate on the so called "fake news" to support such a claim.

[20] *Dial.* 5. (trans. Jackson, *De dialectica*, 87).

[21] *Trin.* 15, 11–20.

can be grasped by the hearer. The sensibility towards the communicative dimension is one of the characteristic features of Augustine's picture of language (Ruef 1981: 86).

However, words are ineluctably caught in a perennial contradiction because, although they are necessary for the intersubjective expression of thoughts, intentions, and states of mind, verbal signs nonetheless remain imperfect means of communication. The communicative function which is inherent in speech can be perverted through the lie.

Ultimately, although Augustine points out the limits of speech and the imperfection of words, he nonetheless acknowledges the necessity of signs. Notwithstanding the imperfect nature of language as tool for communication between sentient beings and acquisition of knowledge, this alone does not grant for the altering of its function in order to pursue evil ends. Since men lack the ability to look in one another's minds, the institution of language was established to fill in this gap by providing men with the faculty of speaking one to another.

Notice that Augustine distinguished the communication that goes on between men and God from communication amongst men only. Whereas the former does not require sensible signs (for God is *cordis inspector*), communication amongst men does need the resort to signs as vehicles of thoughts:

> When a statement is made to God alone, then only in the heart is truth involved; but, when the testimony is given to man, then the truth must be expressed by the mouth of the body, because man cannot see the heart.[22]

Essentially, the lie is a breach of faith. For Augustine, lying is sinful to the extent that the liar breaks the rules of communication between men, and, thus, it alters the natural purpose that language possesses – that is, the communication of truthful knowledge (each speaker saying something according to his own mind). As Harald Weinrich pointed out, "language should reveal thought, not hide it. At stake is the signifying function of language, its most elementary, consequently most fundamental, achievement. Lying perverts it" (Weinrich 2005: 9).

As it will become apparent from the analysis that follows, the essence of the lie is the incongruence between thought and speech, which is deliberate and conscious. This is the crux of the matter. Viewed through this prism, false speech or a *false sign* is a breakdown of communication, because it alters the original and natural purpose of language, namely, the sincere communication of one's thoughts to another by means of speech. As Edwin David Craun (1997: 43) wrote:

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[22] Mary Sarah Muldowney, S. S. J., trans., «Lying», in *Saint Augustine. Treatises on Various Subjects* (The Fathers of the Church. A new translation, Vol. 16) ed. Roy J. Deferrari (New York: Fathers of the Church, third reprint 1981, 106 vols.), *Mend.* 27,36.

To pervert words by using them to convey what is not in the mind, then, is to commit a fundamental injustice against other humans and against the natural order as reason perceives it. To lie is to violate the communion of mind which speech makes possible.

To sum up, lying is an infraction of speech, for its natural purpose is the truthful signification of one's thoughts and ideas to another. False speech, as we saw above, is a distortion of this function and, as such, must be avoided. This is epitomized in the following excerpt from the *Enchiridion*:

> Surely words have therefore been appointed, not as means whereby men may deceive each other, but as means whereby each one may convey his own thoughts to another's knowledge. Therefore to use words for the purpose of deceit, not for what they were appointed, is a fault.[23]

Viewed from such a vantage point, the communicative context envisaged by Augustine, as "rigid" as it might seem, is governed by a rule requiring truth-telling. It is the breaking of this convention that confers to the lie its sinful character.

4.4. Augustine's definition of the lie and the role of the *falsa significatio*

The great majority of interpreters acknowledged that the authority of Augustine on the subject of lying remains undisputed and that his definition is often considered as the quintessential one (Vecchio 2000: 848).

To begin with, it must be observed that there is a close parallelism between the definitions of the lie given in the *De mendacio* and in the *Contra mendacium*, respectively:

Definition 1:

> Quapropter enuntiationem falsam cum voluntate ad fallendum prolatam manifestum est esse mendacium.

> (It is clear, then, that a lie is a false statement made with the desire to deceive.)[24]

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[23] *Ench.*7,22 (trans. Parker and Rivington, *Enchiridion to Laurentius on Faith, Hope and Charity*, 101): «Et utique verba propterea sunt instituta non per quae invicem se homines fallant sed per quae in alterius quisque notitiam cogitationes suas perferat. Verbis ergo uti ad fallaciam, non ad quod instituta sunt, peccatum est».

[24] *Mend.* 4,5 (CSLE 41, 419, trans. Muldowney, *On Lying*, 60).

Definition 2:

Mendacium est quippe falsa significatio cum voluntate fallendi.

(A lie is a false signification told with the desire to deceive.)[25]

What is outlined in the *Contra mendacium* is generally regarded as the "classic" Augustinian definition (Lanahan 1972: 18), the most frequent and clear-cut of all Augustinian definitions of the lie (Gomez 1929: 27). This definition is based on what can be traced to two characteristics of the lie:

(i) the *falsa significatio*;

(ii) the *voluntas fallendi*.

These two characteristics will be first treated individually and, in a second moment, the question of what is the place of each of these features in the essential definition of the lie will be attended to.

4.5. Objective and subjective falseness

How should the *falsa significatio* (false signification), which holds such an importance that it recurs in both definitions, be interpreted? One may, in fact, wonder whether the falseness inherent in a lie is to be considered as an objective (factual) or subjective phenomenon.

The meaning of falsity in Augustine is complex and multifaceted. As we will see in what follows, n the *Soliloquia* Augustine tackles this subject from an ontological viewpoint. In his treatment of the lie, however, he seems to have a very different perspective in mind. The falseness of a statement could refer to the mismatch between what was said by the speaker and what is the case, or, in other words, between what is said and the state of affairs. No one could object, however, that there is at least another meaning of falseness, which can be termed as subjective falseness. Rather than the mismatch between words and state of affairs, subjective falseness is characterized by the incongruity between thought and speech – what one thinks, assumes, or believes and what one actually expresses by means of words. This aspect characterizes the lie as a subjective falsity. Paul J. Griffith interprets Augustine's "false signification" as duplicity or double-heartedness. He takes the following meaning of the concept of *falsa significatio* to be the most accurate:

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[25] Mary Sarah Muldowney, S. S. J., trans., «Against Lying», in *Saint Augustine. Treatises on Various Subjects* (The Fathers of the Church. A new translation, Vol. 16) ed. Roy J. Deferrari (New York: Fathers of the Church, third reprint 1981, 106 vols.), *C. mend.* 12,26.

> False signification (*falsa significatio*) here means duplicitous signification. Augustine does sometimes use "false" as shorthand for "duplicitous" […] The confusion between "false in itself" and "false in the mind of the speaker" is, however, common in both English and Latin, and often causes trouble in discussions of lying. (Griffiths 2004: 27)

Several authors emphasized the twofold interpretation of falseness – objective and subjective – including St. Bonaventure who pointed out that a statement can be compared both to the intention of the speaker and to the thing signified. Based on this distinction, he identified a twofold meaning of truth or falsehood: in respect to the thing signified a word is said to be true (*verus*), whereas in respect to the intention of the speaker a word is said to be truthful (*verax*). In the same way, a false statement (*falsus*) is that in which there is not conformity between the word and the thing signified, and a word is mendacious or misleading (*mendax*) when there is not conformity between the word and the intention of speaker (Lanahan 1972: 54).

It is falseness taken in its subjective meaning that is to be considered in the formal definition of the lie that Augustine subscribed to. The one who lies is said to be lying not because he says something contrary of what is *de facto* true, but because he says the contrary of what he knows or believes to be true. It is important to stress that this type of falseness is formal, namely, it is intentional and conscious (Gomez 1929: 269). This difference is pivotal in Augustine's picture of the lie.

4.6. Images, likeness, and false resemblances in the *Soliloquia*

The *Soliloquia* is an early dialogue composed in 386–387 A.D. and it takes the form of an inner soliloquy between Augustine and Ratio (or Reason).[26] In common with the *De magistro*, the subject of this dialogue is very intricate, and its form is full of twists and turns. Our interest lies in the disquisition about the problem of falsity and likeness because these issues equate well with the general subject of the present chapter.

In the second book of the *Soliloquia* Augustine engages in a discussion on the concept of falsity, its nature and characteristics, as well as a classification of types of perceptual errors. What is falsity (*falsum*) and how should this concept be defined? Throughout the *Soliloquia*, Augustine and Reason put forth, analyse, and discuss numerous definitions of falsity in a tentative manner. Four

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[26] The term "soliloquy" is used for the first time by Augustine. The meaning of this word is explained throughout the dialogue: "As we alone take part, I wish the work to be called and entitled 'Soliloquies', a new and harsh name perhaps, but quite suitable to describe what we are doing. There is no better way of seeking truth than by the method of question and answer".

definitions of falsity, presented and discussed one after the other, could be singled out in this work.

To start with, falsity is defined as "that which is other than it seems" (*quod aliter sese habet quam videtur*).[27] This definition presupposes perception. In other words, it implies the subject who perceives what is sensed as false. Thus, falsity is not in the things themselves but depends upon the perception of a subject – it is dependent upon sense perception.[28] Error, in turn, occurs when the subject assents to a perceived falsity:

> *R*. – Non igitur est in rebus falsitas, sed in sensu: non autem fallitur qui falsis non assentitur.

> (*R*. – There is, then, no falsity in things but only in our senses. But no one is deceived who does not assent to what is false.)[29]

However, without perception there would not be falsity altogether. For this reason, the first definition of *falsum* is easily disputable.

In the second definition what is true is conceived as that which is, and what is false, in turn, is defined as that which is not. The objection to this conception is that, given this definition, nothing can be said to be false anymore because anything that is, is true. Augustine, here, admits being lost in such an intricate and obscure subject and he is admittedly very perplexed.

The third attempt to define falsity revolves around the idea of falsity thought of as verisimilitude (*similitudines veri*). The kernel of verisimilitude is to bear some resemblance to the truth. From this vantage point, false is defined as "what is not as it seems" (*quam quod non ita est ut videtur*).[30]

At this juncture, the nature of falsity intertwines with the concept of likeness, similitude or resemblance. Something is in fact false because it resembles what is true:

> *R*. – Nam certe quod oculi vident, non dicitur falsum, nisi habeat aliquam similitudinem veri.

> (*R*. – What the eyes see is not said to be false unless it has some resemblance to the truth.)[31]

The illustrations provided to expound the idea of false as an effect of verisimilitude are insightful:[32]

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[27] *Sol*. II,3,3 (trans. Burleigh, *The Soliloquies*, 43). This definition of falsity could also be translated as «that which is other than it is perceived to be». This translation facilitates the comparison with the third definition of falsity («what is not as it seems») which is almost identical to the first one.

[28] *Sol*. II,3,3.

[29] *Sol*. II,3,3 (trans. Burleigh, *The Soliloquies*, 43).

[30] *Sol*. II,6,10. (trans. Burleigh, *The Soliloquies*, 46).

[31] *Sol*. II,6,10. (trans. Burleigh, *The Soliloquies*, 46).

[32] *Sol*. II,4,10.

- Dreams (the images seen by a dreamer in a dreamscape – as for instance the image of man – are not real. The image of a man in a dream is false because it resembles a real man, but actually is not a man);
- Perceptual errors (if a man, in his waking state, sees a horse and erroneously takes it to be a man, the man is deceived by the false appearance of something that he has perceived as alike to the shape of a man);
- Painted images (the image of a tree portrayed in a painting is false on the same ground of the examples described above. The tree portrayed in a painting is a likeness of a real tree, hence, for this reason it is false tree);
- Mirror reflections (along the same lines, the image of a man's face reflected in a mirror is thought of as a false face);
- False motions (the example describes the false movements of towers as seen by navigators);
- The image of a broken oar immersed in water;
- Two twins resembling each other;
- Two eggs;
- Different seals stamped with one signet-ring.

All these illustrations of likeness are based on visual perception. Reason states that "as regards visible things it is resemblance that is the mother of falsity".[33] Thus, the connection between likeness and falsity is reiterated.

These instances of visible things that resemble other things are divided into two larger classes:

(i)   Resemblance between things that are equal or equivalent (*aequales*);
(ii)   Resemblance between things that are not equal but inferior (*deteriores*) one in respect to the other.

Equal things are those things which both resemble each other. In other words, there is a biunivocal relation of likeness between the two things. This first class encompasses examples such as two twins or the impressions of a signet-ring.

The second class includes things that are not equally resemblant one to the other. In other words, the resemblance is between something inferior that resembles something superior (or better). In this respect, the relation of likeness is univocal (something worse wants to imitate something better). The face of a man reflected in a mirror falls into this class. It is the image reflected in the mirror (the inferior thing) that tends to be like the face of the man who projects his own image into the mirror, and not vice versa. Philip Cary pointed out that these two classes of resemblances (resemblance between equals and

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[33]   *Sol*. II,6,10. (trans. Burleigh, *The Soliloquies*, 46): «Similitudo igitur rerum quae ad oculos pertinet, mater est falsitatis».

resemblance between not equals) are respectively "horizontal" and "vertical", "for the one is a similarity between equals and the other between higher and lower things" (Cary 2008: 62).

The class of likeness between an inferior thing that resembles a better one is, in turn, divided into two subclasses. One subclass refers to "misreadings of what the soul receives" (*in eo quod anima patitur*), and the other subclass refers to "error in visual perception" (*iis rebus quae videtur*) (Stock 2010: 192).[34] The likeness that occur as the "misreadings of what the soul receives" is in turn divided into two further species: perceptual errors of what the senses perceive (*in sensu patitur*) and what the mind receives by itself (*apud se ipsam ex eo quod accepit a sensibus*).[35] An example of perceptual errors of what the senses perceive is the false movement of the towers as perceived by a sailor. Illustrations of false images that the mind receives by itself are the visions of dreamers and madmen.

Moreover, the subclass of error in visual perception (*iis rebus quae videntur*) is divided into two subspecies: resemblances of visible things expressed or represented either by nature (*a natura…finguntur*), or by living creatures (*animantibus…finguntur*).[36] Resemblances of visible things brought about by nature are of two types: begetting (*gignendo*) and reflection (*resultando*). An example of inferior resemblance naturally caused by begetting is when parents have children who resemble them.[37] An illustration of the type of inferior natural resemblance caused by reflection is the already mentioned mirror image.[38] Another example of these types is the "shadows of bodies which closely resemble bodies, and may be called false bodies".[39]

Among the resemblances of visible things brought up by living creatures, manmade pictures as well as "figments of demons" are listed.

To sum up, several division were made to explicate the various ramifications of the concept of falsity:

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[34] *Sol.* II,6,11.

[35] *Sol.* II,6,11.

[36] *Sol.* II,6,11.

[37] *Sol.* II,6,11: «[…] gignendo, cum parentibus similes nascuntur».

[38] *Sol.* II,6,11: «[…] resultando, ut de speculis cuiuscemodi».

[39] *Sol.* II,6,11(trans. Burleigh, *The Soliloquies*, 47): «Umbrae autem corporum, quia non nimis ab re abest ut corporibus similes et quasi falsa corpora dicantur, nec ad oculorum iudicium pertinere negandae sunt; in illo eas genere poni placet, quod resultando a natura fit».

Falsity as an effect of verisimilitude:

(i) Resemblance between things that are equal (e.g. twins, impressions of a signet-ring);

   a. Misreadings of what the soul receives (*in eo quod anima patitur*);

      i. Perceptual errors of what the senses perceive (*in sensu patitur*); (e.g. false movements of the towers perceived by a sailor);

      ii. What the mind receives by itself (*apud se ipsam ex eo quod accepit a sensibus*) (e.g. visions of dreamers and madmen);

   b. Error in visual perception (*iis rebus quae videtur*);

      i. Naturally caused inferior resemblance (*a natura finguntur*);

         1. Caused by begetting (*gignendo*) (e.g. parents and children who resemble them);

         2. Caused by reflection (*resultando*) (e.g. mirror reflections, shadows of bodies);

      ii. Resemblances brought up by living creatures (e.g. pictures, figments of demons).

(ii) Resemblance between inferior things (mirror reflections).

Up to this point, the dialogue revolved around the realm of visible things. However, the phenomenon of likeness is not limited to the visual sensorium. Classes of resemblances in fact can be singled out also in connection to other human senses:

1. Hearing:
   a. "We hear a voice but do not see the speaker, and think it is someone else whose voice resembles the one we hear";[40]
   b. The echo is an instance of an inferior type of resemblance based on the sense of hearing;
   c. Ringing in the ears;
   d. "The imitation of the merle or the raven that we hear in clocks";[41]
   e. Sounds heard by dreamers in dreams or sound heard by mad men;
   f. False soft notes that resemble true notes.
2. Smell:
   a. Distinguishing one lily from another by smelling;
3. Taste:
   a. Honey from different hives;

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[40] *Sol*. II,6,12 (trans. Burleigh, *The Soliloquies*, 47): «[…] veluti cum loquentis vocem, quem non videmus, audientes, putamus alium quempiam, cui voce similis est».

[41] *Sol*. II,6,12 (trans. Burleigh, *The Soliloquies*, 47): «[…]vel in horologiis merulae aut corui quaedam imitatio».

4. Touch:
    a. The softness of the plumage of the swan and the goose.[42]

When the dialogue seemed to have reached the point that "resemblances, whether equal things or unequal, wheedle all our senses and deceive us", this conclusion is questioned anew.[43] Reason in fact brings up two new questions that challenge Augustine's understanding of the subject:

R. – Bene facis. Sed attende utrum tibi videatur, cum ova similia videmus, aliquod eorum falsum esse recte nos posse dicere.
A. – Nullo modo videtur. Omnia enim si ova sunt, vera ova sunt.
R. – Quid, cum de speculo resultare imaginem videmus? quibus signis falsam esse comprehendimus?
A. – Scilicet quod non tenetur, non sonat, non per se movetur, non vivit, et caeteris innumerabilibus, quae prosequi longum est.
R. – Video te nolle immorari, et properationi tuae mos gerendus est. Itaque, ne singula repetam, si et illi homines quos videmus in somnis, vivere, loqui, teneri a vigilantibus possent, nihilque inter ipsos differret, et eos quos expergefacti ac sani alloquimur et videmus, numquidnam eos falsos diceremus?
A. – Quo pacto istud recte diceretur?
R. – Ergo si eo veri essent, quo veri simillimi apparerent, nihilque inter eos et veros omnino distaret, eoque falsi quo per illas vel alias differentias dissimiles convincerentur; nonne similitudinem veritatis matrem, et dissimilitudinem falsitatis esse fatendum est?

(*R.* – Do you think that when we see two similar eggs we can say that one of them is false?
A. – By no means. If they are eggs, both of them are true eggs.
R. – When we see an image reflected from a mirror, how do we know that it is false?
A. – Because it cannot be grasped; it makes no sound; it does not move of itself; it is not alive […]
R. – If the men we see in dreams could live and speak and be grasped by us when we awake, and there was no difference between them and those whom we see and address when we are awake and of a sound mind, would we say that they were false?
A. – We could not correctly say so.
R. – Then, if they were true so far as they were very like the truth and there was no difference at all between them and real men, but were also false so far as they were proved to be unlike real men by the tests you have mentioned or by other tests, must we not admit that similitude is the mother of truth and dissimilitude the mother of falsity?)[44]

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[42] *Sol*. II,6,12: «R. – Ergo, ne moremur, videturne tibi aut lilium a lilio posse odore, aut mel thyminum a melle thymino de diversis alveariis sapore, aut mollitudo plumarum cycni ab anseris tactu facile diiudicari?».
[43] *Sol*. II,6,12 (trans. Burleigh, *The Soliloquies*, 48): «R. – Ergo apparet nos in omnibus sensibus siue aequalibus, siue in deterioribus rebus, aut similitudine lenocinante falli».
[44] *Sol*. II,7,13 (trans. Burleigh, *The Soliloquies*, 48).

There is a conundrum about the subject of falsity because what is false can have at the same time some similitude and some dissimilitude to what is true: "both likeness and unlikeness together entitle a thing to be called false".[45] The resolution of such a theoretical difficulty is given by Reason. In a very poignant passage of the dialogue two main forms of falsity are singled out. These are called fallacious (*fallax*) and mendacious (*mendax*) and their difference is explained in these terms:

> *R.* – Video enim, tentatis quantum potuimus omnibus rebus, non remansisse quod falsum iure dicatur, nisi quod aut se fingit esse quod non est, aut omnino esse tendit et non est. Sed illud superius falsi genus, vel fallax etiam, vel mendax est. Nam fallax id recte dicitur quod habet quemdam fallendi appetitum; qui sine anima intellegi non potest: sed partim ratione fit, partim natura; ratione, in animalibus rationalibus, ut in homine; natura, in bestiis, tamquam in vulpecula. Illud autem quod mendax voco, a mentientibus fit. Qui hoc differunt a fallacibus, quod omnis fallax appetit fallere; non autem omnis vult fallere qui mentitur: nam et mimi et comoediae et multa poemata mendaciorum plena sunt, delectandi potius quam fallendi voluntate, et omnes fere qui iocantur, mentiuntur. Sed fallax vel fallens is recte dicitur, cuius negotium est ut quisque fallatur. Illi autem qui non id agunt ut decipiant, sed tamen aliquid fingunt, vel mendaces tantum, vel si ne hoc quidem, mentientes tamen vocari nemo ambigit.

> (*R.* – After all our inquiry I see that nothing remains that we may justly term false except that which feigns itself to be what is not, or pretends to be when it does not exist. The former kind is either fallacious or mendacious. Fallacious, strictly speaking, is that which has a certain desire to deceive and this cannot be understood apart from the soul. But deceit is practised partly by reason and partly by nature; by reason in rational beings like men, by nature in beasts like foxes. What I call lying is done by liars. The difference between the fallacious and the mendacious is that the former all wish to deceive while the latter do not all wish to do so. Mimes and comedies and many poems are full of lies, but the aim is to delight rather than to deceive. Nearly all who make jokes lie. But the fallacious person, strictly speaking, is he whose design is to deceive. Those who feign without intent to deceive are mendacious, or at least no one hesitates to call them liars.)[46]

First, falsity takes two forms of manifestation and two definitions of falsity can be given accordingly:

1) Falsity as that which feigns itself to be what is not (*se fingit esse quod non est*);
2) Falsity as that which pretends to be when it does not exist (*esse tendit et non est*);

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[45] *Sol.* II,8,15 (trans. Burleigh, *The Soliloquies*, 59): «A. – Sed fac me non metuere illud respondere, similitudinem ac dissimilitudinem simul efficere ut aliquid falsum recte nominetur; quam mihi evadendi viam dabis?».

[46] *Sol.* II,9,16 (trans. Burleigh, *The Soliloquies*, 49–50).

Another way to look at this difference is to understand that one thing is to will it to be false and another thing is not to be able to be true.

Falsity conceived as, what feigns to be what is not, can be divided into two heads: a deceitful form of falsity (*fallax*) and non-deceitful (*mendax*). The rationale of this distinction is that the fallacious form of falsity displays a tendency or inclination towards deception. On the contrary, the mendacious type of falsity does not have such an inclination: it feigns without being deceitful.

The second species of falsity, that which pretends to be when it does not exist, is of an entirely different nature. Its characteristic lies in that it tends to be something else and is not (pretends it is and is not). Under this rubric are included many of the examples discussed above: "every picture, statue, or similar work of art tries to be that on which it is modelled", dreams, visions of madmen, shadows of bodies, the oar plunged in water, the false movement of the towers and so forth.[47]

4.6.1. Image, equality, and likeness in the *De diversis quaestionibus octoginta tribus*, in the *De Genesi ad litteram imperfectus liber*, and in the *De trinitate*

The interest towards the themes of image and likeness is not limited to the early *Soliloquia* but cut across the Augustinian intellectual itinerary. These themes are in fact discussed and refined in other later works. Augustine develops his semiotics of the image particularly in the *De diversis quaestionibus octoginta tribus* (388–396). This work consists of a series of eighty–three different questions. Question 74 is of particular interest to the present discussion because here Augustine raises the issue and explains the difference between three inter-related concepts, image (*imago*), equality or identity (*aequalitas*), and likeness (*similitudo*):

> Imago et aequalitas et similitudo distinguenda sunt: quia ubi imago, continuo similitudo, non continuo aequalitas; ubi aequalitas, continuo similitudo, non continuo imago; ubi similitudo, non continuo imago, non continuo aequalitas. Ubi imago, continuo similitudo, non continuo aequalitas: ut in speculo est imago hominis; quia de illo expressa est, est etiam necessario similitudo, non tamen aequalitas, quia multa desunt imaginis, quae insunt illi rei de qua expressa est. Ubi aequalitas, continuo similitudo, non continuo imago: velut in duobus ovis paribus, quia inest aequalitas, inest et similitudo; quaecumque enim adsunt uni, adsunt et alteri; imago tamen non est, quia neutrum de altero expressum est. Ubi similitudo, non continuo imago non continuo aequalitas; omne quippe ovum omni ovo, in quantum ovum est, simile est; sed ovum perdicis, quamvis in quantum ovum est, simile sit ovum gallinae, nec imago tamen eius est, quia non

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[47] *Sol.* II,9,16 (trans. Burleigh, *The Soliloquies*, 50): «*R* – Quid omnis pictura vel cuiusce-modi simulacrum, et id genus omnia opificum? nonne illud esse contendunt, ad cuius quid-que similitudinem factum est?».

de illo expressum est, nec aequale, quia et brevius est alterius generis animantium.

(Image and equality and likene*s*s must be distinguished. For where there is an image, there is necessarily a likeness, but not necessarily an equality; where an equality, necessarily a likeness, but not necessarily an image; where a likeness, not necessarily an image and not necessarily an equality.

Where there is an image, there is necessarily a likeness, but not necessarily an equality. For example, there is in a mirror the image of a man. Because the image has been copied from him, there is also necessarily a likeness; but, nonetheless, there is no equality, because there is absent from the image much that is present in that thing of which it is the copy. When there is an equality, there is necessarily a likeness, but not necessarily an image. For example, between two identical (*paribus*) eggs there is a likeness because there is an equality, for whatever belongs to one belongs also to the other. Still, there is no image, because neither one is the copy of the other. Where there is a likeness, there is not necessarily an image and not necessarily an equality. For every egg is like every other egg insofar as it is an egg; but a partridge egg, although like a chicken egg insofar as it is an egg, is, nonetheless, neither its image, because it is not a copy of that one, nor its equal, because it is smaller and of another species of living being.)[48]

Although the concepts of image, equality (or identity), and likeness are interconnected, the specific relations between these three concepts must be spelled out. Augustine points out that an image entails likeness, but not equality. We may notice that Augustine gives an example (the mirror reflection) that echoes the one he had already brought up and discussed in the *Soliloquia*. Although the mirror reflection entails a high degree of likeness to the object reflected, the image reflected in a mirror does not result in an identity between the image and its source.

Equality, in turn, implies likeness but not necessarily an image. Once again, the example cited to illustrate this point (two identical eggs) was already mentioned in the *Soliloquia*. Equality between two things presupposes likeness between them. However, equality does not necessarily involve an image because one thing is not the derivation of the other.

Likeness does not imply neither image nor equality. Two eggs of two different species (a partridge egg and a chicken egg) illustrate this point. Because both are eggs, one is like the other. However, strictly speaking, the two eggs are not the image of one another (because they originate from different sources, e.g. a partridge and a chicken) and they are not equal (because these eggs differ in size and are eggs of different species).

R. Markus (1964), C. Marmo (2017b), O. Boulnois (2008), and E. Zuccotti (2015) all underscored the relevance of Augustine's use of *Quia non de illo expressum est* in the passage quoted above. The use of *expressum est* further specifies the nature of the concept of image which is based on a link of causality

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[48] *Diu. qu.* 83,74. (trans. Mosher, *Eighty–three different questions,* 189–190).

or derivation from its source. Marmo is very explicit in this regard: "The verb which characterizes the image is only the passive voice of *exprimere* […]: the idea repeated here is again that of the causal derivation of the image from the model, which brings along with it likeness (and participation)".[49]

The theoretical knot between image and likeness is further documented and perfected in another excerpt from *De Genesi ad litteram imperfectus liber* (426). In this work, the thematic thread and the context in which the concepts of image and likeness are brought up is the idea that human beings are in the likeness or image of God:

> Omnis imago est similis ei cuius imago est; nec tamen omne, quod simile est alicui, atiam imago est eius. Sicut in speculo et pictura quia imagines sunt, etiam similes sint necesse est ei cuius imagines sunt. Homines autem duo etiam si inter se similes sunt, tamen, si alter ex altero natus non est, nullus eorum imago alterius dici potest. Imago enim tunc est, cum de aliquo exprimitur.

> (Every image is like that of which it is an image, but not everything which is like something is also its image. Thus, because in a mirror or in a picture there are images, they are also alike. But if the one does not have its origin from the other, it is not said to be the image of the other. For it is an image only when it is derived from the other thing.)[50]

Image entails a relation of similitude to its model. However, things that are like other things are not necessarily images. Thus, image and likeness are not co-extensive.

In this text, the idea of the image as bearing a "genetic" (Zuccotti 2015: 87) connection with its source of origin, or, in other words, a "derivation from something (a model or a cause)" (Marmo 2017) is spelled out with clarity.

By comparing the two excerpts from *De diversis quaestionibus octoginta tribus* and *De Genesi ad litteram imperfectus liber* Marmo (2017b) not only has observed the passive use of the verb *exprimere*, already mentioned before, but also a change in respect to the examples provided in the two texts: the mirror as an illustration of the image is recurrent, whereas the example of the picture is not.

If we extend the comparison by including also the second book of early *Soliloquia*, we could notice, however, that Augustine in this work mentions all these examples (mirror, pictures, as well as statues). The link between, likeness, image, and falsity, however, seems to be limited to the *Soliloquia* and not reiterated in the two other works.

But there is another aspect that seems to be the *fil rouge* between these works in their discussion of the concept of image. Like the *Quaestio* 74 and the *De Genesi ad litteram imperfectus liber*, also in the *Soliloquia* the concept of

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[49] «Il verbo che caratterizza l'immagine è solo la voce passiva di *exprimere* […]: l'idea qui ribadita è ancora quella della derivazione causale dell'immagine dal modello, che porta con sé somiglianza (e partecipazione)» (Marmo 2017b: 45), my translation from Italian.

[50] *Gn. litt. inp.* 16,57. (trans. Teske, *On the Literal Interpretation of Genesis*, 183)

image is tailored as having a generative connection with its source. However, this connection is not only "generative" as in the case of parents and children, but also "reflective" (*resultando*) as in the case of the mirror. The images in the mirror are the result of a model (the object reflected). In this category also pictures, figments of demons, and shadows are included.

The concept of image also cuts through the whole *De trinitate*, a theological work of Augustine's maturity. This work is of fundamental importance to understand how revolutionary Augustine's doctrine of trinity was, not only in relation to Christianity, but also in respect to the ancient world. The novelty of the *De trinitate* is that it offers a theological key to interpret an epistemological and gnoseological problem (the relation between *notitia* and *cogitation*, and the structure of the *verbum*).[51]

By analysing the numerous contexts in which Augustine writes about images in the *De trinitate* we can find pictures, paintings, and mental representations. In book VIII, Augustine examines mental images through the specific example of those images that prompt the recollection to the mind of the cities that were familiar to the author (Chartage and Alexandria). The mental image is that which is interposed between man and the world that is experienced through it, and without which there would be neither sense perception, nor memory, nor thought.

In book XI Augustine makes an accurate and sophisticated analysis of the phenomenology of sense perception. Out of the five senses, Augustine selects vision as an object for his analysis because he considers it the most noble of the senses and the most suitable for understanding. Augustine distinguishes three factors in the act of vision: the object (*res*) that is perceived, the vision (*visio*) itself, and the *animi intentio*, namely, that which fixes the vision upon the object of perception.[52] These are three distinct factors and each of them has a different nature: the object is corporeal and is external to the subject, the vision is an inner phenomenon because it dwells within the subject, and the *animi intentio* lies within the soul (Rovighi 1962: 26). It is important to stress that in this work *intentio* and *voluntas* are alike and they both refer to the intentional attention that the mind places upon the object of perception through the act of vision. *Intentio*, thus, entails an active and voluntary desire to see.

The relation between Augustine's theory of sense knowledge and his theory of the image is tailored in the following terms. The act of vision equates well with the concept of image because vision is a similitude or image of the object perceived. The image is inferred and impressed (by the mind and reason) from the perception of an external object (sense perception) and they form a unity (Rovighi 1962: 26).

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[51] We cannot provide a full analysis of this work in the limited province of our enquiry. For a full discussion on the concept of image in the *De trinitate*, see Daniels (1977), McCool (1956), Zuccotti (2015).

[52] *De trin*. 11,2,2.

4.7. *Cor duplex*: the lie as duplicitous

Returning to the two definitions gleaned from the *De mendacio* and the *Contra mendacium*, the meaning of *falsa significatio* and *enuntiatio falsi*, interpreted in their respective contexts, almost coincide. Very explicit in this regard is A. Sieradsky (1952: 6–7), who conceived the lie in terms of false speech or false sign: the word that, being a sign of the ideas and a medium of communication between intelligences, is false when there is an incongruence between the thing signified (that which resides in the mind) and the thing expressed by the sign. The lie, therefore, explains Augustine, is identified with the speaking contrary to what one thinks:

> Quapropter ille mentitur, qui aliud habet in animo et aliud verbis vel quibuslibet significationibus enuntiat.

> (He lies, moreover, who holds one opinion in his mind and who gives expression to another through words of any other outward manifestation.)[53]

The concept of double heartedness (*cor duplex*) is essential for an understanding of the nature of the lie. For Augustine, the nature of lie is duplicitous: the one that lies has a "double-heart" (*cor duplex*), because in the interiority of the mind, he knows or thinks one thing, while he expresses another by giving signs.[54] Thought is to word as inwardness is to outwardness: the inconsistency between the two is the well of a lie. This tragic schism characterizes the lie: the mismatch between what is in one's "heart" and what one has on the "lips". According to Augustine, the one who lies can be described as having a 'double-heart' and a 'double-thought' (*duplex cogitatio*): one part remains opaque and inscrutable, being concealed inside one's mind, the other is externalized by means of signs. With this poignant metaphor, Augustine represents the essence of the lie: its twofold, contradictory, and ambivalent character.

As Paul J. Griffiths (2004: 25–26) pointed out:

> The characteristic mark of the lie is duplicity, a fissure between thought and utterance that is clearly evident to the speaker as he speaks. [...] The lie has only to do with whether there is a mismatch, a gap, a contradiction, a fissure, between what you think is true and what you claim as true.

The question of whether the sole duplicity constitutes the essential and sufficient mark of the lie, as Griffiths seems to suggest, will be discussed in due course. For the present, let us ponder the nature of duplicity as a constituent feature of the lie.

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[53] *Mend.* 3,3 (CSLE 41, 415, trans. Muldowney, *On Lying*, 55).
[54] *S.* 133, 4 (PL 38): «Aliud in se cogitat verum esse, aliud foras profert pro veritate. Duplex cor est, non simplex: non quod ibi habet hoc profert».

Cor duplex literally means "two-faced" or "duplicitous".[55] This duplicity is manifested in the hiatus existing between inwardly concealed believed-truth and outwardly manifested expressed-truth. Lying involves concealment to the extent that one "face", as it were, of the liar's thoughts remains concealed in the back-stage of his mind and he takes it as true, while another "face" of his thoughts is communicated to others by means of signs as if being believed to be true by the liar. In other words, when a lie occurs thought and speech do not match each other in a sincere act of communication.

Griffiths holds that Augustine drew on Sallust's definition of the lie. This connection is quite plausible, and the similarity between the two definitions is striking. Let us recall here, then, the definition proposed by Sallust:

> Ambition led many to become false, to keep one thing concealed in the heart and to have another ready on the tongue, to judge friendships and enmities not as they are but in terms of benefit, to look good rather than to have a good character. (Sallust quoted in Griffiths 2004: 26)

The notion of "heart" (*cor*) is key. This is a recurrent concept in Augustine's work and it is very nuanced. The semantic history of this term and its biblical sources have been studied by Donald J. Novak (1978). He pointed out that *cor duplex*, is conceived as the "inconsistency [within the subject] of its being with its projection" and is included among "the four ways in which the heart is subject to concupiscence" together with *cor immundum*, *cor tortum*, and *cor durum* (Novak 1978: 82):

> Speech gives some access to the heart; but the heart projects itself *in voce cataractarum suarum*: in the outflow of its action. But the heart can externally dissimulate itself. Duplicity is not the refusal of the exterior to represent the heart, but the work of the heart itself. (Novak 1978: 83)

Thus, the mechanism of the lie entails a conscious substitution of one part (what is known or believed as true) with another part that does not correspond to it, which the liar is aware to be false. In doing so, the liar pretends to signify that which he knows to be false as being true. He, therefore, passes off what he takes to be false as being true:

> Unde etiam duplex cor dicitur esse mentientis, id est duplex cogitatio: una rei eius quam veram esse vel scit vel putat et non profert; altera eius rei, quam pro ista profert sciens falsam esse vel putans.

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(For this reason the heart of the liar is said to be double, that is, twofold in its thinking: one part consisting of that knowledge which he knows or thinks to be true, yet does not so express it; the other part consisting of that knowledge which he knows or thinks to be false, yet expresses as true.)[56]

It should be emphasized that in this context the concepts of "true" and "false" refer to the liar's state of mind, namely, what the liar believes or thinks to be true or false. In other words, these terms do not refer to an ontological conception of truth as correctness or correspondence between what is said and the state of affairs in the world. Rather, the terms true and false refer to the notion of truthfulness that is based on what the subject takes to be true, regardless of the adequacy of the statement given and the state of affairs.

Because the liar is cognizant that some sort of falseness is being expressed, it is manifest that the awareness on the side of the production of the lie plays a pivotal role in Augustine's semiotics of deception. In this regard, Griffiths (2004: 37) noted that

> The speaker is the privileged authority on the question of whether he lies. Since the Augustinian definition of the lie is indexed to the speaker's understanding of the relation between her thought and speech, you will always know better than anyone else whether a particular utterance of yours was duplicitous.

In conclusion, the lie entails a duplicitous signification, conceived as a split between inner thought (what one knows or thinks within himself) and outwardly expressed signs, that is, a gulf between thought and speech.

It is also worth noting that the tradition of referring to the lie in terms of *cor duplex* was still present and alive in 1265–1274 when Thomas Aquinas wrote his *Summa Theologiae*. Indeed, Aquinas acknowledged Augustine's principle of the duplicity inherent in the act of lying, recalling the etymology of the term 'lying' (*mendacium*) that "derives from the lie's being speech *contra mentem*".[57] Aquinas took this criterion of duplicity to be the moral and 'formal' aspect of the lie and considered it so essential as to be the sufficient ingredient for the lie. A similar view is shared by other commentators, such as Alexander Carpenter, who writes that "to lie is to go against the mind, whence the lie, which is a sign false to the mind" (Carpenter quoted in Craun 1997: 40).[58]

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[56] *Mend*. 3,3 (CSLE 41, 415, trans. Muldowney, *On Lying*, 55).
[57] *St. Thomas Aquinas*, *Summa Theologiae*. Vol. 41 (2a2ae 101–122), *Virtues of Justice in the Human Community*, Quest. 110, (trans. O'Brien, 149).
[58] E. D. Craun refers to Carpenter (1516), Speculum Morale 1277: «mentiri est contra mentem ire, & inde mendacium quo est falsum mentis signum» (Carpenter, Alexander 1516. Destructorium viciorum. Paris: C. Chevallori).

4.8. Deliberate verbal misdirection vs saying what is false

Thus far, it has been argued that one of the cornerstones of the lie is the inconsistency between thought and speech that occurs in a false sign. One of the most clear and effective arguments to which Augustine resorts in order to explain the nature of the lie is the difference that exists between saying a falsehood and lying. He dwells at length, and in several works, on this fundamental question that is clearly comprehensible in the following passage:

> Ex animi enim sui sententia, non ex rerum ipsarum veritate vel falsitate mentiens aut non mentiens iudicandus est. Potest itaque ille, qui falsum pro vero enuntiat, quod tamen verum esse opinatur, errans dici et temerarius; mentiens autem non recte dicitur, qui cor duplex cum enuntiat non habet nec fallere cupit, sed fallitur. Culpa vero mentientis est in enuntiando animo suo fallendi cupiditas.

> (For, a person is to be judged as lying or not lying according to the intention of his own mind, not according to the truth or falsity of the matter itself. He who expresses the false as true because he thinks it to be true may be said to be mistaken or rash, but he cannot, in fairness, be said to be lying, because, when he so expresses himself, he does not have a false heart nor does he wish to deceive; rather, he himself is deceived. In reality, the fault of the person who tells a lie consists in his desire to deceive in expressing his thought.)[59]

The crux of the problem that Augustine seem to want to make clear is that the one who lies speaks knowingly and willingly against what he assumes or knows to be true. The one who knows he is lying, then, is considered mendacious, whereas the one who makes a mistake, saying a falsehood while holding it to be true, does it out of ignorance. On the contrary, the liar, as will be seen, is fully aware of his mistake, and despite that, he intends to induce someone else into error, making him believe that which the liar himself does not believe. This shows that accidental lying cannot occur and that one who makes a mistake is acting in good faith.[60]

This distinction leads to the first conclusion that the claim that the one who speaks a falsehood lies is not necessarily accurate, for if what it is said is assumed or believed to be truthful by the one who proffers the statement, it could be considered to be merely an error. In the latter circumstance, therefore, in the case where the statement made is *de facto* false (what is said and what is the case do not match) and is uttered *bona fide*, no lie does actually occur.

Some discoveries, for example, believed to be scientific have been subsequently refuted. Umberto Eco (1997: 33) notes the case of Ptolemy who, claiming that the sun revolved around the earth, said what in fact was not the case, because he was mistaken by conviction rather than by the will to lie. In this regard, one must add that, in order for any scientific discovery to be considered erroneous, it is necessary to find a response in the facts or an advance-

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[59] *Mend.* 3,3 (CSLE 41, 415, trans. Muldowney, *On Lying*, 55–56).
[60] *S.* 133, 4: «Fallitur ergo, quia falsum est, et verum putat; dicit autem nonnisi quia verum putat. Error est in humana infirmitate, sed non est in conscientiae sanitate».

ment of knowledge that enables one to determine the accuracy or inaccuracy of the theory – or, in scientific terms, the testability and repeatability of the phenomenon. In reference to Eco's example, the heliocentric model of Copernicus confuted the previous geocentric paradigm; therefore, only through the specialization of science and a subsequent confirmation between the initial assumptions and the following discoveries have we been able to re-formulate the starting hypothesis and, finally, correct the previous paradigm, labelling it now as "wrong" or inaccurate. As Eco (2017) underlined, "In order to say that something is wrong or false or it being a result of falsification, it is necessary to find a notion of what is right, true or authentic";[61] therefore, "while saying what is false is an alethic problem, that is to say it has to do with the notion of *aletheia*, namely truth, lying is an ethical and moral problem".[62]

As Suzanne Thalberg (1963: 7) has remarked "falsity as criterion for lying must be rejected if only because an honest error is false, though asserted. It must be kept in mind that there is no assurance that a statement is a lie merely because it is false".

Augustine, distinguishing the lie from the error, identified a cornerstone that allows us to define two types of truth: the ontological one, intended as correspondence between what is said and what is the actual case, and the moral one, which also conforms to the label of "veracity" or "truthfulness", understood as the conformity between what is said and that which is in one's mind (Dorszynski 1948: 1).

For Augustine, in the comparison between the one who is inadvertently mistaken, holding to be true what is actually false, and the one who deliberately expresses what he knows or believes to be false, i.e. telling a lie, the former is in a more favourable position than the latter, inasmuch as "the former has not one thing in his mind, and another in his speech; but the latter, whatever in fact that which is said by him may be of itself, yet has one thing shut up within his breast, and another ready on his tongue".[63]

One can draw several distinctions when citing the difference between speaking a falsehood inadvertently and deliberately lying: one who lies knowing s/he is lying, one who believes he is telling the truth while being mistaken, one who tells the truth believing that he is lying, and one who mistakenly asserts what is *de facto* the case.

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[61]   «Per dire che qualcosa è sbagliato o falso o che è effetto di una falsificazione, occorre avere una nozione di ciò che è corretto o vero o autentico» (Eco 2017: 2), my translation from Italian.

[62]   «Mentre dire il falso è un problema aletico, e cioè a che vedere con una nozione di *aletheia* e cioè di verità, mentire è un problema etico o morale» (Eco 2017: 2), my translation from Italian.

[63]   *Ench.* 28,6 (trans. Parker and Rivington, *Enchiridion to Laurentius on Faith, Hope and Charity*, 97): «Potiusque e contrario, quantum in ipso est ille mentitur qui dicit verum quod putat falsum. Quantum enim ad animum eius attinet, quia non quod sentit hoc dicit, non verum dicit, quamvis verum inveniatur esse quod dicit».

The cases inferred from the aforementioned distinction are:
1. Saying the opposite of what is believed to be true (the lie);
2. Saying what is mistakenly believed to be true (the error);
3. Lying while accidentally saying what is the case;
4. Being mistaken, asserting what is the case *de facto*.

4.9. The intention to deceive:
a reappraisal of Augustine's *voluntas fallendi*

We shall now come to a consideration of what is the place of the *voluntas fallendi* (the intention to deceive) in Augustine's definition of the lie and attend to the crucial question of whether he granted to it a place in the essential notion of the lie. The intention to deceive is a rather difficult concept and, regretfully, Augustine's treatment of this fundamental aspect is far from being crystal-clear and exhaustive. Indeed, in many passages of his works, one may be easily led to believe that he takes the *voluntas fallendi* as a necessary characteristic of the lie. It sufficient to quote the following excerpts to get acquainted with this idea:

> Exceptis igitur iocis, quae numquam sunt putata mendacia – habent enim evidentissimam ex pronuntiatione atque ipso iocantis affectu significationem animi nequaquam fallentis, etsi non vera enuntiantis.

> (In this treatise I am excluding the question of jocose lies, which have never been considered as real lies, since both in the verbal expression and in the attitude of the one joking such lies are accompanied by a very evident lack of intention to deceive, even though the person be not speaking the truth.)[64]

> Omnis autem qui mentirur, contra id quod animo sentit loquitur, voluntate fallendi.

> (For everyone who lies, speaks contrary to what he thinks in his mind, with the will to deceive.)[65]

On closer scrutiny, however, one must cast doubts on such a conviction or, at least, place this stance under a ruthless critique before encapsulating it as a feature in the essential notion of the lie.

It goes without saying that lying traffics with deception. Yet how should the intention to deceive be conceived? This is a pivotal question that opens a breach in Augustine's scholarship as to how his 'true' position on this notion should be interpreted. In general terms, in the debate around the concept of *voluntas fallendi*, two main interpretations can be discerned. The first and most widespread conception takes the intention to deceive to be part of the essential

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[64] *Mend.* 2,2 (CSLE 41, 414, trans. Muldowney, *On Lying*, 54).
[65] *Ench.*7,72 (trans. Parker and Rivington, *Enchiridion to Laurentius on Faith, Hope and Charity*, 101).

definition of the lie and, thus, lacking this element, there would be no lie altogether. The second and less known interpretation, instead, takes an explicit intention to deceive to be ruled out from what is essential to the lie. Among this second trend we could include L. Thomassin (1691), G. Faure (1847), A. Vermeersch (1920), M. Ledrus (1943), M. Gomez (1929), A. Sieradsky (1952), A. Ruolt (1996). In what follows, we seek to deepen the second route not only because, of the two interpretations, this is the less known, but also because we believe that such an effort could cast light on an unprecedented and more nuanced view on defining the lie that is most probably in alignment with the original intention of the author.

Surely, Augustine himself did not take for granted the assumption that the lie presupposes an intention to deceive from the side of the speaker as its necessary constituent. He openly questioned this conviction and, to this end, he engaged with an elaborated, albeit roundabout and ultimately unsatisfactory, analysis. As will be clear in what follows, Augustine's enquiry leaves some margins of uncertainty, which makes the reader wonder about the author's own conclusions. Although his position is firm and has had a tremendous weight in the treatment of the lie in the successive centuries and has inspired an impressive fascination for later scholars, his analysis (as set forth especially in the fourth chapter of the *De mendacio*) is not as clear and unwavering as one may have wanted it to be. As described above (in 4.1), Augustine himself, in the *Retractationes*, expressed concerns towards the clarity of the arguments of the *De mendacio*, which he termed as "*obscurus et aufractuosus et omino molestus*". As T. Bohlin (2003: 18) pointed out:

> If St. Augustine's position were a black and white denial of the licitness of all lies, as is generally accepted in the *schola*, why, Ledrus asked, did he so belabour the question? Why did he refer to it as a "difficillima and latebrosissima" question? Why did he lament after much rumination that about "this question, considered and treated from whatever point of view, it is not easy to render an opinion"? Why did St. Augustine probe problematic cases of speaking falsely in the two entire treatises and repeatedly address the question throughout his writings? The answer, according to Ledrus is that "Augustine never considered that he had grasped the question of the lie in an absolute way".

Next to the *falsa significatio*, thus, Augustine seemed to consider the will of deception as a characteristic feature of the lie. This is demonstrated in one of the most frequently cited passages of the *De mendacio*, where the well-known definition of the lie is extrapolated:

> Nemo autem dubitat mentiri eum, qui volens falsum enuntiat causa fallendi. Quapropter enuntiationem falsam cum voluntate ad fallendum prolatam manifestum est esse mendacium.

(However, no one doubts that he lies who deliberately says what is false with the intention of deceiving. It is clear, then, that a lie is a false statement made with the desire to deceive.)[66]

If severed from the context where it was originally woven into, this excerpt may be misleading. The question that one should ask is whether, given such a definition, there are any other types of lies that do not fall within such a framework or whether Augustine's definition must be interpreted as all-encompassing.

Immediately after having defined the lie, he added a clause of equal importance:

> Sed utrum hoc solum sit mendacium, alia quaestio est.

> (But, whether this alone is a lie is another question.)[67]

This addition sparks a concern that also the definition formulated earlier did not exhaust conclusively the concept of the lie, for it is questionable whether there would be other categories that are not included in the given concept and may still be thought of as lies. With this caveat, Augustine seems to be wanting to suggest that, while a full-blown lie consists of a false signification uttered with the intention to deceive, this does not rule out the possibility of conceiving other kinds of lies that are not incorporated in this clear-cut definition. In other words, given that a manifest lie is captured by the Augustinian definition, the notion does not exclude that other more essential or minimal forms of lies may be manifested. The answer to the dilemma is not given and this excites doubts, leaving something to be desired.

For what reasons did Augustine indicate a similar notion? To begin with, he set forth a similar definition for very practical purposes. In order to corroborate this hypothesis, one may consider the fact that, as was mentioned earlier, in the Middle Ages, the lawfulness of the lie was a much-debated question. A universally accepted definition of the lie was lacking, and therefore, Augustine was prompt to formulate a firm and indisputable notion in the face of those who held that some lies were allowable under certain circumstances. It is precisely the historical milieu and the circumstances in which the *De mendacio* came to light that provided the author with the opportunity to probe into a descriptive analysis of the nature of the lie, preliminarily as well as in support of his successive argumentation. Before articulating his position, Augustine could not but take into account the concerns that were circulating about the issue of lying and proposed a definition around which consensus was created. Ultimately, what we are dealing with is an ingenious expedient – useful to the author in order to support his thesis. This interpretation helps us to comprehend why Augustine began his treatment with a definition evident and incontrovertible:

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[66] *Mend.* 4,5 (CSLE 41, 419, trans. Muldowney, *On Lying*, 60).
[67] *Mend.* 4,5 (CSLE 41, 419, trans. Muldowney, *On Lying*, 60).

the lie is a false statement intentionally uttered in order to deceive. No one would have objected to a definition that is cast in such a way. With this strategy, Augustine set forth a definition of the lie that is manifest and indisputable. This statement, however, is counterbalanced by the highly revealing concern expressed by Augustine immediately after giving the definition, which questioned whether that case alone would be a lie (a false statement voluntary proffered in order to deceive another). Yet this quest, as previously shown, is left unattended, raising serious doubts as to whether, besides what is manifestly a lie, we can account for something else.

4.10. The lie and the mistrustful hearer

The Augustinian method of studying the lie is investigative, and chapter IV of the *De mendacio* is proof of this. He introduces this chapter with the question of whether a "very penetrating investigation may be made as to whether there be any lie at all when the deliberate will to deceive is lacking"[68] and continues his enquiry proposing two interesting cases:

    a) Saying what is false not to deceive;
    b) Saying the truth in order to deceive.

He described the two case studies as such:

> Unde si appareat fieri posse, ut aliquis propterea falsum dicat ne fallatur ille cui dicitur, exstitit aliud e contrario genus, propterea verum dicentis ut fallat.
> […] Qui enim verum ideo loquitur, quia sentit sibi non credi, ideo utique verum dicit, ut fallat; scit enim vel existimat propterea falsum putari posse quod dicitur, quoniam ab ipso dicitur.

> (Wherefore, if it appears that a person may tell what is false without the intention of deceiving his hearer, so a person may tell the truth so that he may deceive.
> […] He who tells the truth because he realizes that he will not be believed tells the truth in order to deceive, since he knows or, at least, expects it to be considered false simply because he says it.)[69]

Augustine's investigation seeks to divorce the two features that allegedly constitute a lie with the purpose of attending to the question whether either the *falsa significatio* or the *voluntas fallendi*, or both, are part of the essential concept of the lie. Indeed, this is a brilliant move.

    He introduces these two cases on the assumption that the hearer is in any case sceptical – that is, he has no trust in the speaker. According to this prerequisite, the speaker has to calibrate his communication strategy to this particular system of beliefs. Thus, if someone expects not to be believed, the

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[68]   *Mend.* 4,3 (CSLE 41, 416, trans. Muldowney, *On Lying*, 56).
[69]   *Mend.* 4,4 (CSLE 41, 416, trans. Muldowney, *On Lying*, 56).

speaker could follow one of these two strategies: either telling a falsehood so that the truth could be inferred from a false statement, or vice-versa.

The conditions supposed by Augustine for the analysis of case a) are, therefore, the following:

1) The listener's mistrust;
2) The speaker's benign intention;
3) The speaker saying what is *de facto* false (in fact, it turns out that there are robbers along a certain road, while the contrary is stated).

Augustine's two scenarios involve what Robert W. Mitchell (1986: 3) has termed the "awareness of another's awareness on the part of the deceiver". Mitchell distinguished four levels of deception. Mitchell's (1986: 26) fourth-level deception involves the intention to deceive and also a modification of the deceiver's behaviour or deceptive strategy "based on knowledge of the other's past and present behaviour" (Mitchell 1986: 26). This point is worth pondering because Augustine, through such skilful examples, considers the way in which the liar models his behaviour or strategic moves of deception according to the knowledge of the dupe's present attitude. Thus, at this level of deception, there exists, as Mitchell says, the "recognition of the other animal's belief about actions" (Mitchell 1986: 25). Along the same lines, the philosopher Daniel Dennett (1978) subscribes to a similar view holding that in order to intentionally deceive someone there must be a second-order intentional system, that is, the deceiver must have beliefs about the intended victim's beliefs.

Hitherto, Augustine's vision on lying is based mainly on the perspective of the one who produces the lie. We have seen that he gave great importance to the liar's intentions and beliefs. However, when considering the two cases discussed above, Augustine widens his theoretical horizon in order to include an additional element, that is, the perspective of the dupe (the one who lies forms a model of the dupe), and, specifically, the predisposition of the listener to believe the speaker. As Colish (1982: 32–33) has noted, here Augustine "has the rhetorician's sensitivity to the importance of the speaker's credibility as a factor affecting the function of his words as means of communication to the hearer". By widening his view on lying so as to encompass the dupe's system of beliefs as well, Augustine's perspective on the lie becomes more sophisticated inasmuch as his view now takes into account an additional and important level of analysis, namely, the listener's belief – the mistrust towards the speaker. This aspect has to do with the reliability of communication. As Roy A. Rappaport (1979: 226) aptly pointed out, "when the communication system can accommodate lies it becomes a problem to assure the recipients of messages that the information they receive is sufficiently reliable to act upon".

4.10.1. First scenario: saying what is false not to deceive (indirect deception)

The first scenario a) considers the situation in which someone, knowing that a certain road is besieged by robbers, tells to a traveller, who is mistrustful towards the speaker and whose intention is to walk exactly along that way, the contrary of what he assumes to be the case. In fact, he says that there are no robbers on that particular road, whereas, on the contrary, the opposite is actually the case. The speaker is concerned that the traveller may be in jeopardy, and this prompts him to speak the falsehood. His own intention is, thus, benevolent. Capitalizing on the traveller's mistrust, he tells him the contrary to what he takes to be true in order to protect him from potential harm. Due to his mistrustful belief, the traveller would then opt for a different direction from the one indicated by the speaker, thus avoiding the encounter with the bandits.

This analysis casts light on the case of a falsehood that is put through not for deception but in order not to deceive. Augustine pictures this first scenario in the following way:

> Quid enim? Si quisque falsum loquens, quod falsum esse existimat, ideo tamen facit, quia putat sibi non credi, ut eo modo falsa fide absterreat eum, cui loquitur, quem sentit sibi nolle credere?
>
> […] Unum, qui scit aut putat se falsum dicere et ideo dicit, ne fallat velut si aliquam viam noverit obsideri a latronibus et timens, ne per illam pergat homo cuius saluti prospicit et eum scit sibi non credere, dicat eam viam non habere latrones ad hoc, ut illac non eat, dum ideo credit latrones ibi esse, quia ille dixit non ibi esse, cui non credere statuit, mendacem putans.
>
> (Let us consider a person who says what he believes is false and what is actually false but with the expression of not being believed, so that in this way, by a kind of false faith, he may deter from action the hearer who, he realizes, will not believe him.
>
> […] In the first place, we have a person who knows or thinks that he is speaking falsely, yet speaks in this way without the intention of deceiving. Such would be the case of a man who, knowing that a certain road is besieged by bandits and fearing that a friend for whose safety he is concerned will take that road, tells that friend that there are no bandits there. He makes this assertion, realizing that his friend does not trust him, and because of the statement to the contrary of the person in whom he has no faith, will therefore believe that the bandits are there and will not go by the road.)[70]

What does occur in the aforementioned example, as well as in the one that follows, is a sort of reverse signification, wherein the speaker asserts something in order to mean the opposite, and vice- versa. This takes place due to the lack of the convention of truthfulness between the two communicators; that is, the speaker is fully aware that in the hearer's mistrustful interpretation of his words

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[70] *Mend.* 4,4 (CSLE 41, 416, trans. Muldowney, *On Lying*, 56–57).

he will assume the contrary of what is expressed. This example, thus, casts light on the context in which the reliability of the source is altogether lacking. Hence, Augustine's example reduces lying to a sort of communicative game that resembles very much the joke told by Sigmund Freud based on a train conversation between two Jews:

> Two Jews met in a railway carriage at a train station in Galicia. 'Where are you going?' asked one. 'To Cracow,' was the answer. 'What a liar you are!' broke out the other. 'If you say you are going to Cracow, you want me to believe you are going to Lemberg. But I know that in fact you are going to Cracow. So why are you lying to me'. (Freud 1960: 137–138)

Shortly after having considered this critical case, Augustine questioned the definition of the lie proposed earlier in Chapter II of the *De mendacio*, in order to discuss its correctness in light of this example. If lying entails the intention to deceive, the abovementioned case is not to be considered as a lie since it lacks the intent to mislead, although a falsehood was indeed put forth.

There are at least two orders of issues here. In the case under consideration, there seems to occur a confusion of different levels of analysis. In other words, the criterion of deceptive intentionality is mixed up with to the intended effects or ends of the deceit; the two levels are, thus, overlapping. The interlocking of the levels of analysis yells to a view that, rather than clarifying the issue at stake in the Augustinian example, contributes to obfuscate it. At any rate, the speaker is still duping the sceptical traveller by means of a trick. Yet this stratagem was perpetrated with a benevolent goal, for it served as a proxy in order to prevent the man from falling into the hands of the bandits. To our understanding, thus, this example accounts for a case of *indirect deception*.

4.10.2. Second scenario: saying the truth in order to deceive

The second scenario b) is the reverse of the first one:

> Alterum autem, qui sciens aut putans verum esse quod dicit, ad hoc tamen dicit, ut fallat; tamquam si homini non sibi credenti dicat latrones in illa via esse, ubi re vera eos esse cognovit ut ille, cui dicit per illam viam magis pergat atque ita in latrones incidat, dum putat falsum esse quod ille dixerit. Quis ergo istorum mentitur: ille, qui elegit falsum dicere, ne fallat, an ille, qui elegit verum dicere, ut fallat?

> (In the second place, there is the case of a person who, knowing or thinking what he says true, nevertheless says it in order to deceive. This would happen if the man mentioned above were to tell his mistrustful acquaintance that there are bandits on that road, knowing that they actually are there and telling it so that his hearer, because of his distrust of the speaker, may proceed to take that road and so fall into the hands of the bandits. Now, which of these two men is lying? Is it

he who chooses to tell a falsehood without the intention to deceive, or is it he who chooses to tell the truth with the intention to deceive?)[71]

In the example above, the speaker is consciously asserting something that he knows to be true in order to deceive his listener. He uses the truth strategically in order to lead the hearer into error, albeit, technically, he asserted what his true, both subjectively (what he thinks to be true) and factually (what is actually the case).

In comparison with the conditions set by Augustine for the analysis of case a), without prejudice to condition 1), in case b) Augustine alters conditions 2) and 3), whereby the speaker intends to deceive and says that which is *de facto* true. The conditions supposed by Augustine for the analysis of case b) are, therefore, the following:

1) The listener's mistrust;
2) The *bona fide* intention of the speaker;
3) The speaker saying what is *de facto* the case (in fact, it turns out that there are robbers along a certain road).

In case a), although a *de facto* falsehood is expressed, the will of deception is altogether absent; in case b), one has the opposite situation: there is the intention to deceive without any factual falsehood being expressed. The two cases can be organized as in Table 3.

Table 3. Two scenarios of deception: false speech told not to deceive and truthful speech told in order to deceive

Case	Belief of the speaker	Intention of the speaker	Belief of the hearer	Assertion
a) To say what is false | not to deceive	True	Not to deceive	True	False
b) To say the truth in order to deceive	True	To deceive	False	True

The question posed by Augustine is: which of the two persons is actually lying? The one who says a falsehood not to deceive or the other one who says the truth in order to deceive? What if they were both lying? The answer to these questions depends upon the type of definition of the lie that one has in mind.

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[71] *Mend.* 4,4 (CSLE 41, 416, trans. Muldowney, *On Lying*, 57).

It is possible to outline a quartet of options, according to the factors considered necessary to determine whether there is a lie being told:

I.   If one considers, solely and exclusively, the criterion of falsity, then only the first one lies since he asserts something he assumes or believes to be false;
II. This is in reverse, if one considers solely the factor of the intentionality of deception; then there is a lie only in case b);
III. If, on the contrary, one defines a lie as "any pronouncement whatsoever if it be accompanied by the desire of any falsity",[72] we have a lie in both cases: in the first because one says what is false and in the second because it leads one to believe what is false, while telling the truth;
IV. Finally, if the lie is "the utterance of one who desires to speak untruthfully in order to deceive",[73] both criteria that define a lie are present, and, in neither of the two cases does lying occur.

To conclude this discussion, it is worth remembering that Augustine did not provide any ultimate answer to the questions arising from these two puzzling cases. It seems that he concluded his analysis with a shortcut and by giving the reader topics for discussion and reflection, leaving the door open to alternative readings. It is important to dwell longer on this conclusion, for it leads to interpretations with regards to the conception of the nature of lying Augustine had in mind that depart from previous scholarship.

4.11. Augustine's indecisiveness

The crux of the matter is left partially unresolved, and the examination of the two cases ends without a definitive pronouncement in regards to the necessity of the intention to deceive in defining the nature of lying. The sentence with which Augustine concludes the paragraph is, thus, understandable if not obvious: "But, whether this alone is a lie is another question".[74] This conclusion leaves the reader of the *De mendacio* puzzled, at best.

Arthur Vermeersch (1920: 14) and Michael Ledrus (1943) have interpreted this point as Augustine's indecisiveness – providing us with a definition of the lie which includes the element of the intentionality of deceit. The context in which Augustine set forth his famous definition is now being expounded. It is clear that the definition he gave comes as the conclusion of a difficult and complex analysis at the end of which he shows a wavering attitude as to how to solve the dilemma. It is crucial to emphasize this aspect, for it indicates that the definition of the 'manifest lie', as outlined at the end of Chapter IV, should not be taken uncritically and in an unproblematic fashion. A few other scholars

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[72] *Mend.* 4,4 (CSLE 41, 416, trans. Muldowney, *On Lying*, 59).
[73] *Mend.* 4,4 (CSLE 41, 416, trans. Muldowney, *On Lying*, 59).
[74] *Mend.* 4,4 (CSLE 41, 416, trans. Muldowney, *On Lying*, 60).

remarked this point. Michel-Ange Gomez acquiesced in his interpretation of the issue:

> A propos de cette prétendue definition augustinienne du mensonge, on remarque donc: a) elle n'est pas exclusive, b) elle vis un plus sûr. St. Augustin ne l'adopte que pour ce motif: elle ne donne prise à aucune contestation, elle est admise partout. Ce n'est point en vertu d'une opinion fixe, mais pour la commodité de la discussion, que St. Augustin l'emploie telle quelle. La question traitée était si complexe qu'il était de prudence élémentaire d'user d'une formule indiscutée. (Gomez 1929: 31)

Likewise, Gianbattista Faure (1847: 55) considered it erroneous that the intentionality of deception is a constituent element of the lie. He claimed that Augustine included in the definition of the lie the element of the intention to deceive due to the circumstances of the composition of the treatise. Since there were many disagreements on this subject, Augustine provided a definition cast in a clear-cut fashion in order to have a basis for discussion on which everyone would have to agree. Although along similar lines, Alfred Sieradski (1952: 16–19) provided a two-fold reading of intentionality: "explicit" and "implicit". Explicit intentionality falls within the primitive definition of the lie; the implicit angle is taken up in other works of Augustine, including the *Enchiridion*, where all kinds of lies are condemned, even those not inclusive of the will of deception. It is not clear, however, whether Augustine takes the intention to deceive to be interpreted as explicit or implicit. There are yet serious arguments to challenge the generally acknowledged claim that the intention to deceive must be taken as explicit and that it is a necessary feature of the lie. Some authors voiced clear doubts in this regard (Faure 1847; Gomez 1929; Sieradski 1952; Waffalaert 1884). Indeed, the matter is by far more subtle and the argument is much more fine-grained that many believed it to be.

In conclusion, the cornerstone of the lie seems to dwell in the *falsa significatio*, namely, in the intention to say what is believed to be false. The single discrepancy between thought and speech, abstracting from an explicit intention to deceive, is *per se* potentially misleading inasmuch as it may lead someone into error. Seen from this vantage-point, there would then be a kind of implicit deception in any deliberate falsehood (Sieradski 1952: 18).

4.12. *Fallax* and *mendax*: what lies and what deceives

In favour of this thesis, Sieradski (1952: 17) refers to the revealing distinction proposed by Augustine between *mendax* (what lies) and *fallax* (what deceives) that we have already discussed. The first (*mentiens*) – a liar – wishes to appear or to be taken for what he really is not, and he does so intentionally; the second, by contrast, is unwillingly or mistakenly considered by someone to be other than he really is. Therefore, the first lies, whereas the second is deceiving – which can be linked to "fool's gold for gold hunters". Augustine uses this

criterion to distinguish the liar (*mentiens*) from what deceives (*fallens*): "There is in every liar the will to deceive, even though is not believed".[75] By the mere fact of saying the contrary of what one thinks, the liar intends to give the false impression that this is indeed his genuine thought, whereas in reality it is not. Therefore, when speech is contradicting what one has in his mind, in the sole wilful expression of what is regarded as false as if it were true, regardless of whether or not there is an explicit intention to deceive, there is an intrinsic aspect of deception by reason of inducing the listener to fall into error.

The Augustinian distinction between *fallax* and *mendax* could be interpreted, in a more abstract way, by looking at the parties involved in an act of communication and assessing whether there exists an intentional addresser or not. In semiotic scholarship, Roman Jakobson (as well as others) drew attention to a similar distinction. He briefly considered the case in which there is a lack of an intentional addresser. Drawing on C. S. Peirce, he posited that "the sign demands nothing more than the possibility of being interpreted, even in the absence of an addresser" (Jakobson 1985 [1975]: 206). Jakobson used the presence of an intentional addresser as a criterion for discerning between "communication", which "implies a real or alleged addresser", and "information", where this aspect is lacking (Jakobson 1971b [1968]: 703). Unintended signs are "signs interpreted by their receivers without the existence of any intentional sender" (Jakobson 1971b [1968]: 703). These signs are not intentionally produced by an addresser; nonetheless, the process of interpretation still takes place via an interpreter who exploits the potentiality that each sign may have in terms of interpretation. Classical examples of this type of sign are symptoms of diseases interpreted by physicians as indexes, tracks left by animals and used by their hunters, and various forms of divination (Jakobson 1971b [1968]: 703). We will return to the difference between *mendax* and *fallax* in a successive section, since it will be useful in the discussion of non-deceitful untruthfulness.

In conclusion, Augustine did not refer to an explicit intention to deceive – distinct from the wilful false speech, as a criterion for judging the presence of the lie, but rather the false speech itself is sufficient. The *voluntas fallendi*, if it is to be considered as an essential element of every lie, must always be considered as "implicit", insofar as an explicit intention to deceive seems to be ruled out from what is essential to the lie (Sieradski 1952: 20; Waffelaert 1884: 12–13). It is manifest that this view challenges the mainstream interpretation of the Augustinian conception of the lie as necessarily including an explicit intention to deceive.[76]

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[75] *Vera relig.* 23, 61 (trans. Ramsey, *True Religion*, 72):«Nam ita discernitur mentiens a fallente, quod inest omni mentienti voluntas fallendi, etiamsi non ei credatur, fallens autem esse non potest, quim non fallit»

[76] I have argued elsewhere (Gramigna 2013) that the layers of intentionality in Augustine's doctrine of the lie is twofold.

4.13. The morality of the lie

Augustine, drawing on the Holy Scriptures, expressed his position on the morality of the lie quite neatly and firmly: there should not be lying under any circumstances,[77] insofar as anyone who lies commits iniquity. The lie derives its inherent "sinfulness" from the mismatch between thought and speech, insofar as "to use language in order to deceive, and not as it was designed to be used, is a sin".[78] As pointed out earlier, due to this position, he was included among those who followed an "intransigent tendency" (Oddone 1931: 268). Contrary to the "moderate" tendency, which sometimes allowed certain lies, the "intransigent" one, of which Augustine is the forefather, condemned all lies without exceptions.

Although Augustine recognized that all lies are transgressive and are therefore to be avoided, he did not grant the same seriousness, indiscriminately, to every kind of lie. Both the intention that urges to tell a falsehood and the object of the lie (the matter about which a falsehood is told), play a pivotal role in deciding the degree of sinfulness to be assigned to it. In general, it can be stated that lying in order to bring some advantage to another would not be such a grave violation compared to who is lying with the intent to cause harm to others. As Sieradski (1952: 36) pointed out, this intention, evidently, violates the principle of charity and, if the harms induced were serious, it would considered to be as a "mortal sin". When, however, one is moved by a benign intention towards others, it would violate the virtue of veracity, and therefore, it would be to most an acceptable wrongdoing. Also the object of the lie (that about which one were to lie or the subject-in-question of the false statement) bears some weight on the moral evaluation-scale. The situation in which one misdirects a traveller by providing him with deliberately-erroneous directions is not comparable to a lie that concerns more grave matters, such as those that have to do with morality. It seems clear that, in the comparison between these two cases, the first is considered the least serious.

4.14. Augustine's eight-fold division of the lie

Within the *De mendacio*, Augustine formulated an eight-fold division of the kinds of lies according to the gradation of the gravity of the sin: the latter is inversely proportional to the place that every lie carries in the ladder between the first and the eighth type. As shown by L. Godefroy (1928: 557), rather than "species" of lies – as Augustine labelled them – it would be more appropriate to consider them as eight "degrees" of culpability that vary depending on the effect

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[77] *Mend.* 21,42 (CSLE 41, 463): «Elucet itaque discussis omnibus nihil aliud illa testimonia Scripturarum monere nisi numquam esse omnino mentiendum».

[78] *Ench.* 7, 22: «[…] omne mendacium ideo dicendum est esse peccatum quia homo, non solum quando scit ipse quid verum sit sed etiam si quando errat et fallitur sicut homo, hoc debet loqui quod animo gerit, sive illud verum sit sive putetur et non sit».

intended by the liar. As Feehan (1976: 126) pointed out, "the division is rooted not in the lie itself but rather in the end intended, the motive".

The eight degrees of the lie are as follows:[79]

1. The lie in matters of religion;
2. The lie that brings injury to some and has no benefit to anyone;
3. The lie that brings injury to someone and benefits another;
4. The lie said for the love of lying – the lie by itself;
5. The lie told from a desire to please others;
6. The lie that does not cause any harm and brings an advantage to someone;
7. The lie that does not affect any harm and prevents someone from death;
8. The lie that is harmful to no one and protects someone from physical defilement.

Augustine's eightfold gradation is a system where each lie is catalogued according to the gravity of sinfulness. This system is ranked in a descending order (from the most serious to the less evil lie). The gravity of sinfulness exacerbates or mitigates according to both the intended effect of the liar as well as its topic (the matter about which one were to tell a falsehood). The more one approaches the first types of the division, the more he sins; conversely, moving towards the lower grades of the scale, the less one sins.

In discussing of types of lies in regard to the degree of sinfulness they display, we deliberately used the word "effect" rather than "intention" in order to avoid unduly misunderstandings that may get in the way. Misinterpretations may arise due to the semantic overlapping of the "intention that prompts one to lie" with the concept of the "intention to deceive" (as described before). These issues have to do with two levels of analysis in the study of the lie and, as such, should not be confused. Here, Augustine discussed the reasons that prompt one to lie, and this is a slightly different way of conceiving intentionality, inasmuch as it engages with the effects that the liars intend to achieve by means of wilful false speech.

Hence, it is clear that the culpability of the lie is understood as being a gradual phenomenon and accordingly, the degrees of the lie are ranked on a descending order of gravity – from the most criminal (degree 1) to the most venial (degree 8).

4.14.1. The lie in religious doctrine

The lie said in *doctrina religionis* (religious doctrine) is the most serious of all, and must be avoided by all means.[80] The emphasis placed on the gravity of this

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[79] *Mend.* 14, 25.
[80] *Mend.* 21,43.

first kind, compared to the other "degrees", is seen by Ledrus (1943: 5) as revealing Augustine's hesitation in expressing an absolute reprobation also in regard to the other types of lying. Religious doctrine, circumscribed by Augustine as the first kind of lie, ranges from the lies uttered by those who are officially responsible for the teaching of religion, to anyone else (Godefroy 1928: 557). This means that *doctrina religionis*,[81] as a domain selected by the author for the first type of lie, rests upon quite a vague ambit insofar as it seems to include any lie whatsoever in connection with catholic doctrine told not only by religious teachers – that are normally appointed to such a task – but also by anyone relating to ordinary everyday-life (Sieradski 1952: 41). This kind of lie should not be justified under any circumstances, it is stated. Augustine's position is firm and absolute: once the authority of truth is questioned – giving rise to doubt – the certainty in matters of faith will be lost.[82]

Part of the book *Contra mendacium* is devoted to a discussion of this particular type of lie and prompted by the difficulty glimpsed by Consentius: "Is it permitted to one of the faithful to pretend he is a Priscillian in order to discover the secrets of that sect which imposes false oaths on its adherents in order to preserve its secrets?".[83] Augustine answers without hesitation that all lies are to be condemned, yet especially those concerning religion.

4.14.2. The lie told with the sole intention of injury

Set by Augustine in the second place of his 8-fold gradation is the lie that brings injury to someone and benefits no one (*et nulli prosit et obest alicui*). Maria Bettetini (2001: 7) considers this type of lie as harm being done *tout court*, since the harm caused does not have any counterpart. The dictate of not harming one's neighbour is universally recognized, and a lie that unjustly harms someone else is likewise to be avoided – being seen, undoubtedly, as sinful.[84]

4.14.3. The lie intending advantage to
one through injury of another

Going down to the third degree of gravity, Augustine placed the lie intending advantage to one through injury of another (*quod ita prodest alteri ut obsit alteri*). In contrast to the second degree of lies, in the third kind there is someone who benefits from the lie. The third kind of lie is beneficial to one person while it harms another. This lie is not permitted even when, through it, we can prevent a graver injury to one man unjustly causing a lesser injury to

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[81]   *Mend.* 10,17.
[82]   *Mend.* 10,17.
[83]   *C. mend.* 1,1: «Quid est enim aliud mentiamur, ut haereticos mendaces ad veritatem adducamus, nisi: faciamus mala, ut veniant bona?».
[84]   *Mend.* 21,42.

another.[85] Thereby, this type of lie is compared to a violent action with which the bread is taken by force from one prosperous man in order to feed a hungry person. Taking the bread from the strong in order to give it to the weak would be unjust. Likewise, killing an innocent person in order to prevent the death of another is reprehensible: no good that benefits someone can justify the unjust harming of someone else, even if lightly.[86]

4.14.4. The real lie (*mendacium nudum*)

The "real lie" (*mendacium nudum*) embodies what may be regarded as the quintessence of the lie, namely, the lie told only for the pleasure of lying and deceiving. It is the lie-in-itself (lying for the sake of lying), without being weathered by any good or bad intent, and moreover, it is said without any necessity – purely and simply to lie. This type of *mendacium* is less serious than the preceding one, for it involves no significant harm to others. Equally, however, it is considered more serious than the lie of the third kind, whose benign effect alleviates its harm. It is worth noting that in Augustine's eight-fold division of lies the fourth degree is somewhat of an anomaly because it does not meet the criteria of harming or benefit others.[87]

It is also worth mentioning that Augustine distinguishes the liar – in the proper sense of the word (*mendax*) from the one who lies (*mentiens*): the former is the one who utters lies for the love of lying and out-of-habit. Augustine identifies, by contrast, *mentiens* – the one who lies (in this regard like the *mendax*) albeit reluctantly as if he were "forced" to use the lie to gain some end.[88] In the case of the *mentiens*, the effect (some harm or benefit resulting from the lie) prevails over the cause (lying for its own sake).

4.14.5. The lie told from desire of pleasing others

The lie told to please others in smooth discourse (*mendacium quod sit placendi cupiditate de suaviloquio*) has almost the same degree of seriousness of the former type of lie (*mendacium nudum*), even though Augustine recognizes it has some usefulness derived from the pleasure it may spark in others (in a conversation). Those who indulge in this kind of lie are not driven by a morbid love for lying, nor are they necessarily addicted to lies, as in the fourth case, yet they lie in order to ostensibly show others supposed qualities of acuteness or

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[85] *Mend.* 9,16: (CSLE 41, 435): «Et omnino numquam pro aliquo mentiendum est eo mendacio, quod alterum laedat, etsi levius laeditur, quam ille, nisi ita mentireris, laederetur».

[86] *Mend.* 9,16.

[87] It would be fruitful to compare Augustine's conception of the lie with Frankfurt's «bullshit»: «Lies in this category are not told as means to any end distinct from the propagation of falsehood. They are told simply for their own sake – i.e. pureöy out of love of deception» (Frankfurt 2005 [1986]: 58–59).

[88] *Mend.* 9,16 (CSLE 41, 437): «[…] mentiens est etiam qui mentitur invitus».

brilliance. There is no particular end towards harming or benefiting others, but simply to please the listeners in the sense of delighting them in conversation. In other words, they lie to gain recognition from others. They would certainly prefer to be appreciated saying the truth, yet not finding authentically-true things easy to come by – with which they can delight the audience – they prefer telling lies rather than remaining silent.[89] Therefore, this type of lie stems from the sheer wish to pretend to be what one is not and being reputed as witty, funny, or simply better than what one actually is.

At this juncture, it is important to table a clarification. The latter type of lie must be distinguished from jokes themselves, statements that, both for the way they are said and for the predisposition of the speaker, are not misleading, even though one is not telling the truth.[90] To put it briefly, the joke has no intention of deception, for the playful-intention is evident from the tone of voice and the expression of the speaker, proper meta-communicative markers within a recognised and known context. Lies, Augustine says, "are indulged in by liars in a serious way, not jokingly".[91]

The connection between lying and joking proves to be a quite fertile ground for further discussion. That said, we shall devote a separate section of this chapter to joking – that elaborates on the specific difference between the nature of lying and joking (cf. 4.15).

4.14.6. The lie that harms no one and benefits someone

Proceeding to the lower steps of the division, we find those lies that do not harm, being of benefit to someone (*quod et nulli obest et prodest alicui*). This kind of lie, normally attributed to the kindly disposed and benevolent people, has been the subject of much-heated discussion, as Augustine pointed out in chapter XII of the *De mendacio*. This kind of lie is forbidden because compromising the truth for temporal advantages or for the safety of another would be unlawful. Also, the lie that, not effecting any harm, prevents someone from death is to be understood as a subtype of the sixth-type in the Augustinian taxonomy of lies.

Finally, in the eighth and last degree of Augustine's division of lies, we find those lies indulged in in order to protect themselves or others from the harm of undergoing physical defilement. Even though this can be seen as the least severe the cases, lying should be avoided: "The eighth type of lie is forbidden, because, both in good deeds, such as are chastity of soul and purity of body, and in evil deeds what we ourselves do is of greater import than what we permit to be done".[92]

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[89]   *Mend.* 9,18.
[90]   *Mend.* 2,2.
[91]   *Quaestionum in heptateuchum* 145: «Mendacia enim a mendacibus serio aguntur, non ioco; cum autem quae non sunt tamquam ioco dicuntur, non deputantur mendacia».
[92]   *Mend.*21 (trans. Muldowney, *On Lying*, 108–109).

4.15. Augustine's 8-fold gradation revisited

Augustine's division of lies was subsequently taken up by St. Thomas Aquinas in the *Summa Theologiae* where the species of lies are grouped into three major members: the "pernicious lie" (*perniciosum*) that tends to harm one's neighbour, the "jocose lie" (*iocosum*), told for delight, and, finally, the "officious lie" (*officiosum*), with which one tends to help others.[93] This tripartite division will remain the foundation of the Catholic doctrine on mendacity.

Apart from the specificities of Aquinas' threefold division and his particular view on the essence of the lie, what is germane to our immediate purposes is the logic behind it. Being grafted onto the precedent division elaborated by Augustine, the tri-partition of Aquinas is useful in view of the clarification of the logic used by his predecessor in formulating his own gradation. Similarly to the work of Aquinas, Augustine's eight degrees of the lie can, in fact, be grouped into three larger categories.

As can be inferred from the following passage, Aquinas' division is based on the criterion of the end or result of the lie:

> The lie that is sinful can be divided on the basis of factors that worsen or lessen its sinfulness by reasons of the end intended. On the one hand the malice of the lie is worsened should anyone intend by it to injure another; and this is what is called a pernicious lie. On the other hand, the fault is lightened should the purpose be some good, whether pleasurable, the case with the humorous lie; or practical, the case with the useful lie, intended for another's advantage or protection. This is the basis of the division of the lie into these three members (*Summa Theol.* II-II, q. 110, 2).

In light of Aquinas' partition, we can now attempt at revisiting Augustine's division as shown in table 4.

Table 4 summarizes Augustine's division informed by Aquinas' tri-partition of lies. The eight species or degrees proposed by Augustine are grouped into three larger members – that is, "pernicious", "jocose" and "officious" lies. A similar structure presents the advantage of helping to clarify the internal logic upon which Augustine's division of lies was grafted. Needless to say, a full-fledged comparison between the positions of the two Church Fathers on the subject of lying would deserve a much lengthier, scrupulous and deeper study than the one sketched out in these pages. This task, however, would fall outside the purpose of the present work. Nevertheless, we found such a comparison a useful heuristic tool that aids the interpretation of Augustine's own taxonomy.

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[93]　St. Thomas Aquinas, *Summa theologiae.* II II, q. 110 a. 2.

Table 4. Augustine's eightfold gradation of lies revisited in the light of Aquinas' threefold division

Pernicious (injurious)	Lie against God	1. Lie told in religious matters
	Lie against man	2. Lie that profits no one and injures another
		3. Lie that intends advantage to one trought injury of another
Jocose (non injurious)		4. Lie told out for the sole love of lying and deception
		5. Lie told from desire of pleasing others
Officious (non injurious)	External goods	6. Lie useful to another in regard to material goods (money)
	Corporeal integrity	7. Lie that saves a man from death
	Preservation of virtue	8. Lie that prevents someone from defilement

4.16. False as deceitful and false as fictitious

In what follows, we shall go beyond Augustine and turn to the formal distinction between lying and joking in order to evaluate the semiotic significance of this comparison. We believe this endeavour is worth the effort, since the nature of joking in connection with lying is a topic that has been overlooked in Augustinian studies, except for the excellent study of Christopher Levenick (2004).

Augustine, in the incipit of the *De mendacio*, ruled out jokes from his enquiry about the nature of the lie, for it is evident that jokes are not lies, and thus, this subject falls outside the scope of his investigation. As mentioned above (in 4.13.5), in his picture of the *mendacium* the true, real lie is distinguished from the "jocose lie". Jokes and lies cannot be confused "since both in the verbal expression and in the attitude of the one joking such lies are accompanied by a very evident lack of intention to deceive, even though the

person be not speaking the truth".[94] Ultimately, the joke does not present any will of deception as the playful intent is signalled by the tone of voice as well as by the expression of the speaker. Gillian R. Evans (1982: 67) succinctly summed up this point:

> The man who tells a joke makes it clear to his listener that he does not intend what he says to be taken seriously. His tone of voice, the sting in the tail of the joke, the revelation that he was jesting or teasing, when his listener has been taking him seriously, all make it impossible to confuse a joke with a lie, because the true state of affairs is made plain in the end.

On the basis of this evidence, jokes and lies cannot be confused. Although lying and joking are two distinct phenomena, nonetheless they do have a least one trait in common: namely, both the joke and the lie meet the criterion of dealing with some sort of falsehoods. Indeed, without hesitation, Augustine posited that those who are joking do not assert genuine things. In this respect, despite the element of intentional deception being absent, the joke is still catalogued as a type of untruthfulness. As remarked by Christopher Levenick (2004: 304–305), "a joke, by its nature, involves the joker signifying something other than what he believes to be the actual case". As is manifest, this issue opens up a new vista on non-mendacious types of deceptions, inasmuch as the joke is a falsehood that does not intend to mislead (except the case in which one is pretending to be joking).

As Augustine correctly pointed out, from the attitude and tone of voice of the speaker one understands that he is engaging in a non-serious talk. This means that such talks involve the showing of some meta-communicative markers in order to signal to the listener that what is at stake is not to be taken as a serious speech act. These markers, thus, aid the audience in framing the context in which these words are spoken and taking them as a joke. In other words, the communicative situation in which the joke takes place presupposes a shared competence by the interpreters. This common code allows both the speaker and the listener to interpret the meta-communicative markers in the appropriate way, signalling the talk as a non-serious speech act. In a way, this logic is similar to what happens in animal communication when animals engage in play. As Gregory Bateson (1987 [1972]: 139) observed, in such cases there is an exchange of "signals that would carry the message this is play".

Full awareness of the nature of a joke is, thus, essential. It is a tacit consensus given by the parties in being, as it were, playfully deceived. This distinctive feature sets jokes aside from lies inasmuch as the intention of the speaker is *overt*, whereas in the case of lies it is usually *covert*. Moreover, the full awareness of the nature of the joke from both sides of communicators contradicts one of the characteristic feature upon which lying operates – that is, the altering of the relation between the liar and the dupe in regards to the access to knowledge. As pointed out above, lies are generally based on a knowledge

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[94] *Mend.* 2,2 (CSLE 41, 414, trans. Muldowney, *On Lying*, 54).

disparity between the parties of the communicative act (since the liar knows something more than the dupe and the situation is therefore unbalanced). This does not occur in non-serious talks.

The logic at stake in jokes entails the "suspension of the disbelief", and thus, any intent to deceive is lacking.[95] As Paul Ekman (1985: 27) pointed out, "In a lie the target has not asked to be misled, nor has the liar given any *prior notification* of an intention to do so. It would be bizarre to call actors liars. Their audience agrees to be misled, for a time; that is why they are there". From what has been said, it is evident that not all falsehoods do have a desire to deceive and that beside guileful deceit there are other categories of non-truthfulness to be considered.

At this juncture, it is congenial to recall the distinction between *fallax* ('fallacious') and *mendax* ('mendacious') which Augustine laid out in one of his early writings, the *Soliloquia*. The former (*fallax*) is the falsity that strives to deceive, whereas the latter (*mendax*) is the falsity understood as a product of fiction whose purpose is not to deceive but to entertain. One is deceptive, while the other is "that which presents harmless falsehoods for enjoyment" (Dox 2004: 38).

This is how Augustine himself explained this distinction. We report *in toto* the passage where he posits this bifurcation inasmuch as it is very revealing for the purposes of the present discussion:

> I see, indeed, by our many experiments in all these things, that nothing remains which can justly be called false, save that which feigns to be what it is not, or, in general, that which tends to be and is not. Of the former type of false things are those which are either actually misleading or those which are simply fictitious. Of the misleading it may be said truly that it has a certain appetite for deceiving, which cannot be conceived to exist apart from soul, and results, on the one hand from reason, on the other from nature. But the fictitious I call that which is produced by makers of fiction: these differ from the misleading in this, that every misleader has a desire to deceive: while not every fiction-maker has.[96]

Falsity can thus be of two kinds: deceptive or non-deceptive. Deceptive falsity can be either intentionally misleading (as in the case of lies) or non-intentionally misleading, that is, potentially leading to errors due to the nature of being what is not. Non-deceptive falsity, on the contrary, does not intend to mislead, and it

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[95] This point is emphasized by many scholars. The study of Roger Caillois (2001[1958]: 19) is illuminating in this regard: «All play presupposes the temporary acceptance, if not of an illusion (indeed this last word means nothing less than beginning a game: in-lusio), then at least of a closed conventional, and, in certain respects, imaginary universe. Play can consist not only of deploying actions or submitting to one's fate in an imaginary milieu, but of becoming an illusory character oneself, and of so behaving. One is thus confronted with a diverse series of manifestations, the common element of which is that the subject makes believe or makes others believe that he is someone other than himself. He forgets, disguises, or temporarily sheds his personality in order to feign another».

[96] *Sol.* 2,9,16.

encompasses products of fictions, poetry, comedies, literature and also jokes and jests. This distinction can be summarized in the following diagram (Fig. 17):

```
                            False
              ┌───────────────┴───────────────┐
          Misleading                      Fictitious
       ┌──────┴──────┐
   Intentional    Non - intentional
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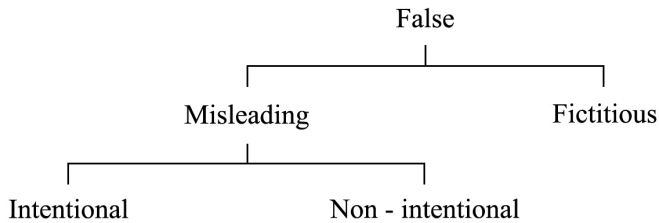
Figure 18. False as deceitful and false as fictitious

The Augustinian difference of *mendax* and *fallax* allows us to branch out to a similar distinction underscored in general semiotics, providing a more comprehensive interpretation. In this direction, it is worth recalling that both Marina Mizzau (1997) and Umberto Eco (1997) pointed out a distinction between false as *fake* and false as *fictitious*. The difference between the two lies in that the former does not display the signs of being fake – therefore pretending to be taken as authentic or true – whereas the latter, on the contrary, exhibits the signs of being untruthful. This is the same logic that is at stake in the difference between lies and jokes.

An example of the fictitious type of falsity is the theatrical masking, inasmuch as it does not pretend to be taken as serious; in other words, the audience is fully aware of the fictional nature of the theatrical masking. In this respect, the fictitious has the same logic of jokes that, as described supra, exhibit the signs of their fictional nature. On the other hand, faking involves an intention of being taken as genuine and to hide the signs that are evidence of fakery, such as, for instance, a woman's wig, for it aims at being taken as real. From the aforesaid, it is apparent that the fictitious is ruled by the logic of the *as if*. As Umberto Eco pointed out, acting *as if* being someone else by wearing a mask on a theatrical stage is different than putting on a mask of Diabolik and faking to be another person in order to rob a bank (Eco 1997: 33). To put it differently, the fictitious and the fake belong to the family of *pretending*, considered in a broad sense. In both cases, faking and fiction, there is the pretence of being someone else or something else. The difference lies in the fact that the latter, the fictitious, does not involve any intention to deceive, whereas the former, the fake, does involve the intention to mislead. Another way of tackling this issue would be to draw a difference between "pretending" and "acting", the former conceived as "an intentional deceptive move obtained through counterfeiting that which the hearer is intended to assume", as for instance "by limping, one can counterfeit lameness" (Vincent, Castelfranchi 1981: 754–755). On the other hand, "acting" can be seen as "the non-deceptive sister of pretending" inasmuch

as the one who acts and the addressee of such action are "accomplices in a game which involves the entertainment of two contradictory worlds: one, the real world, where x is false (a pretence), and the other, a fictional or imaginary world, where x is true" (Vincent, Castelfranchi 1981: 755).

4.17. Wolf in sheep's clothing: on feigners, simulators and hypocrites

What remains to be discussed is the question of whether non-verbal lies are conceivable in the frame of Augustine's doctrine of the *mendacium*. Undoubtedly, Augustine's focus is on the lie understood as false speech. This is in alignment with his own semiotics where words are thought of as the most widespread signs, and respectively, they received a great deal of attention in his corpus. Indeed, throughout his life Augustine devoted much more space to the study of words than to other signs. This preference was germane to his general design, that is, to pin down principles of scriptural interpretation, and since the signs used in the Bible are conventional verbal signs, the latter received a great deal of attention. The supremacy of words among other signs is manifest chiefly in *De doctrina christiana*, whose relevance was discussed in the previous chapter.

Augustine's stance concerning the overwhelming importance of words is an important corollary to the study of the lie. Since he envisaged words as the most suitable signs designated for human communication, it could be argued that the lie is a phenomenon that is entirely confined to written or spoken words. Griffiths (2004: 33) endorsed a similar view:

> Nonverbal actions cannot be lies. It is possible to make public one's thought without words (by gesture or other nonverbal sign), and it is also possible to choose to misinterpret what one thinks in these ways. But such cases lie outside Augustine's definition. He is, for the most part, concerned only with speech (or writing). He does say that one can lie with nonverbal signifiers. But once having said so, he scarcely returns to such cases.

This point is indisputable. Yet a question of whether lies are confined exclusively to the realm of language can still be raised. In what follows, it will be argued that although Augustine's emphasis was clearly on the lie as a speech act, other types of deceit, that prescind from the use of language, can nonetheless be accounted for in light of Augustine's thought. From the corpus of his writing, there is evidence that he was not unfamiliar with other forms of deceit and dissimulation that were not encompassed in the single phenomenon of the lie.

To start with, the very "classic" definition of the lie may offer some room for a broader interpretation, if read it carefully: "He lies [...] who holds one opinion in his mind and who gives expression to another through words or *any other*

outward manifestation.[97] The point to be made here is that, according to the abovementioned definition, it is not too much of a stretch to think that for Augustine one can lie with words or by means of signs of whatever kind. Can one lie only though words, or are there any other instruments to manifest a lie? Thomas Aquinas, whose undisputed Augustinian influence was pointed out supra, picked up this point in an overt fashion when he stated, "As Augustine says, among all signs words occupy the first place. In the saying, then, that lying is a false meaning in words, by 'words' every sort of sign is meant. Hence were one intend to convey something false by nodding he would not be innocent of lying (*Summa theol.* 2a2ae, 110, 1.3). If Aquinas' rendering of Augustine is accurate, then the view that he argues for the lie conceived as an exclusively linguistic phenomenon may be too restricted.

This said, there are at least two forms of dissimulation to be considered: hypocrisy and simulation. Augustine did not treat them in a systematic fashion as he did instead with the subject of the *mendacium*.

The idea of double-heartedness is not limited exclusively to the definition of the lie since this is clearly the mark that characterises other forms of dissimulation, too. In this regard, it is revealing the description of the "hypocrite" that Augustine made in the *De sermone domini in monte*:

> (It is manifest that hypocrites do not carry in their heart what they flash before the eyes of men. Hypocrites are pretenders, like mouthpieces of other persons, as in the plays of the theatre. For one who in tragedy takes the part of Agamemnon, for example, of or any other person involved in the story or myth being enacted, is not really the person himself, but impersonates him and is called a *hypocrita*. So, too, in the Church or in any phase of human life, whoever wishes to seem what he actually is not is a hypocrite. He pretends to be a right-doing person, but is not such in practice. The whole purpose of his behaviour is to win the praise of men.) (DSD II 2,6)

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[97] *Mend*. 3,3 (trans. Muldowney, *On Lying*, 55, emphasis mine).

CONCLUSIONS

Having reached the conclusion of our study, let us now take a general glance at Augustinian semiotics and extract the key points. Our original intention in undertaking the present enquiry has been to expound and interpret Augustine's theory of signs on the basis of the textual interpretation of some of the most relevant works that dealt with the subject. Upon interpretation of the texts – from the early *De dialectica* to the *De doctrina christiana* – there can be no doubt that reflections on signs, words, and language are all-pervasive in Augustine. However, let us be clear that there is no complete agreement among experts on this complex subject, and as such we feel that our enquiry is totally justifiable.

Considering the general character of Augustine's theory of signs – which is always thought of as utilitarian or instrumental – this assessment is not surprising. Augustinian semiotics is not an autonomous science; the analysis of signs must be approached with the realization that Augustine is concerned with the use (*utilitas*) of his theory and that his thought is theocentric. It is important to emphasize that Augustine's doctrine of signs is generally conceived of as the means to achieve a certain end. Indeed, he never envisaged the conceptions of *signum* or *verbum* – in all their variations and nomenclatures – for their own sake, as could be done in a contemporary scholarly debate. The definitions and concepts Augustine outlined in his works were ancillary to a wider scope, and the application of the theory is often more important than the theory itself.

The doctrine of signs set forth in the *De doctrina christiana* served the purpose of developing a method for the textual interpretation of the Scriptures. Indeed, some commentators have argued that Augustine's originality lies in the application of a theory of signs to the interpretation of the Bible (Jackson 1969). Similarly, the *De dialectica* was part of a larger project on the liberal arts, and its aim was to use material things as a ladder towards more spiritual things. The *De magistro* expounded the thesis of the 'inner teacher' after an articulate and lengthy analysis of signs used as an instrument for teaching as well as a medium for intersubjective communication. Seen through this perspective, it is also not surprising to find apparent mismatches within Augustine's own sign conceptions – which in fact do not always overlap and diverge in several significant respects. Not only has the theory been reworked and redeveloped in time, but the analysis of signs is always tailored for different purposes and shaped accordingly. Thus, the theocentric, exegetical and instrumental outlook of Augustine's works must be considered, if one intends to pin down a full-fledged extrapolation of an organic and general theory of signs on the basis of Augustine's works.

Rather than one single, compact and clear-cut *theory* of the sign in Augustine, it is advisable to refer to his *theories* of the sign. Mary Sirridge (2000), with good reason, has referred to Augustine's approach by identifying two models of language – which she has termed as the "volitional" and the

"intrisicist" theories – that coexist within his works. Based on the conception of the sign as intentionally given and stressing the will to signify, the volitional model is predominant in the *De doctrina christiana*, whereas the intrinsicist model, whose emphasis is on "the contract between inner word and the external word which is formed and expressed in some language" (Sirridge 2000: 48), is presented in the *De trinitate*. To these two models outlined by Sirridge, we could add a third one, which we term the epistemological model. In the latter, the sign functions as a means of knowing and is predominant in the *De magistro*.

It is, therefore, clear that there exist many strands of thought that became confluent in Augustine's sign theory and were commingled, although it can be pointed out that there are some common themes, core concepts and key definitions. Although each Augustinian work contains a different analysis of the symbolic relation and, correspondingly, the theory of the sign pursues a different scope, the similarity of problem is not obscured.

Considering this key feature of Augustine's analysis of signs – the instrumentality of his approach – throughout the present study we always considered his theories of the sign in context. This feature sets apart our enquiry from the preceding research on the subject conducted within the scientific community of semiotics. To get a perspective on the works analyzed, we placed the emphasis on the specifics of the context where the definitions, which were extrapolated and discussed in the thesis, found their initial formulations.

Particular attention was also given to the analysis of the structure of Augustine's works in order to show the place of the theory of signs within the overall organization of the treated subject. The interplay between the original context and purpose of Augustine's works and the concepts he outlined are pivotal and must not be overlooked. Indeed, it is within this orientation that Augustine's works can be most meaningfully examined.

Moreover, it seems endemic to a type of contemporary semiotic analysis or historiographical reconstructions of semiotics (Deely 2001; 2007; Eco 1984; 1997; Todorov 1977) to lean towards taking the *De doctrina christiana* as the point of reference in the debate about the birth of Western semiotics and to extract Augustine's theory of signs pre-eminently from this treatise. Outside of theological and philosophical circles, knowledge of other works of Augustine, such as the *De dialectica*, the *De magistro* and the *De mendacio*, is undoubtedly too small. Without minimizing the relevance of a masterpiece such as the *De doctrina christiana*, our purpose has been to show that all the aforementioned works are of tremendous interest for the semiotician. Augustine's own fascination towards signs and the process of signification was a lifelong concern. Indeed, his keen interest in the business of signs and words is not exclusively limited to the *De doctrina* because, as this study has shown, many other works provide interesting clues for reflection. Prior to the *De doctrina*, the young Augustine, in fact, laid the theoretical foundations for his theory of signs, language, and knowledge both in the *De dialectica* and in the *De magistro*. Both works have intrinsic importance and are essential landmarks for understanding

and assessing Augustine's picture of signs and language. We believe that the study of these texts, coupled with the *De doctrina christiana*, certainly repay the student for his time and trouble.

Augustine also had a very profound theory of the lie. Indeed, his doctrine of the *mendacium* was couched in terms of signs. What Ogden and Richards (1946 [1923]: 19) referred to as "verbal treachery" – which is the very essence of language – constitutes a fascinating sub-topic of Augustinian semiotics by and large, which is worthy of study. The one who lies has a "double heart" because he does not manifest through signs what his heart keeps secretly inside (hence the existence of false signs). The treatment of the lie as a scholarly subject proves to be instrumental to our research because lying involves a consideration of the uses and misuses of signs – how signs affect sign-users.

In a nutshell, the study of the lie involves a consideration of the pragmatic aspect of communication. The inclusion of this subject within Augustine's theory of signs is an additional feature that is characteristic to our study and sets it apart from previous research. From the point of view of a general theory of signs, the semiotics of the lie deserves careful consideration and study. As was hinted at the end of the last chapter, the theory of the lie could be expanded, branching out into the study of the types of devious uses of signs that do not involve a linguistic means of expression. A semiotics of simulation and hypocrisy is undoubtedly a fruitful and fairly unexplored trajectory for future research on the problem of the lie.

Needless to say, the present work does not exhaust the entire field of symbolism and meaning in Augustine. We are cognizant of the limitations that the present research inexorably encounters. However, we hope that such an endeavor will inspire other scholars to take up the subject and to extend the study of signs and signification throughout the entire Augustinian corpus, thus covering additional works that, due to an obvious limitation of time and space, were left out from the present enquiry.

General features of Augustine's theories of the sign

What remains to be done is to bring into focus the material analyzed, and to point out the relations in order to provide a synthesis of the Augustinian approach to the subject of signs. As a culmination of the present study, we can now dwell on an overall assessment of Augustine's analysis of signs and seek to connect the dots within his own general theory. These conclusive remarks therefore, attend to an assessment of the significance of Augustine's thought within the broader disciplinary field of semiotics.

To start with, let us list some of the main principles of Augustine's theory of signs. This list does not pretend to be exhaustive, yet we may claim these distinct features:

1. There are things and signs. The former, in their proper sense, are things that are not used to signify; the latter are things being used to signify.
2. Every sign is always a thing, but not all things are signs. Some things, however, are used as signs of other things, thus being simultaneously things and signs.
3. Generally speaking, signs are those things that are used to signify something.
4. That which is signified by a sign can be termed as "signifiable". At times, also the generic term "thing" is used in this respect.
5. Language is a semiotic system.
6. Words are signs whose sole scope is to signify; they are signs used to express thoughts inter-subjectively.
7. There are numerous impediments to a conception of the word as a tool for expressing thoughts. These are identified as obscurities, ambiguities, equivocations and lies of various kinds.
8. Thus, words are an imperfect means of communication.
9. No sign can be said to be known perfectly unless it be known exactly what it is a sign of.
10. A theory of signs presupposes cognition of the things signified.
11. In a more specific sense, a sign can be defined as a thing which causes us to think of something beyond the impression the thing itself makes upon the senses.
12. Generally speaking, signs are natural or given (according to their source), but their variety is not limited to this division.
13. Natural signs are already existing things (they are not man-made) and belong to the analogical network of nature.
14. Natural signs occur non-intentionally; given signs occur intentionally.
15. Given signs are those which living creatures show to one another for the purposes of conveying, as far as they are able, their states of mind (the motions of their spirits), or something which they have sensed or understood.
16. There also exist conventional signs. These signs are based on a covenant between the members of a society.
17. Signifying means to give signs. The main purpose of signifying is to bring forth and transfer to another mind what is conceived in the mind of the sign-giver.
18. Signs occur in myriad varieties, and their divisions are numerous. There are several criteria to divide signs, some of which are as follows:
   a. Source: natural signs or given signs;
   b. Sign-users: humans or animals other than humans;
   c. According to the five senses through which the sign is perceived by a sign-receiver:
      i. Sight (gestures – such as a nod, movements of the hands and the eyes, military standards, written words);
      ii. Hearing (words, the sound emitted by musical instruments);

      iii. Smell ("our Lord gave a sign with the odor of the ointment by which his feet were anointed");

      iv. Taste ("'the taste of the sacrament of his body and blood' signified what he wished");

      v. Touch (when the woman was healed by touching the hem of his garment, something was signified).

  d. Obscurity: unknown signs;

  e. Ambiguity: ambiguous signs;

  f. In reference to the designation of the thing signified: literal signs and figurative signs;

  g. According to the object of signification: signs signified by signs and things signified by signs.

  h. According to the means used in signifying: signs (such as words or gestures) and things shown directly (ostensive signs).

  i. According to whether the sign-giver is reliable or not, signs can be genuine or false.

19. Words are the signs *par excellence* used by mankind.

20. Words can express the meaning of all signs but not vice versa.

General import of the Augustinian semiotics

An analysis of Augustine's theories of the sign reveals several important ideas. There are indeed some recurrent themes that run throughout Augustine's doctrine that are worth spelling out. In this respect, we shall briefly discuss four key issues that bear significance to the subject. These focal nodes account for the main contributions of Augustine to the disciplinary field of semiotics:

1. The conceptions of *signum* and *verbum*;
2. The analysis of signs from the psychological standpoint;
3. The interplay between *res* and *signa*; and
4. The distinction between object language and metalanguage.

Section 1. Sign conceptions in Augustine

Let us summarize, in the form of a schematic outline, the various senses of *signum* and *verbum* which we have discovered in Augustine's selected philosophical works. The following table provides the synopsis of the definitions found in the texts scrutinized:

Table 5. An outline of sign conceptions in Augustine

Dial.	
Signum est quod et se ipsum sensui et praeter se aliquid animo ostendit (dial. 5).	A sign is something which is itself sensed and which indicates to the mind something beyond the sign itself.
Verbum est uniuscuiusque rei signum (dial. 5).	A word is a sign of any sort of thing.
Sed cum verba sint signa rerum (dial. 5,8).	Words are signs of things whenever they refer to them.
Mag.	
Non esse signum nisi aliquid significet (mag. 2,3).	Aug. — A sign is not a sign unless it signifies something.
Aug. Quid? Signum, nisi aliquid significet, potest esse signum? Ad. Non potest (mag. 2,3).	Aug. — Can a sign be a sign unless it signifies something? Ad. — It cannot.
Ut verbum sit quod cum aliquo significatu articulata voce profertur (mag. 4,8).	Aug. — A word is that which is uttered by the articulate voice with some meaning.
Signo cum duo sint, sonus et significatio (mag. 10,34).	Aug. — Two factors are involved with the sign, namely, sound and signification.
Doctr. chr.	
[…] signa, res […] quae ad significandum aliquid adhibentur (Doctr. chr. 2,2).	Signs are things used to signify something.
Signum est enim res praeter speciem, quam ingerit sensibus, aliud aliquid ex se faciens in cogitationem venire (Doctr. chr. 2,1).	A sign is a thing which causes us to think of something beyond the impression the thing itself makes upon the senses.
Data vero signa sunt quae sibi quaeque viventia invicem dant ad demonstrandos quantum possunt motus animi sui vel sensa aut intellecta quaelibet (Doctr. chr. 2,2).	Given signs are those which living creatures show to one other for the purpose of conveying, in so far as they are able, the emotions of their spirits or something which they have sensed or understood.

Before turning to the analysis of the concept of the sign, we need to first make some general considerations. It is hard to make a judgment as to what is the Augustinian work that contains the fullest exposition of sign theory. Each work has its own value and contributes to the making of Augustine's theory. It is probable that the *De dialectica* had a greater potential, although its significance has been downsized due to the problem of the authorship – the authenticity of the treatise was in fact questioned for several years – as well due to its incompleteness. The lengthiest treatment of signs is definitely the *De magistro*, whereas the most systematic view is given in the *De doctrina christiana*.

However, the *De dialectica* provides one of the earliest definitions of the word *(verbum)* as a sign of "any sort of things" (*uniuscuiusque*). The importance of this tenet becomes evident in what follows:

a) The word is, without hesitation, ranked among the class of signs;
b) Because it is conceived as a sign of any type of thing, the word has a higher semiotic capacity which sets language apart from any other sign system.

Augustine, thus, underscores the semiotic character of the word. To put it differently, he describes *words as signs*, therefore using the concept of *signum* both linguistically and non-linguistically. This distinction is consistent and recurs throughout Augustine's literary production. It was first traced to the *De dialectica*, and it is also found in the *De magistro*, in the *De doctrina christiana* -as well as in several other works.

At this juncture, we should make a point about the originality of such a tenet – namely, that words are signs. There has been a general tendency, within semiotic scholarship (Eco 1984; 1986; Deely 2009; Manetti 1987; Todorov 1977) as well as in other fields (Markus 1957), to look at Augustine's analysis of signs as particularly original because his theory merged two strands of thought about the concept of the sign – the sign as inference and as equivalence – in a novel synthesis. Markus (1957) pointed out that Augustine's originality lies in his application of the theory of signs to language. Following in the footsteps of Todorov, Eco (1986: 33) commented in a similar way on the originality of Augustine, whose signature is the "unification of the theories and predominance of linguistics". Commenting on this point, Eco wrote that "in the *De Magistro*, Augustine will definitely bring together the theory of signs and the theory of language. Fifteen centuries before Saussure, he will be the one to recognize the genus of signs, of which linguistic signs are a species, such as insignias, gestures, ostensive signs" (Eco 1984: 33).

Thus, the most common and acknowledged view is that for the first time in the history of Western thought, with Augustine, words are thought of as signs. As noted, this idea is reflected in the definitions of *verbum* outlined above. Although we endorse the main theoretical tenet – words are indeed signs – perhaps the originality of Augustine's thought in this respect should be reappraised.

To start with, the welding of the theory of signs with the theory of language already occurred in the *De dialectica*, rather than in the *De magistro*, as Eco suggested. Moreover, it is not absolutely certain whether Augustine was the very first one who spoke of words as signs – thus merging together theory of signs and theory of language. Indeed, some commentators – whose conclusions seem to be often overlooked – have voiced criticisms towards Augustine's paternity of this principle. The originality of Augustine in this matter is still an open question and should be qualified – in light of the studies that envisaged a different reading. Jackson pointed out that this widespread view is questionable

because the Stoics actually used a theory of signs as a linguistic theory. He makes reference to Seneca, Diogenes and Sextus Empiricus to corroborate his hypothesis. Commenting on this point, Jackson (1969: 49) says: "It might be more correct to say that Augustine is original among Latin authors in calling words 'signs'". We cannot but share the same concern.

The second important point to make: Augustine's definition of the word as a sign of any sort of thing ties in with the question of the place of language among other systems of signs. As compared to other kinds of signs, words have a privileged status in regards to their semiotic modeling capacity. The distinctive feature that is characteristic of the linguistic semiotic system is in fact a high semiotic capacity. In very simple terms, language is the most powerful semiotic system. Its higher semiotic capacity lies in the fact that words can be the signs of anything (themselves included). Words can be signs of themselves, signs of other signs and signs of things that are not signs. Words are quantitatively and qualitatively superior to other types of signs. Not only are linguistic signs larger in number in comparison to other signs (visual, auditory, olfactory and tactile) used by men, but they are also qualitatively superior because they can be used to signify anything – other semiotic systems included – whereas the contrary cannot be said to be true. As it is apparent, this issue – which will become central to many semiotic theories of the XIX century from Émile Benveniste to Louis Hjelmslev – ties in with the distinction between object language and metalanguage, to which we will turn in a separate section. This feature is in fact the basis for the understanding of how language can fulfill a metalinguistic function.

Going now into the specifics of Augustine's definitions as outlined above, it can be stated that his conception of *signum* is generally triadic, although this is not the rule. Indeed, there can be found dyadic as well as tetradic models of the sign involved in his works – the former can be found in the *De magistro* and the latter in the *De dialectica* – which renders his conceptions non-homogeneous. We do not, however, intend this to mean that his view is not coherent or consistent.

The triadic character of Augustine's model of the sign can be gleaned from one of the definitions of *signum* outlined in the *De doctrina christiana*: "Signs are things used to signify something" (*[...] signa, res [...] quae ad significandum aliquid adhibentur*). There are three *relata* that are joined together in this definition (Markus 1957; Jackson 1969) and form one illustration of sign relation in Augustine:

1. *Res* (thing as sign);
2. *Aliquid* (something, what is signified);
3. *Adhibentur* (the use of things by an interpreter).

Although Augustine did not identify it by this name, the abovementioned definition presupposes an organism or an interpreter that uses (*adhibentur*) things (*res*) as signs in order to signify something (*aliquid*). In such a

conception, the distinction between the interpretant of the sign and the object of the sign (in the Peircean terminology) is blurred.

Moreover, Augustine's definitions outlined in Table 1 involve the element of intentionality. This characteristic is prominent and consistent. Augustine distinguished between *signa naturalia* and *signa data* on the basis of the criterion of the will – *signa naturalia* are unintentioned signs whereas *signa data* are given willingly. However, despite the fact that he envisaged in the general theory of signs nonintentional conceptions of the sign as well, Augustine's focus remaining upon the analysis of intentional sign situations.

It is always difficult to interpolate the notions Augustine employed in his works with the nomenclatures used for the analysis of sign relations in contemporary semiotics. The terminologies used in semiotics cannot be entirely superimposed onto the ancient conceptions of the sign in all its variations, because they do not always overlap. A similar approach can be seen in the table below, which takes the three *relata* that come together in a sign relation as (1) the sign; (2) the interpretant; (3) the object, following the contemporary dominant trend in semiotics:

Table 6. An outline of sign relations in Augustine

	Sign	Interpretant	Object
Dial.	*Verbum - Dictio - Vox*	*Dicibile*	*Res*
Dial.	*Signum*	*Aliquid praetor se*	
Mag.	*Sonus*	*Significatus*	
Mag.	*Signum*	*Aliquid*	
Doc. Chr.	*Signa*	*Aliquid*	
Doc. Chr.	*Signum*	*Aliud Aliquid*	
De trinitate	*Verbum vocis*	*Verbum mentis*	*Res*

Such an approach is limited because it forces Augustine's terminology into conceptual categories that were foreign to his system. The equivalence between the terms is always relative and the heuristic relevance remains meagre. Indeed, Augustine's concepts in fact do not fit easily into this scheme.

A more fruitful approach in order to map Augustine's terms related to signs is to conceive a schema in which five building blocks hold together:

(1) The thingness of the sign;
(2) The perceptible aspect of the sign;
(3) The cognitive aspect of the sign;
(4) The relational aspect of the sign (the sign as signifying). The relation between what is signified and the sign is not fixed and should be qualified according to the type of sign;
(5) The inter-subjective aspect of the sign.

Because the sign is always a thing, a sign must have an aspect that is perceptible. In other words, a sign is a material body (1). The second aspect relates the perception of signs – that is to say, the sign in its perceivable aspect to the sensorium of the interpreter who perceives it. In other words, this dimension has to do with the sign and the act of sensation (2). This aspect already factors in a sign-receiver. The third element involved is something conceptual or psychological. In most definitions of the sign, there is very often something to which the sign relates to or something that is signified through the sign and is grasped with an act of cognition (3). The fourth element concerns the relation between what is signified and the sign. This relation is not fixed and ought to be qualified according to the type of sign it is (4). The last factor to take into account is the mind of the sign-receiver, which is the other end of the sign process.

Table 7. An outline of sign relations in Augustine

	(1)	(2)	(3)	(4)	(5)
Dial.	*signum*	*sensui*	*aliquid*	*ostendit*	*animo*
Mag.	*signum*		*aliquid*	*significat*	
Mag.	*signum / sonus*		*significatio*		
Doc. Chr.	*signum*		*aliquid*		*adhibentur*
Doc. Chr.	*signum*	*speciem sensibus*	*aliud aliquid*	*faciens venire*	*cogitatio*

Section 2. The analysis of the sign from the psychological standpoint

Augustine shows a lively interest in the psychological dimension of the process of signification. The *De magistro* takes a closer look into the use of signs, with special attention being given to verbal signs as well as the psychology of understanding the sign. On several occasions, Augustine refers to what is going on in the mind of the one who perceives a sign, which we can be referred to as the sign-receiver. From this standpoint, especially in the *De magistro*, Augustine designs a handful of principles that are worthy of attention:

1. There is a "law of reason itself imparted to our mind";
2. The knowledge of things is more valuable than the signs;
3. The knowledge of things precedes the knowledge of signs.

To start with, for Augustine, there is a law of the mind – "a law of reason" according to which, when signs are perceived or, in the case of words, when signs are heard, the sign-receiver attends to the things signified by the sign. Considering that signs have a material body and a cognitive dimension, this law says that the mind of the sign-receiver is projected toward that which is signified through an act of cognition. We could say that the communication

through words is regulated by this habit of signifying. Augustine is consistent with this logic which he reiterates in the *De trinitate*, "No sign can be said to be known perfectly unless it be known of what it is a sign".[1] This highlights to us why Augustine did indeed distinguish between the sign, the thing, the cognition of the sign, and the cognition the thing. The latter is essential for understanding the sign as a sign. In other words, if this knowledge is absent, there is not even recognition of the sign by an interpreter. This is why the knowledge of things is of greater value than the knowledge of their signs. For whatever is used to signify, whether it is words, gestures, or events, will not have significance for one who does not have knowledge of the things signified. In the case of words, when one hears them articulated but does not know what is signified, the sounds he hears are not signs in his consciousness but merely senseless noise. If he knows what is signified, then he does not learn from the sounds he hears. His attention is simply directed to what he already knows. This logic implies an important general principle, namely, the very institution of any kind of sign whatsoever presupposes knowledge of what is to be signified. Interestingly, Robert Ayers suggested that Peirce held a similar view of Augustine because "for both there must be knowledge of the things signs stand for if there is to be knowledge of the meanings of the signs".[2] Therefore, there is a necessary relation between the sign and the knowledge of what is signified by the sign. Such a relation is essential for any semantic process to actually take place. One fundamental point that can be gleaned from an analysis of the sign from the psychological standpoint is that the knowledge of things is a condition for any theory of signs.

Section 3. The interplay between *signum* and *res*

Among the general thematic threads found in Augustine, it is imperative to include the division between *res* and *signum*, which is the *trait d'union* between the works we have been dealing with. Despite Augustine's approach to the doublet *res/signum* and the definitions he provides for each of the terms varying according to the aim and focus of his works, *res* and *signum* constitute the building blocks for his general theory. Such a doublet is consistent throughout his literary career and it was in fact found in the majority of the works treated in the present enquiry.

The division between *res* and *signum* must by no means be taken as absolute. The emphasis can be placed either on *res* taken in themselves – thus as *things that exist* – or on *res* as signifying something else. For our own convenience, we call the first point of view *res qua res*, and the second *res qua*

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[1] *Trin*. 10,1,2.

[2] Ayers (1976: 7–8) refers to the following passage from Peirce to show the similarity between Augustine and the American pragmatist: «The Sign can only represent the Object and tell about it. It cannot furnish acquaintance with or recognition of that Object; for that is what is meant in this volume by the Object of a Sign; namely, that with which it presupposes an acquaintance in order to convey some further information concerning it».

signum. There is an implicit yet important argument that could be inferred from Augustine's treatment of the *res/signum* distinction. Augustine's view of things and signs envisages the possibility of shifting from one realm (the existence of things) to the other (the signifying of things). The boundary that separates *res* and *signum* is revealing because such a division is not fixed and immutable, but relative and susceptible of shifting from one division to the other. Augustine is extremely cognizant that the distinction between *res* and *signum* is relative rather than absolute, mobile rather than rigid, although he does not explicitly say so. Our thesis is that *res* can alter its own status shifting from the realm of things to the realm of signs, depending on whether the emphasis is placed on the existence or on the signification of things.

There are two conclusive remarks that can be drawn from the analysis of the *res*/*signum* division in Augustine from a semiotic viewpoint. The first conclusion relates both to the ontological and epistemic status of *res* and *signum,* where ontological means having to do with existence and epistemic means having to with knowledge. From an ontological point of view, things and signs share a common ground because both partake in the network of things. We saw that: signs, to a certain extent, are things, too. Yet our thesis is that there is an epistemological gulf between *res* and *signum* because the sign derives its nature essentially from the relation that holds to another thing for a subject, whereas things do not show such a quality. Such an epistemic discrepancy cannot be dismissed and must be always kept in mind. More could be added. Such an epistemic gulf can be thought of as a continuum, or a gradation, rather than a sharp and absolute separation. From the point of view of *res*, this means that anything can potentially function as a sign, thus shifting from the level of mere existence to the realm of signifying. Such a view is extremely modern and anticipates a pillar of the semiotics of the twentieth century.[3] From the perspective of signs, this epistemic status is pivotal because the essence of signs lies in the relation that signs entail with other things through the mechanism of signifying.

There is a second point to make. Augustine's logic of things and signs leads to the assessment of the nature of the *signum* as derivative and secondary in respect to *res*. Signs acquire their nature because they stand for something else. Yet signs do not corrupt their status of being things among other things, although of a rather peculiar nature. Furthermore, in respect to *res*, *signum* is derivative. *Res* is a primitive and intransitive concept, whereas *signum* is secondary and transitive in respect to *res*. We can represent the idea of the shifting from the level of *res* to the level of *signum* with the following scheme. The scheme should be read from top to bottom.

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[3]   On Augustine as a precursor of C. S. Peirce's semiotics, see Short (2007: 23–26).

Res (existence)

|

Signum (signifying)

|

Res (referent of the sign)
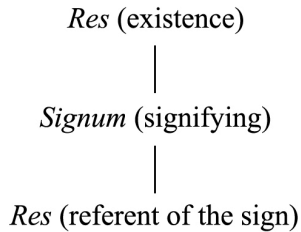
Figure 19. The *res/signum* continuum

Section 4. Object language and metalanguage

The distinction Augustine made between *res* and *signum* is the basis of a further distinction, namely, what in contemporary terminology is referred to as the difference between object language and metalanguage. To start with, *signum* in Augustine has a very peculiar status because the sign can be thought of as a sign and thing – things qua signs, in fact, do not cease to be things. It is sufficient to say that in order to understand Augustine's approach to signs, these two stances must be viewed as complementaries rather than contraries. The doublet *signum/ res* is rather, envisaged in terms of a relative, functional and (as it were) mobile relation. Such a division is not an absolute one.

The idea Augustine put forth is that a sign can rightly be the *res* of another sign. For instance, one can use words not only to talk about things but also to dispute about words. Indeed, Augustine pointed out that signs can refer to things – thus, there exist signs of things – and yet there are signs whose purpose is to signify other signs – signs of signs. The latter case of signifying occurs when words are conceived as signs of other words. From this perspective, there is the existence of two strata of signification that can be singled out: a word (which is a sign) can become the object (*res*) of another sign. In other words, a metalanguage can be envisaged that has a language itself as its own object.

In this study, we have sought to fathom the features of Augustine's theory of the sign in all its variations. The task was not an easy one because Augustine's writings admit of different interpretations. Our attempt here was simply like putting a toe in a vast ocean of information, knowledge and wisdom. We would answer to this with Augustine's own words: "what is sought with difficulty is discovered with more pleasure. Those who do not find what they seek directly stated labor in hunger; those who do not seek because they have what they wish at once frequently become indolent in disdain".[4]

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[4] *Doctr. chr.* 6,8 (trans. Robertson, *On Christian Doctrine*, 54).

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et spe et caritate	PL 40, CCL 46
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SUMMARY

More than fifteen hundred years ago, *Aurelius Augustinus* (354–430 AD), also known as St. Augustine or Augustine of Hippo, gave birth to a new paradigm of thought: the first Christian philosophy. He lived in the midst of quite a unique time in history, at the intersection of two cultural epochs, of which he was an outstanding synthesizer. It is said, and rightly so, that the boundaries of a culture are often the most salient and turbulent points with reference to the generation of novel meanings. So was the case for Augustine, who dwelled at the fringe of two cultures – classical antiquity and the Middle Ages – that were intersecting and commingling one with another, as two streams run into a mightier river.

Augustine's influence in the theological and philosophical debate remains undisputed. Not only was he a prominent figure in the history of theology and philosophy, but Augustine was also generally referred to as a forerunner of semiotics, the discipline whose business is the study of signs – in all their varieties and their actions. Indeed, Augustine's definition of *signum* – *"Signum est res praeter speciem quam ingerit sensibus, aliud aliquid ex se faciens in cogitationem venire"* – was and still is a landmark both for ancient sign theories as well as for the history of semiotics.

The present dissertation provides an account of the theories of the sign and signification in Augustine of Hippo. Its purpose is to approach Augustine's thought from the point of view of the problem of meaning with a view to its evaluation and implications for the domain of semiotics.

The study uses Augustine's own accounts to investigate and interpret the philosophical problem of the sign, so its methodology is textually-oriented and interpretative. The focus lies, for the most part, on the first decade of Augustine's literary production. The *De dialectica,* an early treatise written in 387, is taken as the *terminus ad quo* of the study, and the *De doctrina christiana*, Augustine's masterpiece started after 395 and completed in 420, is the *terminus ad quem*. The reason behind the determination of such a delimitation is because those selected texts show an explicit engagement with poignant discussion on the nature and structure of the sign, the variety of signs and how signs can be used to signify. Although Augustine's intention never was to establish a theory of meaning as an independent field of study, he largely employed a theory of signs. Despite the fact that this doctrine served a larger purpose, which was theological and exegetical, Augustine's approach to signs is intrinsically meaningful.

In its entirety, the present study comprises four chapters coupled with an introduction and conclusion. Although it does not follow a strict chronological design, the structure of the dissertation still takes into account the temporal stages of development of Augustine's thought. Thus, the interest is primarily in the exposition of the theories of signs as they were formulated first in the *De dialectica* (387), the *De magistro* (389), and the *De doctrina christiana* (396–

420), which are covered by Chapters 1–3. Chapter 4 takes up the issue of false signification (*falsa significatio*) and the doctrine of the lie (*mendacium*) as expounded in the *De mendacio* (395) and *Contra mendacium* (420).

Our enquiry begins with an examination of Augustine's treatment of signs in the *De dialectica*, an early treatise whose authorship was a disputed issue for several years. Nowadays, this treatise is generally considered as a genuine work of Augustine. Despite its incompleteness, we argue that the rudiments of Augustine's sign theory can already be traced or discerned in such a work. Indeed, here, one can glimpse the first definitions of *signum* ("sign"), *verbum* ("word") and *res* ("thing") and a clear discussion of words as signs. In this text, *signum* is defined as "something which is itself sensed and which indicates to the mind something beyond the sign itself", and *verbum* as "a sign of any sort of things". The *De dialectica* is a technical treatise with a pronounced Stoic influence. It presents revealing insights in reference with semantics and pragmatics. After a brief introduction of the genesis of the treatise, an analysis of the structure of the work is presented, coupled with a discussion of all the relevant sections. A special emphasis is given to Chapter 5 of the book ("On signification"). Upon analyses of the most significant passages of this section, the semiotic terminology Augustine employed is catalogued and discussed, the structure of the sign explained, and the meaning of his fourfold semiotic distinction (*signum*, *dictio*, *dicile* and *res*) expounded. Outlined in the first chapter are five main features of Augustine's work in regard to his theory of signs: (1) the relational nature of the sign; (2) the twofold nature of the sign; (3) the social nature of the sign; (4) the intentional nature of the sign; (5) the intersubjective nature of the sign. The conclusion is drawn that Augustine's approach to meaning, with reference to this early treatise, is tetradic: it places emphasis on the semantic and pragmatic aspect of communication, and underscores the fundamental distinction between object-language and meta-language.

Many of the themes treated in the *De dialectica* are taken up, amplified, and deepened in the *De magistro*, which is the subject of Chapter 2. Although the *De magistro* is the lengthiest account on signs Augustine ever wrote, its significance has been often downplayed for the theological outlook of the work as well as because on the surface the work is non-linear and largely inaccessible. The *De magistro* is a dialogue between Augustine and his sixteen-years-old son, Adeodatus. Father and son are not only the formal interlocutors of the dialogue, but they also symbolize the roles of the teacher and the learner. One of the central themes of the dialogue is teaching, intended in a broad sense as making known or communicating knowledge, and the problem of the conditions of the acquisition and communicability of knowledge. The dialogue raises thought-provoking questions to which Augustine never replies directly, and it induces both Adeodatus and the reader not to expect immediate answers but, rather, to formulate arguments meditated on at length: can a man teach another? What is the place of signs and the signifying process in respect to teaching, learning, and communication in general? Do signs contribute to the acquisition of knowledge or, instead, can the sign-mediation be altogether bypassed? The dialogue

revolves around two main theses diametrically contraposed: (1) nothing is taught if not by means of signs; (2) nothing is taught by means of signs. Augustine's discourse is cumulative and continues with sudden changes in directions, which lead him to dismiss the initial argument. Indeed, often, throughout the dialogue, a thesis previously substantiated is diametrically reversed, so that what seemed consolidated is questioned anew, in a sort of *reductio ab absurdum*. Because the structure of the dialogue is circular and its form dialogical, the work has given rise to many interpretations often contrasting one to the other. For this reason, Chapter 2, before the analysis of the text, first discusses the contemporary debate on the structure of the *De magistro* and shows its significance and implications in regard to the interpretation of the dialogue as a whole. It is argued that the backbone of the structure of the work is a threefold distinction Augustine sets forth twice throughout the text: (1) signs shown by means of signs, (2) things shown by doing things themselves, and (3) things shown by means of signs. Such a threefold distinction should be reckoned as a substantial part of the dialogue and can be thought of as an engine, as it were, around which the dialogue revolves.

Not only is Augustine's *De magistro* a dialogue about signs, language, and the acquisition of knowledge, but it also articulates a ruthless critique both to words as signs as well as to language as a system of signification. Ultimately, the commonsensical idea that signs (and words in particular) have the capacity of bringing forth someone's ideas to another subject or that signs are able to teach something to someone is radically challenged, and ultimately, the office of signs is reappraised, limiting the power of words to a set of very specific and narrow functions. What is intrinsically important is that in the *De magistro*, Augustine illustrates the relations of signs to themselves, to other signs, and to things that are not signs. In other words, the analysis takes into account intra-systemic, inter-systemic, and extra-systemic sign relations. Further important clues for reflections are the theory of showing, or "ostension", and the functions of speech, to which is devoted particular attention. By placing emphasis on the language analysis set forth for the most part of the work, it is argued that the *De magistro* has intrinsic significance for the study of meaning and the symbolism of language.

In Chapter 3, Augustine's theory of signs in the *De doctrina christiana* is presented. The treatise is explored in reference to the theory of signs and contemporary semiotics. Specific attention is given not only to the second Book of the treatise, which is devoted to the *doctrina signorum* ("doctrine of signs"), but also to Book I where Augustine discusses the *doctrina rerum* ("doctrine of things"). Throughout the chapter it is maintained that the concepts of res ("things") and *signa* ("signs") are interconnected and, for this reason, the two themes should be treated in tandem. After an introduction in which is discussed the debate around the *De doctrina christiana*, the special province of the enquiry is qualified. Chapter 3 deals with with one corner of the issue – namely, to study, *sub specie semiotica*, Augustine's *De doctrina christiana*. More specifically, the chapter examines four main questions: (1) to discuss Augustine's

definition of *signum* against the background of the concept of *res*; 2) to explore the debate around the long-lasting division between *signa naturalia* and *signa data*; 3) to examine the place of intentionality in Augustine's theory of signs; 4) to explore the various divisions of signs.

In Chapter 4, the issue of communication *mala fide* is taken up, analysed, and discussed with reference to Augustine's works. The chapter approaches the subject of false signs and how signs can be used for the purposes of misleading, by engaging with two works of Augustine that devoted a whole systematic analysis of the problem of the lie: the *De mendacio* (395) and the *Contra mendacium* (420). First, the nature of the lie is explored, and the definitions formulated by Augustine are outlined and analysed. Then, two features of the lie are singled out – the false signification and the intention to deceive. The pivotal question of whether in Augustine the intention to deceive is thought of as an essential criterion for the definition of what is a lie is debated and critically appraised. It is contended that, despite Augustine's definition of the lie as a false signification uttered for the purpose of deceiving is generally accepted as the true Augustinian definition, this formulation is not as clear-cut as one may think it to be. Upon closer scrutiny, it is argued that there are two interpretations of Augustine's stance (the mainstream interpretation and a second less known yet credible reading of his thought). It is argued that the second interpretation has better credentials to be closer to Augustine's conception about the nature of the lie. Moreover, Augustine's eightfold gradations of lies is spelled out and discussed. The remainder of the chapter goes beyond Augustine. Augustine's definition of the lie is paralleled to its congeners (mistakes, jokes, fakes, simulation) and branched out towards a novel synthesis. Ultimately, the chapter argues that a semiotics of the lie is of utmost importance.

The conclusive remarks attend to an assessment of the significance of Augustine's thought within the broader disciplinary field of semiotics. The material analysed is brought into focus, and the relations are pointed out in order to provide a synthesis of the Augustinian approach to the subject of signs. In comparison to previous studies on Augustine's theory of the sign conducted within semiotics (which generally placed emphasis on the theory of signs in the *De doctrina christiana*), the present enquiry presents a novel contribution in respect to the following points: (1) the present study is wider in scope inasmuch as it does take into account numerous additional Augustinian sources, such as the *De dialectica* and the *De magistro*, and unravels the complex semiotic theories found in these works; (2) it expands the subject of signs by including an analysis of the communication *mala fide* (which includes lying, misdirecting and other forms of deception); (3) it places the Augustinian theory of the sign always in context; (4) it emphasises the interconnectedness of the concepts of *res* (things) and *signa* (signs), which are treated in reference to one another; (5) it challenges and reappraises the classical Augustinian definition of the lie and argues that the heart of Augustine's definition is the notion of *falsa significatio*, namely, the mismatch between what one holds within his/her "heart" and expresses outwardly by means of signs; (6) it provides an original outlook of

types of falsehoods. Moreover, the study sketches the general features of Augustine's theory of signs in twenty main points and discusses the general import of Augustine semiotics by placing emphasis on four main issues: (a) the conceptions of *signum* and verbum; (b) the analysis of signs from the psychological standpoint; (c) the interplay between *res* and *signa*; and (d) the distinction between object language and metalanguage.

SUMMARY IN ESTONIAN

Augustinus ja märkide ning signifikatsiooni uurimine

Rohkem kui tuhat viissada aastat tagasi pani *Aurelius Augustinus* (354–430 AD), keda tuntakse ka kui Püha Augustinust ja Augustinust Hippost, aluse uuele mõtteparadigmale: esimesele kristlikule filosoofiale. Ta elas ja tegutses ainulaadsel ajastul, mis oli lõikumispunktiks kahele erinevale kultuuriperioodile, mida Augustinus oskas suurepärasel moel omavahel siduda ja sünteesida. On õigusega väidetud, et sageli on just kultuuride piirialad uudsete tähenduste loomise tulipunktideks. Nii oli see ka Augustinuse puhul, kes elas klassikalise antiikkultuuri ja keskaegse kultuuri piirimail – mis ristusid ja segunesid omavahel nagu kaks suuremasse jõkke suubuvat oja.

Augustinust, kelle mõju teoloogia ja filosoofia ajaloos on vaieldamatu, peetakse reeglina lisaks ka semiootika – teadusharu, mille huviobjektiks on kõikvõimalikud märgid ja nende toimimine – eelkäijaks. Ja tõepoolest on Augustinuse määratlus mõiste *signum* kohta – "*Signum est res praeter speciem quam ingerit sensibus, aliud aliquid ex se faciens in cogitationem venire*" – teedrajava tähtsusega nii antiikajastu märgiteooriate kui ka semiootika ajaloo seisukohast vaadatuna.

Käesolev doktoritöö annab ülevaate Augustinuse mõttepärandis esinevatest märgi- ja tähendusteooriatest. Uurimuse eesmärgiks on vaadelda Augustinuse arusaamasid tähenduse probleemi seisukohast, anda neile hinnang ning kajastada nende mõju semiootikale.

Uurimistöö tugineb märkide problemaatika avamisel ja tõlgendamisel Augustinuse enda vastavasisulistele kirjeldustele ning on seega meetodilt tekstikeskne ja tõlgendav. Tähelepanu fookuses on valdavalt Augustinuse loometegevuse esimesel aastakümnel valminud teosed. Uurimuse ajaliseks algpunktiks on Augustinuse "De dialectica", mis valmis aastal 387 ning lõpp-punktiks on tema peateos, aastatel 396–420 valminud "De doctrina christiana". Tekstide valikul on lähtutud asjaolust, et just nimetatud teostes on võimalik leida kõige selgekujulisemaid arutelusid märgi, märgistruktuuri, märgitüüpide ning märkide kasutamise kohta tähistamisprotsessis. Augustinuse sihiks ei olnud rajada tähendusteooriat iseseisva uurimisvaldkonnana, kuid see ei takistanud teda oma teostes sageli märgiteooriat kasutamast. Kuigi tema õpetus märkidest teenis laiemat, teoloogilist ja eksegeetilist otstarvet, on see ometi olemuslikult tähenduslik ka iseeneses.

Doktoritöö koosneb neljast peatükist, millele eelneb sissejuhatus ja järgneb kokkuvõte. Ehkki uurimuse ülesehitus ei ole rangelt kronoloogiline, on selle koostamisel siiski arvestatud Augustinuse seisukohtade kujunemise ja muutumisega ajas. Uurimuse peamiseks sihiks on tuua lugeja ette Augustinuse märgiteooriad sellistena, nagu need esinevad tema teostes "De dialectica" (387), "De magistro" (389) ja "De doctrina christiana" (396–420), mis moodustavad ühtlasi doktoritöö kolme esimese peatüki sisu. Neljandas peatükis käsitletakse vale

signifikatsiooni (*falsa significatio*) teemat ja õpetust valest (*mendacium*), mis leiavad kajastamist Augustinuse kirjutistes "De mendacio" (395) ja "Contra mendacium" (420).

Esimene peatükk keskendub Augustinuse arusaamale märkidest nii, nagu see on esitatud tema varases teoses "De dialectica", mille autorsuse üle on pikka aega vaieldud, kuid mida peetakse tänapäeval üldjuhul siiski Augustinuse algupäraseks kirjutiseks. Kuigi tegu pole terviklikku teosega, väidan, et selles võib ometi näha või aimata Augustinuse märgiteooriale iseloomulikke jooni. Siit leiab tema esimesed määratlused mõistetele *signum* ("märk"), *verbum* ("sõna") ja *res* ("asi") ning ühtlasi ka selgesõnalise arutelu sõnade kui märkide kohta. *Signum* on siin defineeritud kui "midagi, mis on ise tajutav ja mis osutab mõistuse jaoks millelegi, mis asub väljapool märki ennast" ning *verbum* kui "märk igat sorti asjade kohta". Tugevate stoitsistlike mõjutustega ja tehnilist laadi "De dialectica" sisaldab kõnekaid seisukohti semantika ja pragmaatika kohta. Doktoritöö annab esmalt ülevaate selle teose tekkeloost, liikudes seejärel selle ülesehituse ja olulisemate osade analüüsi juurde. Erilist tähelepanu on sealjuures pööratud selle 5. peatükile ("Tähendusest") ja omakorda selle kõige kaalukamate lõikude analüüsile, mille tulemuseks on Augustinuse kasutatud semiootilise terminoloogia kataloog ja selle kohta käiv arutelu nagu ka seletus sellele, mida tähendab Augustinuse jaoks märgi struktuur ja kuidas mõista tema neljatist semiootilist jaotust: *signum*, *dictio*, *dicile* ja *res*. Lisaks piiritletakse siin ka Augustinuse kirjatöödes esinevale märgiteooriale omased viis tunnusjoont, milleks on: (1) märgi relatsiooniline iseloom; (2) märgi kahetine iseloom; (3) märgi sotsiaalne iseloom; (4) märgi intentsionaalne iseloom; (5) märgi intersubjektiivne iseloom. Kõige selle põhjal järeldub, et Augustinuse varase kirjatöö valguses võib tema arusaama tähendusest pidada neljatiseks, ning et see rõhutab suhtlemise semantilist ja pragmaatilist aspekti ja toonitab põhimõttelist erinevust objekt-keele ja metakeele vahel.

Paljud "De dialecticas" käsitletud teemad leiavad kajastamist, täiendamist ja edasiarendamist Augustinuse teoses "De magistro", mida vaatleb lähemalt käesoleva uurimuse teine peatükk. Vaatamata tõsiasjale, et nimetatud teos on mahukaim Augustinuse kirjutatud käsitlus märkide kohta, on selle tähtsust teose teoloogilise hoiaku, mitte-lineaarsuse ja raskesti ligipääsetavuse tõttu sageli alahinnatud. "De magistro" kujutab endast vormilt dialoogi Augustinuse ja tema kuueteistkümneaastase poja Adeodatuse vahel. Isa ja poeg ei ole siin mitte lihtsalt vestluspartnerid, vaid nad kehastavad lisaks ka õpetaja ja õpilase rolli. Dialoogi üheks keskseks teemaks on õpetamine laias tähenduses kui teadmise vahendamine või teada andmine, ning teadmiste omandamise ja vahendatavuse tingimuste problemaatika. Dialoog on üles ehitatud Adeodatuse mõtlema ärgitavatele küsimustele, millele Augustinus ei vasta kunagi otse, ärgitades nõnda nii poega kui ka lugejat mitte otsima koheseid vastuseid, vaid sõnastama põhjalikult kaalutletud argumente: kas üks inimene saab üldse teist õpetada? Milline roll on õpetamise, õppimise ja suhtlemise juures üldiselt märkidel ja signifitseerimise protsessil? Kas märgid aitavad teadmise omandamisele kaasa või on võimalik märke kui teadmise vahendajaid hoopis vältida? Dialoog keerleb kahe

peamise teesi ümber, mis on teineteisele risti vastukäivad: (1) Märkide abita ei saa midagi õpetada; (2) Märkide abil ei saa midagi õpetada. Augustinuse arutluskäik on kumulatiivne ja kulgeb kiirete suunamuutustega, mis panevad ta mõnd oma varasemat argumenti hiljem kõrvale heitma. Kogu dialoogi vältel tuleb üsna sageli ette, et mõni eelpool tõendatud argument lükatakse hiljem täielikult ümber nii, et see, mis näis juba paika panduna tuleb uuesti üle küsida – nõnda, et tulemuseks on teatud mõttes *reductio ab absurdum*. Kuna dialoogi struktuur on tsirkulaarne ja selle vorm dialoogiline, on see andnud alust lugematule hulgale erinevatele ja sageli vastakatele tõlgendustele. Seetõttu annab ka käesoleva doktoritöö teine peatükk enne "De magistro" analüüsi juurde asumist ülevaate nüüdisaegsest diskussioonist teose struktuuri üle ning toob välja selle tähenduse ja mõju dialoogi kui sellise mõistmisele tervikuna. Uurimuse autor leiab, et kõnealuse kirjutise struktuuri selgroo moodustab kolmetine jaotus, mida Augustinus tekstis kahel korral kirjeldab: (1) märgid, mida näidatakse märkide abil, (2) asjad, mida näidatakse asjade tegemise läbi, ja (3) asjad, mida näidatakse märkide abil.

"De magistro" ei ole mitte üksnes dialoog märkide, keele ja teadmiste omandamise kohta, vaid see on ühtlasi ka armutu kriitika sõnade kui märkide ja keele kui signifikatsiooni süsteemi kohta. Veelgi enam, Augustinus seab siin küsimärgi alla kogu üldtunnustatud idee sellest, et märkidel (ja eriti sõnadel) on võime vahendada ühe subjekti mõtteid teisele või et märgid suudavad kellelegi midagi õpetada – selle kriitika tulemusena toimub märgi ülesande ümberhindamine ja sõna mõju piiramine nii, et sellele omistatakse vaid väga spetsiifilised ja kitsad funktsioonid. Siinkohal on äärmiselt oluline silmas pidada, et Augustinus näitlikustab „De magistros" nii märkide suhet isendasse, teistesse märkidesse kui ka asjadesse, mis ei ole märgid. Tänapäevase semiootika terminoloogiat kasutades võiks öelda, et ta võttis arvesse süsteemisiseseid ja -väliseid märgisuhteid. Olulisi vihjeid Augustinuse arusaamade mõistmiseks pakuvad lisaks tema osutuse või „ostensiooni" teooria ja kõne funktsiooni kirjeldused, millele on ka uurimistöö kõnealuses peatükis erilist tähelepanu pööratud. Kogu raamatus pea läbivalt esineva keeleanalüüsi alusel võib väita, et "De magistrol" on tähenduse ja keele sümbolismi uurimisel oluline väärtus.

Kolmas peatükk keskendub Augustinuse neljaköitelises teoses "De doctrina christiana" kajastuvale märgiteooriale, mida vaadeldakse nüüdisaegse semiootika ja märgiteooria valguses. Erilist tähelepanu on seejuures pööratud nii selle II raamatule, mis on pühendatud õpetusele märkidest (*doctrina signorum*) kui ka I raamatule, milles Augustinus käsitleb õpetust asjadest (*doctrina rerum*). Peatüki kui terviku lähte-eelduseks on, et Augustinuse arusaam "asjadest" (*res*) ja "märkidest" (*signa*) on omavahel seotud, mistõttu neid vaadeldakse koos. Pärast sissejuhatavat ülevaadet "De doctrina christiana" kohta käivast diskussioonist võetakse kõnealuses peatükis vaatluse alla nimetatud teost puudutav kitsam teemavaldkond. Siin seatakse eesmärgiks uurida "De doctrina christianat" *sub specie semiotica* ehk täpsemalt öelduna: (1) käsitleda Augustinuse arusaama mõistest *signum* tema arusaama valguses *res* kohta; 2) uurida lähemalt *signa naturalia* ja *signa data* vahelise pikaajalise eristuse kohta käivat diskus-

siooni; 3) uurida intentsionaalsuse rolli Augustinuse märgiteoorias; 4) uurida märkide erinevaid jaotusi.

Neljanda peatüki keskmes seisab pahatahtlik suhtlemine *mala fidei,* mida kirjeldatakse ja analüüsitakse Augustinuse teoste taustal. Vaatluse alla tuleb valede märkide teema ja see, kuidas märke võib kasutada eksitamise eesmärgil. Seejuures toetutakse Augustinuse teostele "De mendacio" (395) ja "Contra mendacium" (420), milles on vale probleemile pühendatud terve süstemaatiline analüüs. Esmalt uuritakse lähemalt vale olemust ja kirjeldatakse ning analüüsitakse Augustinuse antud definitsioone sellele. Seejärel keskendutakse vale kahele spetsiifilisele omadusele – valele signifikatsioonile ja kavatsusele petta. Arutelu käigus püütakse anda kriitiline hinnang keskse tähtsusega küsimusele, kas Augustinuse puhul tuleks kavatsust petta pidada vale definitsiooni olemuslikuks kriteeriumiks. Analüüsi käigus jõutakse tõdemuseni, et vaatamata sellele, et Augustinuse määratlust – mille kohaselt vale on ebaõige signifikatsioon, mida on esitatud petmise eesmärgil –, peetakse üldiselt Augustinuse autentseks definitsiooniks, ei ole see sõnastus sugugi nii selgepiiriline, nagu võiks arvata. Lähemal vaatlusel selgub, et Augustinuse seisukohta on võimalik tõlgendada kahel eri moel, millest üks on levinud arusaam ja teine vähem tuntud ent ometi sama usutav seletus. Käesolev uurimus annab alust väita, et neist kahest tõlgendusest teine seisab Augustinuse arusaamale valest lähemal. Lisaks käsitletakse kõnealuses peatükis Augustinuse kaheksaastmelist jaotust valedest kõnelemisel. Sealt edasi minnakse Augustinusest kaugemale, kõrvutades tema vale definitsiooni vale analoogide (vead, naljad, teesklus, simuleerimine) kohta käivate määratlustega, jõudes sel moel uudse sünteesini. Kõnealune peatükk tõstab selgelt esile vale kohta käiva semiootika ülimat olulisust.

Doktoritöö kokkuvõtvas osas antakse läbiviidud analüüsi ja uurimuse najal hinnang Augustinuse ideede olulisusele semiootika distsipliini jaoks laiemalt, tuues sealjuures selgelt esile nende ideede vahelised seosed, mille alusel on võimalik sünteesida Augustinuse arusaama märkidest. Käesolev uurimistöö erineb varasematest Augustinuse märgiteooria kohta käivatest semiootilistest uurimustest (mis keskenduvad eelkõige teoses "De doctrina christiana" kajastuvale märgiteooriale) ja esitab uudse lähenemise selle läbi, et: (1) on laiahaardelisem, tuginedes lisaks nimetatud teosele ka suurele hulgale teistele Augustinuse teostele, näiteks "De dialectica" ja "De magistro", ning avades neisse kätketud keerulisi semiootilisi teooriaid; (2) avardab märkide teemat, kaasates uurimusse analüüsi *mala fide* kommunikatsiooni kohta (mis hõlmab valetamist, eksitamist ja teisi petmise vorme); (3) asetab Augustinuse märgiteooria läbivalt konteksti; (4) rõhutab seost asjade (*res*) ja märkide (*signa*) käsituse vahel, mida kasutatakse teineteise taustal; (5) esitab väljakutse klassikalisele arusaamale Augustinuse definitsioonist vale kohta ja hindab selle ümber, väites, et Augustinuse määratluse tuumaks on arusaam *falsa significatio*'st ehk ebakõla selle vahel, mida inimene oma "südames" tunneb ja mida ta märkide abil väliselt väljendab; (6) pakub algupärase lähenemise valede jaotusele. Uurimuse tulemusena joonistuvad välja Augustinuse märgiteooria kakskümmend peamist tunnusjoont ning selgub Augustinuse semiootika olulisus neljas peamises

aspektis, milleks on: (a) arusaam *signum*'ist ja *verbum*'ist; (b) märkide analüüs psühholoogilisest vaatepunktist; (c) *res* ja *signa* vastastikune mõju; ja (d) objekt- ja metakeele eristamine.

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Education
2011–2017 University of Tartu, Doctoral studies in Semiotics and Theory of Culture
2009–2011 University of Tartu, *magister artium* (Semiotics, *cum laude*). Dissertation: *Augustine on Lying: A Semiotic Analysis.* Supervisor: Silvi Salupere
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2000–2003 University of Rome "La Sapienza", *baccalaureus artium* (Communication Studies, *cum laude*)

Career
2017– ... University of Tartu, Institute of Cultural Research, Junior Research Fellow in Culture and Cognition Studies
2014–2017 University of Tartu, Department of Semiotics, Lecturer
2012–213 University of Tartu, College of Foreign Languages and Culture, Lecturer

Courses taught
2012–2013 Methodology of Semiotic Analysis
2013–2016 The semiotics of the Tartu-Moscow School
2016–2017 Doctoral Seminar (monographic course on U. Eco, "Semiotics and the Philosophy of Language")
2016–2017 U. Eco's Interpretative semiotics

Academic honours and scholarships
2009 University of Rome "La Sapienza", Scholarship for post-graduate training abroad
2012 The Juri Lotman Award for the MA thesis "Augustine on Lying: A semiotic Analysis"

2012	DoRa, Scholarship for doctoral studies
2014	DoRa 8, Short term scholarship for visit abroad "Participation of Young Researchers in the International Circulation of Knowledge"
2014	DoRa T6 Long term scholarship "Study and research activities of doctoral students in foreign universities and research institutions"

Research stays abroad

| 09/2015–02/2016 | University of Siena, Department of Cognitive and Social Sciences, Visiting Ph. D Student |

Major publications

Gramigna, Remo 2016. La mentira en San Agustin. *DeSignis 25. Historia de la semiótica. Homenaje a Umberto Eco/History of Semiotics. In honor to Umberto Eco*, 45–55.

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Research grants

PUT1481 "The Role of Imaginary Narrative Scenarios in Cultural Dynamics (1.01.2017−31.12.2020)", Marina Grishakova, University of Tartu, Faculty of Arts and Humanities, Institute of Cultural Research; Other research staff.

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2000–2003	Rooma Ülikool "La Sapienza", bakalaureuseõpe, meedia ja kommunikatsioon (*cum laude*).

Teenistuskäik

2017– ...	Tartu Ülikool, kultuuriteaduste instituut, kultuuriuuringute ja kognitivistika nooremteadur
2014–2017	Tartu Ülikool, filosoofia ja semiootika instituut, lektor
2012–213	Tartu Ülikool, maailma keelte ja kultuuride kolledž, lektor

Uurimisvaldkonnad

Kultuur ja ühiskond, semiootika ajalugu, kultuur ja kognitsioon

Õpetatud kursusi

2012–2013	Semiootilise analüüsi metodoloogia
2013–2016	Tartu-Moskva koolkonna semiootika
2016–2017	Doktoriseminar (U. Eco teose *Semotics and the Philosophy of Language* alusel)
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09/2015–02/2016	Siena Ülikool, kognitiiv- ja sotsiaalteaduste osakond, külalisdoktorant

Tunnustused

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2012	Juri Lotmani stipendium
2012	DoRa doktorandistipendium

| 2014 | DoRa 8 |
| 2014 | DoRa T6, doktorandide semester välismaal |

Peamised publikatsioonid

Gramigna, Remo 2016. La mentira en San Agustin. *DeSignis 25. Historia de la semiótica. Homenaje a Umberto Eco/History of Semiotics. In honor to Umberto Eco*, 45–55.

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Saadud uurimistoetused

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