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Maria Mora Marquez, Ana

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Pragmatics in Peter John Olivi's Account of Signification of Common Names

Ana María Mora-Márquez

University of Copenhagen

Abstract

The aim of this paper is to present a reconstruction of Olivi's account of signification of common names and to highlight certain intrusion of pragmatics into this account. The paper deals with the question of how certain facts, other than original imposition, may be relevant to determine the semantical content of an utterance, and not with the question of how we perform actions by means of utterances. The intrusion of pragmatics into Olivi's semantics we intend to point out may seem minimal today, but was of a certain importance at his time. Even if the conventional codes still play a role in his explanation of how words acquire a semantical content, both the intention of the speaker and the communication context in which this intention is being effectuated are essential features of the actual signification of names.

Keywords

Peter John Olivi, medieval semantics, medieval pragmatics, medieval philosophy, common names

1. Framing the question

Peter John Olivi lived between 1248 and 1298. He was a controversial Franciscan theologian, who entered his order at the age of 12, studied in Paris between 1267 and 1272, and spent the rest of his life teaching in Franciscan *studia* in the south of France. His engagements in thorny debates over matters sensitive for the Church made him well known at his time. Perhaps the most important of these debates was the one over the poverty of the clergy. As a consequence of his radical positions, his academic career stagnated, he was summoned to leave Paris without becoming a Master of Theology, and his writings were condemned by the Franciscan authorities in 1283.

From a philosophical perspective, he was no less radical. He was a fierce defender of free will as a directive notion of all possible anthropology,¹ to the point that this notion emerges constantly in his treatment of psychological, epistemological and logical matters. His treatment of philosophical issues is found in both his *Commentary on the Sentences* of Peter the Lombard and in a set of logical questions written around 1287, the *Questiones logicales*, which are probably a result of his teaching in southern France.²

The main aim of this article is to present a reconstruction of Olivi's account of signification of common names and, at the same time, to highlight some intrusions of pragmatics into this account. I shall be concerned with the question of how certain facts, other than the original imposition, may co-determine the semantical content of an utterance; for instance, how the intention of the people involved in a conversation and the context in which the conversation is taking place may help to determine its content. I shall not, however, be concerned with the question of how we perform actions by means of language. In order to carry out this reconstruction, I shall mainly focus on the questions 4 and 7 of the *Questiones logicales*,³ as well as on one of the questions of *Quid ponat ius vel de signis voluntariis*.⁴

¹ For the voluntarist anthropology of Olivi, in opposition to Aquina's intellectualist one, see Robert Pasnau, *Theories of Cognition in the Later Middle Ages* (Cambridge-New York, 1997). A detailed study of the notion of free will in Olivi is found in Francois Xavier Putallaz, *Insolente liberté. Controverses et condamnations au XIII^e siècle* (Friburg, 1995); see also Olivier Boulnois 'Vouloir, voeu et noblesse de la volonté selon Olivi', *Cahiers du Centre de Recherches Historiques* 16 (1996), 57-64.

² For a study of Olivi's life, see David C. Burr, *L'histoire de Pierre Olivi: Franciscain persécuté*, tr. F.X. Putallaz (Friburg, 1976). For a study of his relation to the academic milieu of his time, see David C. Burr, 'Petrus Iohannis Olivi and the Philosophers', *Franciscan Studies* 31 (1971). Alain Boureau & Sylvain Piron (eds.), *Pierre de Jean Olivi (1248-1298): Pensée scolastique, dissidence spirituelle et société* (Paris, 1999) contains a collection of essays on Olivi's philosophical and theological works.

³ The questions ask whether the direct meaning of a common name is a concept or a thing and whether an equivocal name signifies all its significates at the same time (*An nomina rerum prius et principalius significant res vel conceptus intellectus de ipsis rebus and an nomen aequivocum simul significet omnia sua significata*). Peter John Olivi, *Quaestiones Logicales*, ed. S. Brown, *Traditio* 42 (1986), 335-388.

⁴ This question asks whether signification adds something real to the physical sign and it is found in the Preface to his *Commentary on Sentences IV*. Its goal is to elucidate whether the obligation linked to the institution of a norm is a real relation or a relation of reason (a *ratio realis* or a *ratio rationis*). Olivi's position is that the only existing relation is the one established between the intentions of the ones instituting the norm and the ones subject to the norm. Then,

The intrusion of pragmatics into Olivi's semantics that I intend to point out may seem minimal today, but was of some importance in his time. The conventional codes still play a role in his explanation of how words acquire a semantical content, but he also maintains that both the intention of users of language and the communication context in which these intentions are being applied are essential features of the actual signification of common names.

My argument will proceed in three steps: first, I will present the semiotics on which Olivi's semantic positions are grounded; then, I will go on to the exposition of his account of signification of common names, and accentuate the essential role that the intention of the users plays here; finally I will consider certain problems posed by equivocal names, in order to allow the entrance of the notion of communication context into Olivi's semantics.

2. The Semiotic Basis

Olivi's ideas about signification are built on a theory of signs of neat Augustinian inspiration. Elements of this semiotics can be found both in the *Quaestiones logicales* and in *Quid ponat ius*.

In the fourth question of the *Quaestiones logicales*, Olivi establishes a division of signs according to how they signify. On the one hand, there are signs which signify naturally, that is, signs whose significative character depends on a causal relation between them and their significates. Examples of this kind of sign are complaints of the ill (an example taken from the Boethian tradition) and words taken as caused by the concepts and the will of the utterer (an example closer to the Augustinian tradition). On the other hand, there are signs which signify by the *beneplacitum* of men, that is, signs whose significative character depends on an arbitrary decision by those instituting them:

One must say that the signification of names or utterances is twofold. On the one hand, there is a natural one, according to which they signify the causes by means of which they are formed and made, together with some other things joined to their forming. And in this way they signify primarily the affections and the conceptions of the soul. [...] So, the utterances or the sighs of the ill signify naturally their pain, and the terrifying utterances of the

no real relation is to be found between the norm and the one instituting or the one adopting it. See Ferdinand Delorme, 'Question de J. P. Olivi *Quid ponat ius vel dominium* ou encore *De signis voluntariis*', *Antonianum* 20/1-4 (1945), 309-330. For a detailed study of this question, see Rosier 2004. For a study of Olivi's notion of relation, see Alain Boureau, 'Le concept de relation chez Pierre de Jean Olivi', in Boureau & Piron (eds.), *Pierre de Jean Olivi (1248-1298)*, 41-56.

ones who growl signify naturally their rage and wrath, and every utterance signifies the will to speak which commands its own fulfilment. On the other hand, there is a signification instituted only by an arbitrary decision (*beneplacitum*) of men. And according to this one, utterances signify primarily the things which they are instituted to signify.⁵

This latter kind of signs we can call, without getting into much trouble, ‘conventional signs’.

In presenting this typology of signs, Olivi does not entirely follow Augustine and his tradition.⁶ Nonetheless, when discussing the significative character of conventional signs, he appears to be fully in line with the Augustinian semiotical tradition, according to which a physical entity is actually a sign only insofar as it is considered as such by an interpreter.⁷

The signification of conventional signs is, thus, twofold: on the one hand, they have a dispositional signification (*habitualiter*); on the other, an actual signification:

One must say that the signification of the name is taken in two ways: first, dispositionally, as it were; second, in act or exercise, as it occurs when [the name] is actually uttered out of an intention to signify or when it is written in a certain narration. It has the first mode by imposition, and the second by being applied to the things to which it is now and was [already earlier] imposed.⁸

⁵ Dicendum quod duplex est significatio nominum sive vocum. Una est naturalis, secundum quam significant suas causas per quas formantur et fiunt et quaedam alia annexa suae formationi. Et hoc modo prius significant affectus et conceptus animi. [...] Unde voces sive suspiria gementium naturaliter significant dolorem eorum et terribiles voces frementium naturaliter significant furorem et iram eorum et omnis vox significat voluntatem loquendi imperantem eius completionem. Alia est significatio a solo beneplacito hominum instituta. Et secundum hanc <voces> prius significant res illas ad quas significandas sunt institutae. *QL*, q.4, p. 346.

⁶ Augustine divides signs into natural signs and given signs. Roger Bacon will then divide the latter into given signs which signify naturally and given signs which signify conventionally. In this last typology of signs, cries of pain are given signs signifying naturally, whereas names can be seen as natural signs, insofar as they are caused by concepts. Cf. Augustine, *De doctrina christiana*, II, I, 2-3 and Irène Rosier, *La parole comme acte. Sur la grammaire et le sémantique au XIII^e siècle* (Paris, 1994), 89-94.

⁷ Cf. Augustine, *De doctrina christiana*, II, I, 1 : Signum est enim res praeter speciem, quam ingerit sensibus, aliud aliquid ex se faciens in cogitationem venire.

⁸ Dicendum quod significatio nominis dupliciter accipitur: primo scilicet quasi habitualiter; secundo in actu aut exercitio, sicut fit cum ex intentione significandi actualiter profertur aut cum in certa narratione est scriptum. Primum modum habet ex impositione; secundo vero ex applicatione ad quae iam est et erat impositum. *QL*, q.7, p. 353.

Therefore, conventional signs obtain their dispositional signification from an act of imposition and their actual signification from their use in a communication context.

In the question *Quid ponat ius*, Olivi suggests that the act of imposition from which dispositional signification arises is not the act of a single man putting a label, let us say a name, on its significate. It is rather the result of a common agreement of the members of a linguistic community, to the effect that, once a name has been agreed upon by the community to stand for some significate, its significative relation to this significate becomes a kind of rule that single users of the language are supposed not to break when actually using it. Thus, the signification of an utterance depends both on the imposition determined by the common intention of a community (dispositional signification) and on the effective use of the previously imposed utterance (actual signification):⁹

Now, to the point about the duplicity by perjury, one must say that because this or that word is commonly and from the common intention or agreement of men ordained to signify such a thing, nobody can use it on his own authority for another signification without the deceit of insincerity (*dolo simulationis*), unless he clearly expresses his intention to the listener; so, the reason for the determinate signification of utterances is taken not only from the actual intention of the speaker, but also from the common and dispositional intention of the speakers of that language; so, it is right to say that just as the actual signification of the word consists in the actual intention of the speaker and in the actual apprehension of the listener, in the same way its dispositional signification really consists in the dispositional and common intention of men.¹⁰

Now, neither the dispositional nor the actual signification is a real relation between the sign and its content. Hence, the only thing that is required for a relation of signification to hold between a sign and its content is that users intend to give such a content to the sign:

⁹ We will discuss later (p. 161-163) the implications of this passage with regard to resolution of equivocation.

¹⁰ Ad illud autem de duplicitate pro periurio dicendum quod, ex quo haec vel illa vox est communiter et a communi intentione seu beneplacito hominum ordinata ad tale quid significandum, non potest quis propria auctoritate ea uti ad aliam significationem absque simulationis dolo, nisi suam intentionem clare exprimat auditori; unde ratio determinatae significationis ipsarum vocum non solum sumitur ab actuali intentione loquentis set etiam a communi et habituali intentione hominum illius linguae; unde bene dicitur quod, sicut actualis significatio vocis est in actuali intentione loquentis et in actuali apprehensione audientis, sic eius habitualis significatio est realiter in communi et habituali intentione hominum. *QPI*, in Irène Rosier-Catach, *La parole efficace. Signe, rituel, sacré* (Paris, 2004), 180-181.

As regards voluntary signs, we still have to determine what their signification (in the active sense of signification) posits. And indeed, when you consider it subtly and clearly, you will find that signification adds nothing over and above the real essence of the thing that is employed as a sign, except for the mental intention of the ones who institute and accept it, and of the person who actually employs that thing to signify and of the one who hears it or receives it under the account of such a signification or sign.¹¹

Signification could be better described as a direction of the attention of the users towards a content, a direction that is given by the intentions of both speaker and listener. More particularly, actual signification takes place when the listener decodes a sign uttered by the speaker by directing his attention to its intended content. He can effectuate this decoding because he already knows what the sign can stand for. To illustrate this last point, it is worth mentioning what Olivi has to say about the way we learn what a sign means. Since there is nothing in the essence of the physical sign that can lead us to direct our attention more to one thing than to another, the only way to learn what a sign stands for is by means of other signs:

To the seventh [argument], one must say that an utterance has nothing in its nature to make it signify one thing rather than another, unless we speak of its natural signification according to which it naturally signifies its causes. But that is not what we are speaking about here. And for this reason the utterance in itself does not imprint its significate in the listener, nor its signification; otherwise, every listener would understand every language and its proper significations, which is clearly false. On the contrary, a man must first know what an utterance signifies before, by means of it (or better, occasioned by it), he thinks again of the things the speaker intends to signify to him by means of that utterance. So, by means of the utterance itself we do not learn its significate absolutely, but only in a certain respect.¹²

¹¹) Restat igitur videre de signis voluntariis, quid scilicet ponit ipsorum significatio active sumpta. Et certe, quanto subtilius et perspicatius illam attenderis, inuenies quod supra realem essentiam rei quae pro signo assumitur nichil addit ipsa significatio, nisi solum mentalem intentionem instituentium et acceptantium, et ipsius qui actu illam rem assumit ad significandum et eius qui eam audit vel accipit sub ratione talis significationis seu talis signi. *QPI*, in Rosier-Catach, *La parole efficace*, 179.

¹²) Ad septimum dicendum quod vox non habet aliquid in sui natura ex quo plus significet hanc rem quam illam, nisi loquamur de sua naturali significatione secundum quam naturaliter significat suas causas. De hac autem hic non loquimur. Et ideo vox ex se non imprimit audienti suum significatum nec suam significationem, alias omnis audiens intelligeret omne idioma et proprias significationes eorum, quod est aperte falsum; immo oportet quod prius sciat homo quid significat talis vox, antequam per ipsam, set potius occasione ipsius, de novo advertat res quas loquens intendit sibi per vocem illam significare. Unde per vocem ipsam non addiscimus absolute suum significatum, set solum sub certo respectu. *QPI*, in Rosier-Catach, *La parole efficace*, 180.

Moreover, some signs are more naturally fit to direct the listener's attention to a content, e.g., gestural or deictic signs:

But if you ask how we learn what this or that utterance signifies, one must say that [that happens] by means of certain signs which have been given voluntarily [and] have a greater connaturality and direction or relation to such significates. So a child is taught what the utterance 'wine' signifies in this way (or in a similar or equivalent way): while saying this utterance, we show him with a movement of the eye or a touch of the finger the thing that is called 'wine'.¹³

In sum, in Olivi's treatment of conventional signs and their signification, the actual relation of signification between a conventional sign and its content depends entirely on both the intentions of the speaker and the listener actually using the sign. Nevertheless, both the speaker and the listener are constrained by a certain normativity resulting from the imposition of the sign, so that, as we shall see, they are expected to collaborate in a communicative exchange by not breaking the rules of use. We will see in what follows to what extent these ideas enter into the semantics of common names.

3. Intention of Users and Signification of Common Names

In question 4 of his *Quaestiones logicales*, Olivi treats a problem that is frequently raised in commentaries on the *Perihermeneias* and in some other linguistic treatises of the 13th century. The problem is whether names signify primarily a concept or a thing. His response to this question is in opposition to the Boethian tradition, according to which the immediate significates of names are concepts; external things are only secondarily signified by means of the signification of concepts. Olivi's rejection of the Boethian interpretation of *De int.* 16a3-9 relies heavily on the notion of the intention of users. A common name signifies whatever we mainly intend to speak about when using that name:¹⁴

¹³ Si autem quaeras quomodo secundum hoc addiscimus quid significet haec vox vel illa, dicendum quod per aliqua signa a voluntate data quae habent maiorem connaturalitatem et directionem <vel> aspectum ad talia significata. Unde puero docetur quid significat haec vox vinum per hoc quod dicendo hanc vocem nutu oculi vel tactu digiti ostendimus sibi rem quae appellatur vinum aut per aliquam viam consimilem vel equivalentem. *QPI*, in Rosier-Catach, *La parole efficace*, 180.

¹⁴ We could also intend to speak about our concept of a man, and in that case the name 'man' would signify the concept and not the thing, given that this intention is made clear.

And in this way, this name ‘man’ signifies first the thing that is a man, because the intention of men aims more directly and more primarily at signifying the thing that is a man than any other thing. In fact, [this intention] did not impose properly this name to any other thing than the thing that is called a man.¹⁵

Furthermore, what we mainly intend to speak about determines the content of a term when it is actually used in a propositional context:

Now, this is proved, not only from the intention of those imposing names on things, but also from the common sense of the expressions. For when we say “a man runs”, we do not mean to say that the concept I have of man, or that man insofar as it is in our intellect, runs, or that humanity in the abstract runs, but rather that the thing that is a man taken in concretion runs.¹⁶

The central role played by the intention of users in determining the content of a common name is here grounded on a voluntarism that is taken as an axiom in most of Olivi’s theological and philosophical thinking. Against authors who establish some kind of priority of intellect over will (his main target is Thomas Aquinas), Olivi’s psychology, epistemology and anthropology are all built on an axiomatic priority of will over intellect. Will plays a central role in his account of knowledge, of decisions-making and, in a more general sense, in his definition of humanity.¹⁷

¹⁵) Et hoc modo hoc nomen homo prius significat rem quae est homo, quia intentio hominum directius et principalius intendit per hoc nomen homo significare rem quae est homo quam aliquid aliud. Immo nec imposuit proprie hoc nomen alicui alteri quam rei quae dicitur homo. *QL*, q.4, p. 346.

¹⁶) Hoc autem probatur non solum ab intentione imponentium nomina rebus sed etiam ex communi sensu locutionum. Cum enim dicitur “Homo currit” non intendimus dicere quod conceptus quem habeo de homine vel homo prout est in intellectu nostro currit aut quod humanitas abstracta currit, sed potius quod res quae est homo conrective acceptus currit. *QL*, q.4, p. 347. In the particular case of common names used in a proposition stating facts of reality (e.g., the common name ‘man’ when used in the proposition “a man runs”), they signify primarily the external thing because the intention of the speaker is to state a fact about a particular thing in the external world and not a fact about its concept (so, in “a man runs”, Olivi says, the intention of the speaker is to affirm that a real man, and not his concept, runs). One cannot but be surprised by this argument, given that Olivi is well acquainted with a theory of supposition offering sufficient tools to explain how ‘man’ stands for a real man in the proposition “a man runs”, no matter what its significate is. In fact, ‘man’ could stand for an actual man, according to its personal supposition, while still signifying its concept or its abstracted essence according to a more primitive semantical property of the name, i.e., signification. It does not come as a surprise, then, that the use of this argument against the Boethian interpretation of *De int.* 16a3-9 is contested by Scotus in his own commentaries on this Aristotelian treatise. Cf. Duns Scotus, *In primum Perih.*, q. 2, p. 54, 20-26. (St. Bonaventure edition).

¹⁷) So, for Olivi man is essentially free, and not essentially rational, as Aquinas claims.

The aspect of this voluntarism that has the most immediate consequences for Olivi's semantics is the epistemological one. Olivi rejects the Aristotelian epistemological tradition according to which in the act of non-propositional cognition, external things are efficient causes and the faculties of the soul are receptive. In opposition to this, Olivi adopts an epistemology going back to Augustine. According to this, every act of cognition follows the scheme will-apprehension-memory described in Augustine's *De trinitate*. This epistemology goes together with a psychology where all the intellectual faculties of the soul are essentially active and directed by will. This means that in the case of non-propositional cognition, will and intellect are the efficient causes, while external things are merely terminative causes.

Olivi's epistemological position is fundamental to his account of signification, since he commits himself to the principle that *modus significandi sequitur modum intelligendi*:

I respond that even if names of things are imposed in order to signify things, nevertheless they are imposed on things only insofar as they are apprehended by the intellect, and in the way in which the intellect wants the things that it has apprehended to be signified.¹⁸

Thus, names signify in a manner that follows a certain mode of apprehension.

When answering the question about the univocity of names as far as being and not being are concerned, he puts forth the following argument:

M. The way of signifying follows the way of apprehending.

m. We apprehend things without any consideration of time and actual existence.

C. Therefore, we signify them as abstracted from time and actual existence:

Now, firstly, that indeed names do not signify by themselves present, past or future in the thing, but the thing insofar as it is abstracted from them by means of the intellect, this is now proved with five arguments : [...] Second, from the relation of consequence between mode of signifying and mode of apprehending, for the mode of signifying follows the mode of apprehending. Now, it is a fact that we commonly apprehend names and the absolute significates of names without relation to any time or place.¹⁹

¹⁸) Respondeo quod licet nomina rerum sint imposita ad significandum res, non tamen sunt imposita rebus nisi prout sunt apprehensae ab intellectu et sub illo modo sub quo intellectus vult res se intellectas significari. *QL*, q.1, p. 338. One should stress that Olivi's use of *modus significandi* is not the technical one of the modistic grammar.

¹⁹) Primum autem, quod scilicet nomina non significant ex se praesens, praeteritum vel futurum secundum rem, sed prout est per intellectum abstracta ab eis, probatur ad praesens quintuplici ratione: [...] Secunda est consequentia <modi> significandi ad modum intelligendi. Modus enim

The commonness of signification of names depends on their following an act of apprehension which does not consider the individuating conditions of things, but only their proper definition. This act of apprehension, which is the equivalent of a concept in Olivi's theory, is neither a *species intelligibilis* nor a quality of the soul resulting from this act and different from it. In his *De verbo*, Olivi rejects the idea, attributed by him to Thomas Aquinas,²⁰ that the concept is something different from the act of apprehension itself and from the *species* that initiates this act. In contrast to this, Olivi's concept is not the result of the act of apprehension, nor does this act require any *species intelligibilis* to get started.²¹ To posit such obstacles in the cognitive access to the world amounts to putting into question the freedom of the human soul, Olivi argues. Therefore, the concept must be identical with the act of apprehension, an act that is directed by the will to its terminative object, e.g., an external thing. Now, if names arise in accordance with this will-directed kind of apprehension that does not consider individuating conditions of the external thing, they will signify it in a common manner, i.e., they will be common names.²²

In other authors (e.g., authors from the Modist school), the formula *modus significandi sequitur modum intelligendi* is combined with the idea that the mode of apprehension follows a mode of being. In the case of the common name, the commonness in signification follows both a commonness in apprehension and a commonness in being. Olivi, on the contrary, does not admit any commonness in the realm of being. Commonness of signification follows

significandi sequitur modum intelligendi. Constat autem quod nos saepe intelligimus nomina et absoluta significata nominum absque relatione ad aliquod tempus vel locum. *QL*, q.1, p. 340.

²⁰ It is not certain that Aquinas actually adopted the theory attributed to him by Olivi. See John J. Haldane, 'The Life of Signs', *The Review of Metaphysics* 47/3 (1994), 451-470; John P. O'Callaghan, 'The Problem of Language and Mental Representation in Aristotle and St. Thomas', *The Review of Metaphysics* 50/3 (1997), 499-545 and Id., 'Concepts, Beings and Things in Contemporary Philosophy and Thomas Aquinas', *The Review of Metaphysics* 53/1 (1999), 69-98. For other studies about Aquinas theory of concept, see Giorgio Pini, 'Species, Concept and Thing: Theories of Signification in the Second Half of the Thirteenth Century', *Medieval Philosophy and Theology* 8 (1997), 21-52; Claude Panaccio, *Le discours intérieur* (Paris, 1999), 177-201 and Id., 'Aquinas on Intellectual Representation', in Dominik Perler (ed.), *Ancient and Medieval Theories of Intentionality* (Leiden etc., 2001), 185-201.

²¹ Olivi is not the first scholastic to reject the *species intelligibilis* as the formal principle of the act of apprehension. In fact, an earlier rejection of this entity is found in Henry of Ghent (q. 14, *Quodlibet* V). Henry is also a fierce defender of the active character of the intellectual faculties. For Henry's rejection of the *species*, his epistemology and philosophy of mind, see Leen Spruit, *Species intelligibilis: from perception to knowledge*, vol. I: *Classical roots and medieval discussions* (Leiden etc., 1994).

²² For a study of Olivi's notion of intentionality, see Dominik Perler, *Théories de l'intentionnalité au Moyen-Âge* (Paris, 2003).

a commonness in the act of apprehension which has no counterpart in reality. It is, however, not totally independent of reality, as it is based on something that he calls *rationes reales*.

These *rationes reales* can be understood as notions that the intellect grasps from particularized essences of things, without this implying that they are pure fictions of the intellect. They are *rationes* in the sense that they are an intellectual perspective on things, but they are also *reales* in the sense that this perspective is based on the things themselves. The intellect can choose among several perspectives when apprehending a thing, but the number of perspectives is limited by the ways in which the world is arranged. Yet, these ways of intellectual apprehension do not amount to modes of being:

The response to the third [argument] is twofold. First, that dispositional being differs from actual being, however not really, as if there were diverse real beings existing in things. They only differ according to diverse *rationes* or modes, because dispositional being belongs to the thing insofar as [the thing] is apprehensible without simultaneous apprehension of its actual existence.²³

Olivi's use of the formula *modus significandi sequitur modum intelligendi* is, therefore, to be understood as follows: the mode of signification of a word follows the way in which the speaker has chosen to cognitively approach the thing he wants to speak about, without this implying that he could have chosen just any way whatsoever. Hence, Olivi interprets the statement 'words signify the things insofar as they are in the intellect' as saying: 'the thing is signified according to the *real ratio* according to which it is an object of the person apprehending and communicating':

To the second [argument], one must say that 'things are signified insofar as they are in the intellect' can be understood in two ways. First in the sense that only what they posit in the intellect is signified by their names. And in this way the proposition is false which states that names signify things insofar as they are in our intellect, rather than insofar as they are themselves in act. Secondly, it can be understood in the sense that the thing is signified according to its *real ratio* according to which it is the object of the one who understands and talks rather than according to all the *rationes* it has from without in its actual existence, and in this way the proposition is true.²⁴

²³) Ad tertium dupliciter respondetur: Primo, quod esse habituale differt ab esse actuali, non quidem realiter, quasi sint diversa esse realia in rebus existentia, sed solum differunt secundum diversas rationes sive modos, quia esse habituale convenit rei prout est intelligibilis absque intelligentia suae actualis existentiae. *QL*, q.3, p. 345.

²⁴) Ad secundum dicendum quod res significari prout sunt in intellectu potest dupliciter intelligi: Primo scilicet quod illud quod ponunt in intellectu solum significatur per nomina eorum.

This amounts to saying that the apprehension of the external thing is an epistemological and not a semantic condition for its signification. The axiomatic role that will play in Olivi's philosophical thinking leads him to reject both universals *in re* and universals *post rem*. The consequence which is important for us is that, in Olivi's account of signification, the intention of users plays the central role of determining both the semantical content a name actually conveys and its mode of signification. Both choices are, of course, limited by some rules of use imposed by the institution of words and by the ways in which a potential significate allows itself to be approached by the intellect. I submit that this emphasis on the intention of users in Olivi's account of signification of common names constitutes a first intrusion of pragmatics into Olivi's semantic ideas.

4. Equivocal names

A second intrusion is found in his discussions of equivocal names, where the communication context appears to play an important role in the resolution of equivocation.²⁵

As we have seen, a physical sign is not, according to its own essence, directed to any particular kind of thing and it can, therefore, be instituted by imposition to signify anything whatsoever. Therefore, nothing prevents it from being instituted by imposition to signify several things. Olivi admits, then, the possibility of equivocation from the point of view of dispositional signification. But given that both the speaker and the listener are constrained by the

Et hoc modo falsa est propositio illa qua dicitur quod nomina potius significant res prout sunt <in> nostro intellectu quam prout sunt actu in se ipsis. Secundo potest intelligi quod res potius significatur secundum illam rationem suam realem secundum quam est obiectum intelligentis et loquentis quam secundum omnes rationes quas extrinsecus habet in sua existentia actuali, et hoc modo vera est propositio illa. *QL*, q.4, ad 2, p. 347.

²⁵ Sten Ebbesen, 'Can equivocation be eliminated?', *Studia Mediewistyczne* 18 (1977), 105-124; Id., 'Is "Canis currit" ungrammatical? Grammar in Elenchi Commentaries', *Historiographia Linguistica* VII (1980), 53-68; and Costantino Marmo, 'A Pragmatic Approach to Language in Modism', in Sten Ebbesen (ed.), *Sprachtheorien in Spätantike und Mittelalter* (Tübingen, 1995), 169-183 have pointed out some authors, such as Duns Scotus, Radulphus Brito and the Anonymous from Prague, who have dealt with the question of equivocation in a way similar to Olivi's. Other treatments of equivocation in the 13th Century can be found in E. Jennifer Ashworth, 'Analogy and Equivocation in Thirteenth Century Logic: Aquinas in Context', *Mediaeval Studies* 54 (1992), 94-135; Ead., 'A Thirteenth-Century Interpretation of Aristotle on Equivocation and Analogy', in *Aristotle and His Medieval Interpreters*, eds. Richard Bosley & Martin Tweedale, *Canadian Journal of Philosophy (Supplementary Volume)* 17 (1992), 85-101.

impossibility of apprehending more than one thing at the same time, equivocation cannot be actualized either by the speaker or by the listener. When the speaker utters a name, he can intend it to convey only one of its possible significates to the listener, and the listener, in his turn, can interpret the sign as conveying only one of these possibilities.

The potential equivocation of the name still leaves open the possibility of linguistic misunderstandings between its users, e.g., when the content the speaker intends to convey when using that word does not match the one the listener grants to it. This situation is, however, generally avoided because of what Olivi calls ‘the force of the narration or of the sentence’. He does not treat in depth what this ‘force’ consists in. However, he seems to suggest that the dispositional signification of a given name brings with it some constraints on its use in a context. When a name is put in the frame of a communication context, the listener is somehow led by these constraints to interpret the speaker’s intention in a way that makes sense. In other words, in a regular conversation, some rules of use demand a determinate interpretation on the part of the listener of the intention of the speaker:

One must say that any of the listeners applies [the name], with his proper application or intention, to the significate he then conceives by means of it. And that is why the same name is somehow multiplied in several people applying it and conceiving it in different ways. Nevertheless, insofar as it belongs only to the speaker and the writer, it has properly only one significate, and if the force of the narration or of the phrase demands only that one, it can never be rightly applied, in the listeners, to another thing.²⁶

Thus, even if the dispositional signification of names allows the possibility of equivocation, in regular cases the rules of use will prevent misunderstandings in a communication context, by demanding just one interpretation on the part of the listener.

Nonetheless, Olivi admits that it is possible for speakers to aim at deceiving or misleading the listener: they can utter the name in a way (for example using a particular word order) which demands a particular content, while intending it to have another:

²⁶ Ad primum igitur primae partis dicendum quod quilibet auditorum propria applicatione sive intentione applicat illud ad illud significatum quod tunc per ipsum concepit. Et ideo in diversis diversimode illud applicantibus et concipientibus est ipsum nomen quodammodo multiplicatum. Prout tamen est solius proferentis et scribentis, non habet proprie nisi unum significatum, et si vis narrationis sive orationis solum illud exigit, numquam potest in audientibus recte ad aliud applicari. *QL*, q.7, p. 353.

One must say that even if the speaker can intend that the listeners take it with one or another signification, nonetheless he cannot intend that he himself actively signifies diverse things by means of it. However, it can happen that because of the order and propriety of narration [the name] signifies rightly one thing in virtue of the common acception, and that he himself intends to signify another thing by speaking with bad faith.²⁷

Therefore, Olivi seems to be well aware of the fact that a speaker can also deviate from the common uses of language. This should not be the case, however, and so a collaboration between speaker and listener is to be expected in the act of communication. The common uses of language which result from communitarian agreements somehow restrain the freedom of choice of speakers when determining the content of a word; and if a speaker intends to convey a content that would be unusual in the given context, he will be speaking with *dolo simulationis*, unless he makes clear why he is deviating from the common use.²⁸ Thus, the treatment of equivocation reveals a feature of Olivi's semantics where the content of an utterance is ultimately determined by the context and a collaboration between its users, rather than by the original imposition, or impositions.

The consideration of a communication context and of a collaboration between the users of language constitute, then, the second intrusion of pragmatics into Olivi's account of the signification of common names.

5. Conclusion

Admittedly, Olivi's account of signification of common names is, in some ways, not totally original. The emphasis on the intention of users and the consideration of the communication context as determining factors in the act of signifying are also present in Bacon's semiotics and semantics and are strongly suggested by Augustine, both in the *De doctrina christiana* and in the *De magistro*. The intrusion of pragmatics into Olivi's semantics has, therefore,

²⁷⁾ Ad tertium dicendum quod licet proferens possit intendere quod auditores accipiant illud sub alia et alia significatione, non potest tamen intendere quod ipse active per ipsum significet diversa. Fieri tamen potest quod ex ordine et proprietate narrationis unum ex vi communis acceptionis significet recte et ipse proferens aliud doloso corde significare intendat. *QL*, q.7, p. 353.

²⁸⁾ See above, n. 11.

at least two historical precedents. The influence of Augustine on Olivi is obvious, but there is no reason to think that Bacon has exerted any.²⁹

What is original about Olivi is that he articulates these elements with both an epistemology built on a priority of will over intellect and an ontology of particulars and *rationes reales*. The result of putting these three layers together is an account of signification that is, as far as we know, unique in the 13th century and that presents us with a thinker with a somewhat dynamic conception of language.

Olivi is well aware of the fact that, when using a name in a context, the users of language have more choices than the content determined by a first and unique act of imposition. Names can legitimately be equivocal, so that the resolution of equivocation and the effectiveness of communication depend more on an expected collaboration between listener and speaker than on formal rules of disambiguation.

He does not want to commit himself to ontological and/or epistemological positions which restrict human actions in general, and the act of communication in particular. And the consequence of this is that both the intentions of the speaker and of the listener, together with the context, play a central role in his semantic accounts.

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²⁹ Elements of pragmatics can also be found in some of Henry of Ghent's theological works, such as the article 73 of his *Summa*. For a partial edition and a study of some of the linguistic aspects contained in this text, see Irène Rosier, 'Henri de Gand, le De dialectica d'Augustin, et l'imposition des noms divins', *Documenti e studi sulla tradizione filosofica medievale* 6 (1995), 145-253. But rather than an influence of the one over the other, Henry and Olivi seem to be drawing on the same sources.