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THE ARCHITECTURE OF GRAMMAR

**Studies in Linguistic Historiography
in Honor of Pierre Swiggers**

Edited by

**Tim DENECKER, Piet DESMET,
Lieve JOOKEN, Peter LAUWERS,
Toon VAN HAL and Raf VAN ROOY**



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TABLE OF CONTENTS

Piet DESMET, <i>Préface</i>	IX-XI
Tim DENECKER – Lieve JOOKEN – Peter LAUWERS – Toon VAN HAL – Raf VAN ROOY, <i>Introduction: Pierre Swiggers, Architect and maître d'œuvre in Linguistics and Grammatical Historiography</i>	1-12

I. Antiquity to the Middle Ages

Stephanos MATTHAIOS, <i>Den griechischen Akzenten auf der Spur. Der Varro-Traktat De accentibus und Eratosthenes' Zirkumflex-Definition</i>	15-35
Guillaume BONNET, <i>Le rôle des fragments dans l'approche du traité De lingua Latina de Varron</i>	37-51
Maria Chiara SCAPPATICCIO, <i>Significans vox</i> (Anon. gramm. ~ P.Lond. Lit. II 184 ll. 6-7)	53-60
Bruno ROCHETTE, <i>La préface de l'Ars grammatica de Diomède (GL I 229)</i>	61-79
Anneli LUHTALA, <i>Observations on Some Pedagogical Aspects of Medieval Grammar Education</i>	81-95

II. The Early Modern Period

Cristina ALTMAN, <i>Grammatical Representation of Nominal Classes in Brazilian Missionary Grammars (Sixteenth and Seventeenth Centuries)</i>	99-121
José J. GÓMEZ ASENCIO – Carmen QUIJADA VAN DEN BERGHE, <i>Arquitecturas discrepantes en la gramaticografía del español (1614-1770)</i>	123-140
María Dolores MARTÍNEZ GAVILÁN, <i>Gonzalo Correas y la superioridad del castellano sobre el latín: aproximación desde la ideología lingüística</i>	141-156
Javier SUSO LÓPEZ, <i>Rapports entre langues dans les grammaires éditées aux XVI^e et XVII^e siècles: proposition d'une typologie</i>	157-172

Bernhard HURCH, <i>Phonologie ante litteram. Ein Plädoyer für die Bedeutung kolonialer Sprachdaten des Huastekischen</i>	173-191
Otto ZWARTJES, <i>Small Talk and “Platiquillas” in Missionary Grammars</i>	193-213
Serhij WAKULENKO, <i>Kriterien der Unterscheidung der Nenn- und Beiwörter in der Potschajiwer Zaprawa grammatyczná von 1782 auf dem Hintergrund der polnischen und ukrainischen Sprachleherschreibung vom Ende des 16. bis zum Ende des 18. Jh.</i>	215-235
María José MARTÍNEZ ALCALDE – Mercedes QUILIS MERÍN, <i>Aspectos contrastivos en la configuración histórica de las gramáticas del español: la cuestión del multilingüismo peninsular</i>	237-249

III. Across Periods, Perspectives, and Methodologies

Bernard COLOMBAT, <i>La règle dans la tradition grammaticale latine</i>	253-268
Gonçalo FERNANDES, <i>The Matthew Effect and the Historiography of Linguistics</i>	269-284
Rolf KEMMLER, <i>Towards a Classification of Metalinguistic Manuals above the Individual Language Level</i>	285-303
Gerda HASSLER, <i>Der Aspektbegriff in verschiedenen nationalen Traditionen der Grammatikographie</i>	305-323
Michel BERRÉ – Sophie PIRON, <i>Le «circonstanciel» et l’orientation discursive de la grammaire scolaire: étude de quelques ouvrages publiés en Belgique aux XVIII^e et XIX^e siècles</i>	325-344

IV. Modernity to the Present Day

María Luisa CALERO VAQUERA, <i>El proceso de gramatización de la lengua catalana visto a través de los prólogos de sus gramáticas (1743-1918)</i>	347-361
Nicolas MAZZIOTTA, <i>Through the Eyes of Grammar: Richard Salter Storrs’s (1830-1884) Sentence-Maps</i>	363-376
Alfonso ZAMORANO AGUILAR, <i>Tradición e innovación en la teoría gramatical peruana (ss. XIX-XX). Análisis específico de las clases de palabras en dos series textuales de Primitivo Sanmartí</i>	377-392

Ricardo ESCAVY ZAMORA, <i>Las propuestas gramaticales de Eduardo Benot (1822-1907) como teoría “avant la lettre” de la moderna lingüística</i>	393-408
Estanislao SOFÍA, <i>Quand c’est l’objet qui impose le point de vue: notes saussuriennes sur l’impossibilité des théories linguistiques en synchronie</i>	409-422
Doyle CALHOUN, <i>Au seuil de la grammaire: l’appareil préfaciel français dans la grammaticographie «missionnaire» de langues africaines à l’époque coloniale, 1850-1930</i> ..	423-440
Ronaldo BATISTA, <i>A Non-Traditional Grammar in the History of Linguistic Thought: Mendes Fradique’s Grammatica Portugueza pelo Methodo Confuso (1927)</i>	441-455
John E. JOSEPH, <i>Making Grammars Concrete Again: Aurélien Sauvageot’s Esquisses of Finnish and Hungarian</i>	457-470
Marie STEFFENS, <i>En quête de sens: la sémantique dans les grammaires du français au XX^e et XXI^e siècles</i>	471-488
Selective Index of Concepts and Terms	489-492
Selective Index of Proper Names	493-498
Pierre SWIGGERS’s Bibliography	499-560

SIGNIFICANS VOX
(ANON. GRAMM. ~ P.LOND. LIT. II 184 LL. 6-7)

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Abstract: Showing an awareness of the distinction between *vox articulata* and *vox inarticulata*, the anonymous grammarian of the fragmentary Latin *Ars* contained in *P.Lond. Lit. II 184 + P.Mich. VII 429* (second/third century AD) employs the concept of *significans vox* in his definition of *dictio*. The passage is analysed here in its relation to other grammatical contexts and to their possible sources: the contacts between the anonymous *Ars* of Karanis and the orthographical treatise by Velius Longus as well as those with the later grammar by Marius Victorinus open up several possible links between these respective texts, and may contribute to a hypothetical reconstruction of the author of this fragmentary Latin grammatical treatise contained in *P.Lond. Lit. II 184 + P.Mich. VII 429*.

Boundaries between fields of research are often hardly visible, but still marked clearly enough to present consistent limits to a multi-perspective approach to a given topic, even though this perspective may yield more in-depth, and in any case more complex, findings. Crossing perspectives and penetrating into apparently distant fields while using one's own discipline-specific competences can be very fruitful. When these apparently distant fields are papyrology on the one hand, and ancient linguistics on the other, one name that immediately comes to mind is that of Pierre Swiggers, along with that of his *sodalis studiorum*, Alfons Wouters¹. In the journal *Aegyptus*, Pierre Swiggers (1984) published a note on the grammatical papyrus *P.Lond. Lit. 184*, elaborating on the annotated edition of this grammatical fragment published some years earlier by Alfons Wouters (1979). This note discusses the particular approach adopted to the basic distinction in Latin grammatical theory between *vox articulata*

¹ The research underlying this contribution has received funding from the European Research Council (ERC) under the European Union's Horizon 2020 research and innovation programme (Grant agreement no. 636983; ERC-PLATINUM project, University of Naples "Federico II", of which the author is the Principal Investigator). With specific reference to Latin grammars attested on papyrus sources, see e.g. Swiggers (1995), Swiggers – Wouters (1995; 2000; 2010; 2015), and Swiggers – Wouters – Van Elst (2020).

and *vox inarticulata*. Back in 1984, analysing papyrological data from a linguistic perspective was a pioneering approach. More than thirty years on, Swiggers's contribution still stands as a reference, and in the present contribution it serves as the starting point for some further considerations.

The Oldest Direct Witness of an Ars grammatica

Since it was published, the Latin grammatical text transmitted by a fragmentary roll from Karanis (Kôm Aushîm, in the Fayoum) has stood out for its unique and exceptional status, as it provides us with an otherwise unknown *Ars grammatica*, the oldest direct witness of a Latin grammatical treatise, and perhaps a treatise that includes the oldest *Ars* surviving through direct transmission². The fragmentary roll does not bear a *subscriptio* and is therefore to be considered anonymous. However, several hypotheses have been formulated regarding its authorship, singling out famous grammarians such as Remmius Palaemon and, more recently, Verrius Flaccus or his Alexandrian-oriented grammatical source³.

In this unique grammatical fragment, the definitions of *dictio* and *oratio* are followed by an enumeration of the eight parts of speech. Each part of speech must have been systematically described, but only the lines concerning the noun survive (*P.Lond. Lit.* II 184). A subsequent section concerns (1) syllable formation out of double consonants and semivowels or semiconsonants, and (2) the equivalence of *-ae-* and *-ai-* and the possibility of considering the latter to be made up of two different syllables, on account of the effect of metaplasm (*P.Mich.* VII 429).

Significans vox (*P.Lond. Lit.* II 184): Anonymus, *Velius Longus*, *Marius Victorinus*

In his definition of *dictio*, the anonymous grammarian of *P.Lond. Lit.* II 184 + *P.Mich.* VII 429 introduces the concept of *vox*:

² This text is transmitted by a fragmentary papyrus roll of which three non-consecutive sections remain, *P.Lond. Lit.* II 184 + *P.Mich.* VII 429: London, British Library [inv. 2723] + Cairo, Egyptian Museum [inv. 4649 verso] (2nd-3rd c. AD); see *CLA* II 212 + XI 212, *ChLA* III 218, *CPL* 56 + 57, *MP*³ 2996, *LDAB* 5065, Dunlap (1947), Wouters (1979: 93-108), and Zetzel (2018: 330); a third fragment has been discovered very recently and its publication is forthcoming. As a matter of fact, although non-adjacent, the three papyri (now stored in three different papyrological collections) certainly come from the same original roll. I have offered a new, extensively annotated edition of *P.Lond. Lit.* II 184 + *P.Mich.* VII 429 in Scappaticcio (2015: 93-143), with a line-by-line commentary and further bibliographical references; an updated edition of this ancient Latin grammar is being published in the forthcoming *Corpus of Latin Texts on Papyrus (CLTP)*.

³ This issue is extensively discussed in Scappaticcio (2020).

¹⁵ [vel]ut diceretur dictio: ¹⁶ [...] vox figuram habens ¹⁷ [sign]ificantiu[m] vocum. ¹⁸ [Na]m eiusmodi vox potest ¹⁹ [di]ci, intellegi non po- ¹⁰ [-test]; itaque ea dictio quae ¹¹ [ha]bet significationem ¹² [in]tellectumque oratio. ¹³ [...] a]utem oratio quasi o- ¹⁴ [-ris] ratio, cuius partes ¹⁵ [qu]idam grammatici ¹⁶ [u]sque multiplicaverunt ¹⁷ [] ut turba praeceptorum (Anon. gramm.; P.Lond. Lit. II 184 col. I ll. 5-17)

The “word” (*dictio*) is said to be composed of meaningful sounds. The scanty lines where *vox* is mentioned do not provide sufficient context to allow for a conclusive interpretation. However, the parallelism with a passage (from Varro?) in Diomedes’ late antique *Ars grammatica* is instructive, in that it clarifies the reference to “a kind of *vox* which, though it can be uttered, cannot be understood”:

Vox est, ut Stoicis videtur, spiritus tenuis auditu sensibilis, quantum in ipso est. Fit autem vel exilis aerae pulsu vel verberati aeris ictu. Omnis vox aut articulata est aut confusa. Articulata est rationalis hominum loquellis explanata. Eadem et litteralis vel scriptilis appellatur, quia litteris comprehendi potest. Confusa est irrationalis vel inscriptilis, simplici vocis sono animalium effecta, quae scribi non potest, ut est equi hinnitus, tauri mugitus (Diom. gramm. GL I 420.9-15)

According to Swiggers (1984: 33-34), “[a] reasonable interpretation of this passage is that a *vox* ‘of that kind’ (*eiusmodi vox*) is, in the ancient grammarians’ view, a *vox inarticulata* or *confusa*”⁴. Behind the frequent references to *vox* in the *Ars* of P.Lond. Lit. II 184 + P.Mich. VII 429 lies the basic distinction between *vox articulata* and *vox inarticulata*. This

⁴ Wouters (1979: 101) had suggested an emendation of the transmitted text: [na]m [e]iusmodi vox potest [di]ci intellegi non <semper> po[te]st, an emendation which was shown to be implausible by Swiggers (1984: 33-34). Diomedes’ passage is listed by Funaioli (*GRF*, 1907: 268 fr. 238) among the ones coming from Varro. On the position of the chapter *De voce* of P.Lond. Lit. II 184 + P.Mich. VII 429 within an overall investigation of the *De voce* sections in ancient grammar, see the straightforward explanation by Ax (1986: 262-264). As for the definition of *vox* arising from scanty fragments from Varro’s grammatical works, see Ax (1986: 259-261, 264), where a synthesis is offered in order to highlight the differences between Varro and the anonymous grammarian of P.Lond. Lit. II 184 + P.Mich. VII 429: “Varros Buch I der ‘Disciplinae’ ist zwar die erste lateinische ars, von deren Existenz wir sicher wissen. Ob sie aber ein de-voce-Kapitel enthielt, muß aus Überlieferungsmangel ungeklärt bleiben. Dennoch spricht sehr viel für ein de-voce-Kapitel des ‘römischen’ Typs in Varros ars nach der Sinnreihe ‘Grammatik und ihre Aufgaben’ und vor der Konstituentenreihe. Es gibt Indizien für ein Weiterleben des stoischen Typs von ‘de voce’ in der lateinischen ars grammatica. Jedoch reichen diese Zeugnisse nicht aus, um ihnen den Rang eines eigenständigen Traditionszweiges neben dem gut belegten Konstituententyp einzuräumen”. On the *dictio*, see the synthesis offered by Callipo (2017: 280-287) in her commentary on Apollonius Dyscolus’ grammar (on the *dictio* in P.Lond. Lit. II 184 + P.Mich. VII 429, see 286).

distinction is deeply rooted in the Graeco-Roman grammatical tradition and goes back to Stoic theory and dialectics (as opposed to Varro)⁵.

The grammatical nexus *vox significans* is put to use by the *Anonymus* of *P.Lond. Lit.* II 184 + *P.Mich.* VII 429, in a way that differs from the abovementioned passage of Diomedes. However, the *Ars* from Karanis shows precise analogies to what can be read in the second chapter, *De voce*, of the *Ars* by Marius Victorinus⁶:

Elementum est uniuscuiusque rei initium, dictio figura significantium vocum aut initium a quo sumit incrementum et in quod resolvitur <oratio>, oratio est dictio significans vel compositio dictionum significantium consummans unam sententiam. (Mar. Victor. *gramm.* 2, 8; ed. Mariotti 1967: 66.26-67.3; see further Mariotti 1967: 130-133)

Both in the anonymous grammar from Karanis and in Victorinus, the focus is on the explanation of *dictio*, and a parallelism is established between *dictio* and the *significantes voces*. However, the anonymous grammarian of *P.Lond. Lit.* II 184 + *P.Mich.* VII 429 defines the *vox* as a *figura significantium vocum*, unlike Victorinus, who defines the *dictio* as a *figura* characterized by *significantes voces*. Such an apparently minor (and “silent”) difference is actually relevant, for although all *voces* can be articulated, not all of them are understandable in their own right.

It is possible to point out a second parallel, namely in the introductory section of the orthographical treatise by Velius Longus. This section is concerned with the value of letters, departing from the different possible definitions of *litterae*, and clearly exemplifying the long debate originating in Stoic reflection on λόγος. Having offered his readers a number of definitions for “orthography”, Velius Longus underlines that not all grammarians agree in accepting the explanation according to which the letter would represent the basic element of a meaningful sound (*vox*

⁵ Ax (1986: 262): “schon die bloße terminologische Besetzung dieser Dihärese erinnert sofort an die Reihe φωνή, λέξις und λόγος am Beginn der stoischen Dialektik. Daß sie aber dem stoischen Vorbild auch in der Sache entspricht, wird zur Gewißheit, wenn man die Bestimmungen von dictio und Ratio näher betrachtet.” On the Stoic theories of the *vox*, see Ax (1986: 138-211) and Desbordes (1990: 101-112). The difference between *vox articulata* and *vox inarticulata* as explained by Latin grammarians has often been discussed, see Ax (1986), Schenkeveld (1990), Stroh (1998), Ax (2002) in response to the two latter studies, Luque Moreno (1996), and Basset (2013), with further bibliographical references. In the present contribution, this complex issue is referred to for the sole purpose of investigating the sources relied upon by the anonymous grammarian of the *Ars* of *P.Lond. Lit.* II 184 + *P.Mich.* VII 429.

⁶ Dunlap (1940: 339-340 [339]): “there is no verbal reminiscence of this definition in any of the grammatical writers with the exception of Marius Victorinus”; cf. Dunlap (1947: 5) and Wouters (1979: 101-102).

significans), given that some sounds can be written even though they are meaningless, as the example of *tittir* shows:

Excluserunt autem omnes illam finitionem, quam quidam dixerunt, litteram esse initium vocis significantis, ideo quoniam quaedam voces scribi possunt, quamvis nihil significant, sicuti cum dicimus “tittir”: nam hoc scribi potest, nihil vero significat (Vel. *orth.* 2; ed. Di Napoli 2011: 5.10-14; see also Di Napoli 2011: 87-96 for a discussion of this passage)

For a long time, Varro has been considered the main source for these lines in Velius Longus (see Desbordes 1990: 108-109 and, more recently and with different results, Di Napoli 2011: 91-92), but strong analogies with the *De significatu verborum* and its Plautine *tittibilicium* (*Cas.* 347)⁷ point towards a different hypothesis. This hypothesis implies that Velius Longus shaped the first section of his *De orthographia* on the model of a section *De litterae definitionibus* from the lost orthographical reference work by Verrius Flaccus (Di Napoli 2011: 91-93). It should be noted that the latter was also one of the main sources — and perhaps the only one — for the orthographical chapter of the *Ars* by Marius Victorinus⁸.

Verrius’ *De orthographia* was also to become a model for the *De orthographia* by Terentius Scaurus, preserved through an acephalous manuscript tradition, which furthermore lacks the introductory section, where orthography and its constitutive elements (the *littera*) must have been defined⁹. But if Terentius Scaurus was one of the main sources for Augustine’s *Ars breviata*, it is acceptable to hypothesize that the definition of *verbum* as a *vox significans*, which he offered in the non-grammatical context of his *Sermones ad populum*, in order to emphasize the distinction between *vox* and *verbum*, could have a grammatical, and possibly orthographical, background¹⁰.

⁷ Paul. Fest. 504.1-3 Lindsay. It is worth noting that the *tittir* of Velius Longus is otherwise unattested and seems to have been made up from the above-mentioned example in the verse of Plautus.

⁸ On the link between the chapter on orthography in the *Ars* of Victorinus on the one hand, and Verrius Flaccus on the other, see Mackensen (1896: 33-40).

⁹ Verrius Flaccus represented one of the main sources for Terentius Scaurus, who seems to have used Verrius’ orthographical treatise directly (see Biddau 2008: XLV-LI). According to Biddau (2008: XLV-XLVI), it is impossible to determine whether Terentius Scaurus and Velius Longus were (a) consulting Verrius Flaccus directly, or (b) “absorbing” Verrius’ theories through the intermediary of Remmius Palaemon.

¹⁰ Aug. *Serm.* 289: *Si homo ore patente clamet quantum potest, vox est, verbum non est. Quae est autem vox quae dicitur verbum? Ubi intelligitur aliquid, vox significans verbum est.* On Augustine’s *Ars breviata* and its sources, the edition by Bonnet (2013) provides a point of reference; see also Zetzel (2018: 284-285), with further bibliographical references.

The grammatical nexus *significans vox*, a “meaningful sound”, is thus only known (a) through the *Anonymus* of the grammatical treatise of *P.Lond. Lit.* II 184 + *P.Mich.* VII 429, (b) through Velius Longus, and (c) through Marius Victorinus¹¹. This “triangle” also holds good for other places in the scanty grammatical lines of *P.Lond. Lit.* II 184 + *P.Mich.* VII 429, for instance when it introduces Verg. *Aen.* 9, 26 as an example of the equivalence between the endings *-ai* and *-ae*¹².

Conclusion

Whether the grammatical nexus *significans vox* developed from Stoic or from Alexandrian grammatical theory cannot be determined. In this connection, a short (but complex) passage from Seneca’s letters to Lucilius deserves to be mentioned: “*Claritas*” inquit “*laus est a bonis bono reddita; laus oratio, vox est aliquid significans; vox est autem, licet viro- rum sit <bonorum, non> bonum*” (Sen. *ep.* 102, 9). In this passage, the *significans* linked to the *vox* is a verbal form and has an object, unlike in Velius and Augustine, where *significans* is used as an adjective. Seneca here reports a theory held by others, which is refuted in the subsequent sections of the letter. However, the fact that the grammatical nexus was integrated in an Alexandrian-oriented grammar such as the fragmentary and anonymous one of *P.Lond. Lit.* II 184 + *P.Mich.* VII 429 is highly relevant (see Scappaticcio 2020). While in the *Anonymus* and in Marius Victorinus, *significans vox* serves to define *dictio*, in Velius Longus it concerns *littera*. Still, such a shared grammatical nexus may point towards a common source. Several possible hypotheses thus arise:

- (a) the *Anonymus*, Velius Longus and Marius Victorinus modelled their exposition on the same source;
- (b) one of them provided the source for the others; or
- (c) one of them provided the source for one of the two others, with the latter becoming the source of the most recent grammarian (i.e. Marius Victorinus).

¹¹ Cf. also the grammar of Diomedes, where a *vocis significatio* is discussed in the chapter *De nomine* from the first book: *Vocabulum est quo res inanimales vocis significatione specie nominis enuntiamus* (*GL* I 320.23-24); cf. Luhtala (2010: 226-227) and Scappaticcio (2015: 119-120).

¹² On this matter, see Scappaticcio (2015: 136-141; 2020: 817). The fourth chapter of Victorinus’ grammar is concerned with orthography.

In the latter two cases, the *Anonymus* and Velius Longus compete in age, unless one accepts that the grammatical lines of *P.Lond. Lit. II 184 + P.Mich. VII 429* — the original roll being copied approximately in the age of Velius Longus — are the oldest ones, possibly representing a reference work by a grammatical *auctor* famous enough to circulate in second/third-century Karanis.

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