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## History of Western Linguistic Thought: The Middle Ages

Anne Grondeux

► **To cite this version:**

Anne Grondeux. History of Western Linguistic Thought: The Middle Ages. International Encyclopedia of Language and Linguistics, 3rd Edition, Elsevier, In press. <hal-04723236>

**HAL Id: hal-04723236**

**<https://hal.science/hal-04723236v1>**

Submitted on 12 Feb 2026

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**Article Title**

70007. History of Western Linguistic Thought: the Middle Ages

**Author**

Anne GRONDEUX

**Abstract**

During the Middle Ages, grammar evolved significantly. Scholars adapted ancient linguistic tools to Christian contexts, introducing new concepts like *oratio perfecta* and theories of supposition. Versified grammars and logical analyses emerged, and universities fostered debates on syntax and performative language, ultimately synthesizing Greek and Latin traditions for modern grammatical studies. Rather than treating the Middle Ages as a monolithic period, it is useful to examine the times of the monasteries, schools, and universities. This division, albeit crude, helps highlight the innovations introduced during each era, particularly within the three branches of the trivium: grammar, dialectic, and rhetoric.

**Keywords**

construction – medieval universities – linguistic diversity – medieval etymology – parts of speech – commentaries – glosses – versified grammars – modist grammar -

**Introduction**

Linguistic thought in the Latin Middle Ages developed without professional linguists, guided instead by masters of grammar, dialectics, and rhetoric—the artisans of the trivium—as well as theologians and jurists. Grammar formed the foundation of the scholarly structure, with the approaches of grammar masters influencing every level. Initially, medieval linguistic thought was rooted exclusively in Latin, in a West where vernaculars were gaining ground. It evolved within a teaching system designed to transform non-Latin-speaking laymen into Latin-speaking clerics. Consequently, neither the target language nor the metalanguage was the mother tongue: Latin became a supravernacular language essential for career advancement, particularly clerical status. Over ten centuries, linguistic thought developed within a Christian context, with several implications: grammar was Christianized by including Christian examples, defended against accusations of paganism, and justified by its utility in serving the faith. Drawing from Jerome and Augustine, a recurring question was whether Christians were entitled to engage with grammar. The Christianization of examples attempted to expand a closed corpus based on ancient literature, at a time when the notions of grammar, Latin and letters became synonymous. An illiterate person, therefore, was someone untrained in Latin and grammar. Each section (the eras of monasteries, schools, and universities—a rather crude division) briefly outlines the historical and intellectual context of the innovations discussed.

For a deeper understanding, refer to the summaries by Libera & Rosier (1992), Law (1993, 2003), Marmo (2010), Rosier-Catach (2010), Swiggers (1997), Colombat & Lahaussais (2019), and note that, beyond the Latin era, robust linguistic traditions developed in Arabic (Bohas, Guillaume, & Kouloughli, 1990), Hebrew (Kogel 2016, 2019), Irish (Ahlquist, 1992), and Syriac (Conti & Farina, 2013; Farina, 2018).

## 1. The Era of Monasteries

The early Middle Ages were characterized by the efforts to gather, organize, and transmit the rich heritage of Antiquity. During this period, Boethius, encouraged by his father-in-law Symmachus, translated Greek philosophical texts. Although his work was interrupted by his death in Theodoric's jails in 524, Boethius succeeded in translating and commenting on key parts of Aristotle's *Organon* (*Categories*, *Perihermeneias*, *Analytics I and II*, *Topics*, *Sophistic Refutations*) and Porphyry's *Isagoge*. These works formed the foundation of the *Logica uetus* of the Middle Ages, encompassing several logical treatises and his renowned *Consolation of Philosophy*, which introduced Western medieval thought to Platonic philosophy. Similarly, Boethius's cousin, Cassiodorus, aimed to preserve ancient knowledge. His monastic retreat, the Vivarium, birthed the *Institutiones*, with its second book on secular sciences achieving significant acclaim (Holtz, 1984). His commentary on the Psalter also enriched grammatical terminology (Grondeux, 2013). Isidore of Seville, driven by a similar desire, compiled his *Etymologies*, drawing from the *Institutiones* that had reached Spain, alongside numerous other works, becoming a cornerstone of Western education (Fontaine, 1959; Abeele, 2008). Linguistic thought in this era was heavily influenced by Donatus's work, though commentaries by scholars like Pompeius and Servius were widely studied. The synthesis of these ideas is evident in the *Explanationes in Donatum I & II*, likely originating in Africa and circulating in Visigoth Spain, inspiring the grammatical chapters of Isidore's *Etymologies*. This period was characterized by a concerted effort to preserve and build upon ancient knowledge, shaping the intellectual landscape of the Middle Ages.

### 1.1. Emergence of Syntax in the West

In the early 6th century, Priscian's *Ars grammatica*, crafted for a Greek-speaking audience, marked a significant, though initially subtle, shift in Western linguistic thought (Baratin, 1998). Adapted from Apollonius Dyscolus's *Syntax (Peri suntaxeōs)*, it innovatively replaced the third part of Roman *artes*—typically focused on figures and vices of speech—with two books dedicated to syntax, detailing how parts of speech combine to form meaningful sentences. Initially, Priscian's contributions were overlooked. In the Vivarium, Cassiodorus first described Priscian as a Greek grammarian in the initial version of his *Institutiones II*. Only later, upon obtaining a copy of Priscian's work, did he correct this oversight (Holtz, 1984). From the Vivarium, the *Ars Prisciani* spread via the Lateran to Visigoth Spain, where it is cited in 7<sup>th</sup>-century texts like the *Grammar Quod*, the *Liber glossarum*, and the *Ars* of Julian of Toledo (Grondeux, 2024). It also reached the British Isles (Law, 1982), where Aldhelm of Malmesbury consulted it (Holtz, 2000, 290). The work saw a resurgence on the continent, primarily through the influence of the *Scotti peregrini*, in intellectual centers with

strong Irish influence, such as Tours, Fleury, Laon, Bobbio, and Montecassino. This period featured intense commentary, initially on the *Ars Donati* (Cinato, 2015) (Bonifatius/Vynfreh, *Ars grammatica; Ars Bernensis; Ars Riuipullensis; Ars Laureshamensis*): the "pointillist readings" (Holtz, 1991, 173) compared the two manuals for centuries. Their methodology incorporated numerous notes from the *Ars Prisciani* into commentaries on Donatus, considered more basic (e.g., debates on the existence of a seventh case, the ablative without preposition, or the natural order of cases). In this way, the masters became familiar with Priscian's manual. However, constrained by the structure of the *Ars Donati*, their approach remained focused on morphology.

In contrast, the Englishman Alcuin (735–804), trained at York, mastered the *Ars Prisciani* sufficiently to address complex questions posed by Charlemagne (Holtz, 2000, 293–294). Alcuin uniquely recognized that Priscian's first sixteen books on morphology prepared the ground for the two books on syntax (Holtz, 2000). His *Excerptiones super Priscianum* (Holtz-Grondeux, 2020), written between 796 and 800, carefully selected extracts from these sixteen books, linking them to syntax. Preserved in four manuscripts (one a palimpsest), his *Excerptiones* had limited contemporary impact; Alcuin taught Charlemagne dialectics, not grammar, which was entrusted to Peter of Pisa. A precursor, Alcuin introduced connections with logic in his *De grammatica*, doubling Priscian's definitions of noun and verb with Aristotle's via Boethius; 21 manuscripts of his *De grammatica* survive. Notable disciples included Rabanus Maurus, Lupus of Ferrières, Hilduine, Fredegise, Amalarius of Metz, and, a generation later, Heiric and Remi of Auxerre, and Odo of Cluny, whose pupil John described navigating the 'immense sea of Priscianus' (*immensum Prisciani pelagus*) (Cinato, 2015, 29).

By the late 9th century, sustained commentaries emerged, notably by Irish scholars like John Scotus (Luhtala, 2000) and Sedulius Scottus. Their commentaries, based on a shared Irish model, interpreted Priscian through Boethius, though without fully grasping his Stoic sources (Luhtala 2000, 119). John worked in Laon, Sedulius in Liège, with evidence of Priscian readings also from the Auxerre school, including Muretach (Iogna-Prat et al., 1991), Heiric (Cinato, 2014), and Remi (Judy, 2003; Krotz, 2014). Laon scholars approached the **Ars Prisciani** from a unique angle, focusing on Greek language studies, as seen in Martin of Laon's **Graeca Prisciani**. John Scotus, following Hilduine of Saint-Denis, translated Dionysius the Areopagite's works, reflecting this Greek engagement.

## 1.2. The Word

Isidore of Seville's approach, pivotal for the medieval West, is expressed in his didactic works, the *Etymologies* and the *Differences* I and II. He emphasizes the fundamental role of words as the entry point to all knowledge: "*Nomen* 'name' is more or less the same as *notamen* (lit. 'that makes knowledge'), because it makes things known to us through the intermediary of its vocable. Indeed, if we do not know the name, the knowledge of things is lost" (Spevak, 2020, 30; Isid. etym. 1, 7, 1). Following Isidore, the weight of etymology shaped the linguistic approach to form and meaning (Klinck, 1970; Buridant, 1998): "etymology is the origin of words, when the meaning of a verb or noun is grasped by means of interpretation" (Spevak, 2020, 124; etym. 1, 29, 1). Isidore also explored the imposition of

names: “yet not all names were assigned by the Ancients according to nature, some were also assigned according to preference, just as we sometimes name our servants and affairs according to what seems good to our will” (Spevak, 2020, 124; etym. 1, 29, 2). A generation later, in Zaragoza, a lexicographical tradition solidified, supported by a synthesis of Hispanic glossaries, whose complexity is highlighted by Cinato (2019). The *Liber glossarum* emerged from Isidorean files, combined with Isidore’s Hispanic recension of the *Etymologies* (Grondeux-Cinato, 2016). This alphabetical breakdown of ancient vocabulary, used by Papias in the 11th century for his *Elementarium*, follows a glossographic approach. Derived mainly from gloss collections, the data exhibit three characteristics: they are inflected, heterogeneous (lexical, contextual, syntactic, prosodic, etc.; Cinato, 2015, 210–253), and assume perfect equivalence between a word and its explanation. For example, in Vergil’s Aeneid (6, 334), *classis* is used, not in the sense of ‘fleet’, but of ‘boat’. The pair *classis-nauis* was then extracted in Vergilian *glossae collectae*, appearing in this form in the *Liber glossarum*.

### 1.3. Adapting Grammar to New Audiences

As grammarians’ audiences shifted from a predominantly pagan, Latin-speaking population to a Christian one, scholars faced the challenge of adapting tools designed for a pagan context to a Christian world (Perez Rodriguez, 2001). This raised key questions: Can grammar be taught to clerics using texts like Vergil’s? Is it possible to read Vergil without embracing paganism? Adaptations took several forms:

1. **Commentary on Scriptures:** Scholars applied the principles of ancient grammar to Biblical texts. Cassiodorus’s commentary on the Psalter is a prime example (Grondeux, 2013), applying ancient science to Scripture while framing it within scriptural commentary. Similarly, Virgil the Grammarian conveyed wisdom through pseudo-grammars, *Epitome* and *Epistulae* (Law, 1995).
2. **Christianization of Examples:** Starting with Isidore Iunior (Spain, 5th/6<sup>th</sup> century), author of a treatise called *De vitis* (Schindel, 1975), this trend influenced Isidore of Seville, the author of the grammar *Quod*, Julian of Toledo, and Bede the Venerable, bridging grammar and exegesis.

**Defense of Grammar:** Scholars justified grammar as an auxiliary science to theology (*pagina divina*; cf. Cinato, 2015, 11–19; Grondeux, 2023a). The Anonymus ad Cuimnanum in *Expositio latinitatis*, written in Bobbio, argued that wisdom seekers should not reject grammar, essential for education and learning. Alcuin, inspired by Boethius’s *Consolation of Philosophy* (Courcelle, 1966), cemented the alliance between liberal arts and Wisdom in the prologue to his *De grammatica*.

Religious concerns appeared in Charlemagne’s *Admonitio generalis* of March 23, 789, influenced by Alcuin, emphasizing the need to rectify deteriorating written language and ensure sacred text accuracy—thus echoing Cassiodorus’s concerns (Holtz, 1988). Teaching morphology to non-Latin speakers prompted innovations, enriching the *Ars Donati* with paradigms unnecessary when Latin was native (Law, 1986). Another notable innovation was the dialogical form of textbooks, modeled on Augustine’s *De magistro*, and adopted by figures such as the anonymous author of *Grammar Quod*, Julian of Toledo, and Alcuin in his

*De grammatica*, a dialogue between Franco and Saxo (Holtz, 2004). These adaptations reflect the dynamic evolution of linguistic education for a changing audience.

## Map n. 1

### 2. The Rise of Cathedral Schools

In the 12<sup>th</sup> century, cathedral schools in urban areas significantly transformed the educational landscape (Delhay, 1947; Hunt, 1980). Renowned schools included Laon (Anselm and Ralph), Paris (Manegold, William of Champeaux, Peter Abelard, Alberic of Paris), Châlons-en-Champagne (William of Champeaux), Angers (Marbod), Orléans (Arnoul, Matthew of Vendôme), Chartres (William of Conches), and Poitiers (Petrus Helias). Commentary dominated scholastic work, including the *Glossa ordinaria* on the Bible in Laon and Paris, logico-grammatical commentaries in Laon and Paris, and commentaries on ancient poets in Orléans. The *Ars Prisciani* was central, spawning commentaries and summae: *Glosulae in Priscianum maiorem*, *Glosulae in Priscianum minorem*, and *Notae Dunelmenses*, linked to William of Champeaux, which inspired William of Conches's *Glosae* and Petrus Helias's *Summa* (Fredborg, 1973, 2011a, & 2011b). The latter, in turn, inspired the *Summa Absoluta cuiuslibet* by Petrus Hispanus, from the late 12th century, focusing on *Priscianus minor*. Notably, in these schools the definition of *Priscianus minor* shifted: Carolingians referred to it as the minor *Institution*, but later scholars applied it to the two syntax books (XVII–XVIII). Concurrently, copies of **Donatus maior** declined significantly (Holtz, 1981, 330). Following John Scotus, grammarians often served as logicians, commenting on Boethius and Priscian. Interactions among grammar, logic, and theology within the **trivium** led to significant developments in linguistic thought (Goubier & Rosier-Catach, 2020a, 2020b; Jolivet, 1982; Valente, 2008).

#### 2.1. The Subject of Grammar: *Oratio Perfecta*

Interactions between Priscian's syntax books (XVII–XVIII) and Aristotle's *Peri hermeneias* led theorists to explore *oratio perfecta*, often equated with *constructio*, as the primary subject of grammar. *Oratio perfecta* described a grammatically correct, fully articulated sentence adhering to syntax rules and conveying a complete thought. These reflections introduced novel concepts, such as the subject/predicate pair and theories of supposition, distinguishing meaning and reference (e.g., *suppositio personalis*, *materialis*, *simplex*, depending on whether the term concerns the *nomen*, *vox*, or *species*) (De Rijk, 1962–1967; Kneepkens, 1987b). Additionally, this framework fostered reflections on transitivity (Kneepkens, 1990a) and realist or nominalist approaches—stemming from Porphyry's *Isagoge*—illustrated by Roscelin of Compiègne, William of Champeaux, and Peter Abelard. These inquiries culminated in Abelard's *dictum propositionis*, which examined the content (or meaning) of propositions, while being distinct from the linguistic expression itself. Abelard distinguished between the form of an expression (*oratio*) and its content (*intellectus*). The "dictum propositionis" is the meaning conveyed by the proposition, which can be true or false, regardless of the specific words used to express it. Abélard came to consider that

'signification' in the sense of Priscian was broader than that of the dialecticians, referring, in fact, to any mental action that can be found in the composition of intellections (Rosier-Catach, 2004a).

## 2.2. Parts of Speech

Parts of speech underwent renewed analysis, which led in particular to the autonomy of the adjective, individualized from nouns (Rosier, 1992). Grammarians also investigated the causes behind the invention of parts of speech (Rosier, 1988, 1994b). This investigation followed in the footsteps of Priscian II.55, who distinguished parts of speech by their "properties of signification". These properties may relate to meaning (in the case of the noun and the verb), or to function (the adverb, for example, being attached to the verb). As early as the *Glosulae in Priscianum maiorem*, grammarians aimed to account for Priscian's "properties of meaning" in terms of cause of invention (*inuentio*), then "function" (*officium*) (Fredborg, 2011b). Evoked by the *Glosulae in Priscianum maiorem*, the possibility of discerning these causes was theorized and systematized by William of Conches: "The cause of the invention of nouns is as follows. In every complete statement, something is said about something else. It was therefore necessary to invent a word to distinguish what the discourse was about" (Rosier, 1994b, 84). Language theorists also delved into syncategoremes (Rosier-Catach, 2003a), a term first appearing in Priscian's *Ars* with the equivalent *consignificantia*, to differentiate between parts of speech with full meaning and those without. Consignification was a notion rich in implications for medieval linguistic thought, in particular that of Peter Abelard, who proposed to resolve the question of the meaning of consignifying parts by analyzing them as mental acts (Rosier-Catach, 2003b). The analysis extended to the accidents of parts of speech, as seen in the *Glosulae in Priscianum maiorem* and the *Notae Dunelmenses*. These analyses determined the scope of accidents, depending on whether they were understood *in re* or *in uoce*. These analyses do not appear to have outlived their founder, as testified by Petrus Helias, who explicitly states that he renounces them (Grondeux-Rosier-Catach, 2017, 137, 263). Among parts of speech, the verb, as the bearer of predication, and especially the substantive verb (*copula*), occupied a central place in linguistic reflections. This interest was closely linked to theological concerns (Valente, 2008). Along with theologians, grammarians distinguished between different meanings of the verb 'to be', depending on its application to God or His creation (Rosier-Catach, 2003d).

## 2.3. Changes in Lexicography

Building on the *Liber glossarum* (cf. 1.2), an Italian cleric, Papias, attempted in the mid-11th century to create a scientific instrument. Unlike his model, he sought to eliminate gloss-derived entries to avoid contextual or repetitive information, reduce entries to absolute forms (nominative or infinitive), and include notations for noun gender and verb conjugation. For example, the pair *classis-nauis* from Verg. *Aen.* 6, 334 (mentioned above) was initially removed from the preparatory version (De Angelis, 2011), then reintroduced with context in later versions. Papias's **Elementarium**, unfinished at his death, was widely transmitted and printed in the late 15th century. While he did not transform the glossary into a "dictionary" (Grondeux, 2023b), successors like Osbern of Gloucester and Hugutio of Pisa aimed for a

methodological break by starting not from glosses, but from "roots" under which collections of sometimes heterogeneous words were assembled.

## 2.4 Formal **Innovations**

New instruments flourished, with lemmatic commentaries on Priscian evolving into autonomous *summae*, such as Petrus Helias's *Summa super Priscianum* (c. 1140, ed. Reilly 1993), Robert of Paris's *Summa Breue sit*, Robert Blund's *Summa in arte grammatica* (second half of the 12<sup>th</sup> c., ed. Kneepkens, 1987a, II and III), and Petrus Hispanus's *Summa Absoluta cuiuslibet*. *Summae* coincided with logicians' reflections on meaning and reference, prompting grammarians to focus on syntax, regime, and transitivity (Kneepkens, 1990b). Late 12<sup>th</sup>-century versified grammars emerged: Eberhard of Béthune's *Graecismus*, Alexander of Villedieu's *Doctrinale*, followed in the 13<sup>th</sup> century by John of Garlande's *Compendium* and *Clavis compendia*, and Conrad of Mures's *Graecismus nouus*. This didactic form echoed poetic arts, linked to rhetoric teaching (Faral, 1924; Ward, 1995). Although monasteries ceased being innovation centers, they continued to develop professional tools for expression and preaching, such as **artes lectoriae**, **artes praedicandi**, and **artes orandi**. Along with the **artes dictaminis**, these formed part of the rhetorical dimension of linguistic reflection.

### Map n. 2

## 3. The Rise of Universities

Universities emerged in the early 13<sup>th</sup> century, providing legal, institutional, and pedagogical frameworks. Their statutes defined curricula tied to a corpus of commented works (Verger, 2013). Their rise coincided with new Aristotle translations, complementing the *Logica uetus*. At the University of Paris, organized into "nations", English, German, and Danish scholars, often preachers like Robert Kilwardby or friars like Roger Bacon, were active. Universities across Europe adopted similar programs, ensuring theologians were trained in arts faculties, mastering grammar and logic. Theologians used these disciplines intensively to address theological questions, such as the problem of divine names, the analysis of sacramental formulas, and the consecration formula. Thus, linguistic reflection evolved to explore the performative character of language in sacraments (Rosier-Catach, 2004b), as well as the power of language in everyday life, including preaching, law, and magic (Bériou & al., 2014). The university context facilitated the dissemination of knowledge, as academic achievements were shared in commentaries on versified grammars written in cathedral schools, and conversely, versified grammars eventually found their way into university curricula (Grondeux, 2000). The Hundred Years' War in the 15<sup>th</sup> century prompted a *translatio studiorum*, fostering Eastern European universities in Prague, Vienna, and Krakow, amid broader late medieval changes, including the rise of the vernacular (Dahan, Rosier-Catach & Valente, 1995; Bresc & Grévin, 2005).

### 3.1. Major Trends

In speculative grammar (Bursill Hall, 1971), modes of meaning became the organizing principle, forming the basis for utterance construction. For example, *dolor* ('suffering') and

*doleo* ('I suffer') essentially convey similar meaning but differ in signification modes, enabling grammatical construction (Pinborg, 1982; Rosier, 1983). Key works include Martin of Dacia's *De modis significandi* (after 1255), Boethius of Dacia's *De modis significandi sive Quaestiones super Priscianum majorem* (c. 1270), John of Dacia's *Summa Grammatica* (c. 1280), Simon of Dacia's *Domus gramaticae* (1255–1270), Radulphus Brito's *Quaestiones super Priscianum minorem* (c. 1300), Michael of Marbais's *Summa de modis significandi* (died c. 1300), Thomas of Erfurt's *Tractatus de modis significandi seu grammatica speculativa* (before 1310), Siger of Courtrai's *Summa modorum significandi* (1320), and John Josse of Marvillia's *Expositiones modorum significandi* (died c. 1334). These advancements underscored the dynamic evolution of linguistic thought during the rise of universities.

The notion of "interjection" serves as an ideal observation point for modes of signification. Latin grammarians adopted the Greek parts of speech but removed the article, which did not exist in Latin, thus creating space for the interjection, detached from the adverb. Donatus treated it as a distinct part, while Priscian, following Greek models, categorized it under the class of adverbs. An additional complexity is that the interjection signifies an affect rather than a concept, sparking rich debate among language theorists (Rosier, 1992b). That is why medieval grammarians had a nuanced approach to interjections, viewing them as a unique and somewhat controversial linguistic unit. Interjections were often considered distinct from other parts of speech due to their expressive and emotive nature. It is therefore easy to see if a teacher follows Donatus or Priscian. If he follows Donatus, he will consider the interjection as a separate part of speech and will dedicate a chapter to it. If he follows Priscian, he will treat it as Priscian does, within the section dedicated to adverbs.

Intentionalism, a novel movement led by Robert Kilwardby and Roger Bacon, introduced **oratio imperfecta** into grammar (Rosier, 1994a). Imperfect utterances, such as "nominatio hic magister" ("in the nominative, the master"), underwent complex analyses that relied on the speaker's intent to signify. This study of norm-deviating constructions identified the impropriety (*improprietas*), the reason for allowing it (*causa quare potest fieri*), and the reason it must occur (*causa quare oportet fieri*). For example, in a fire, the cry "ad aquam!" ("water!") is more effective than a full sentence containing a verb. Theorists distinguished statements performing speech acts (*actus exercitus*) from those signifying acts (*actus significatus*).

### 3.2 Formal Innovations

Linguistic thought developed new expression methods. Without modern punctuation, discussing words in constructions often required cumbersome periphrases such as *hoc uerbum* (this word/this verb), *haec dictio* (this word), and *hoc quod dico* (lit. what I say). Additionally, the grammatical attraction caused autonomous words to shift from nominative to required cases, causing confusion, exacerbated by Latin's lack of articles in Latin. For example, understanding statements like *homo intelligitur in animali* (man is understood in animal) became challenging. 13th-century scholars adopted the French article *li/ly* (the), which unambiguously indicated that the following word was used autonomously and allowed

it to remain in the nominative, avoiding case attraction (Rosier-Catach, 2003c). Logicians distinguished between *suppositio materialis* and *suppositio simplex* to analyze these different usages.

While the genre of commentary remained prominent, particularly on Priscian and Donatus's *Barbarism*, it evolved with the emergence of commentaries based on questions and sophisms (Ebbesen & Goubier, 2010). Scholars across faculties adopted oral teaching methods, analyzing imperfect statements dialogically with an opponent and a respondent collaboratively resolving the correctness of constructions. These sophisms were compiled into collections, though the fictional nature of the dialogues was often unclear (Rosier, 1990; 1991). In the same vein, teachers produced 'disputed questions' to facilitate knowledge transmission (Weijers, 1996). These questions could focus specifically on syllabus passages, or be independent of them. The *disputatio* served as a teaching tool, an exploratory method, and an instrument of academic examination.

### 3.3. In the Shadow of the Universities

While grammar and logic were central to university education, rhetoric, tied to poetics, was taught outside universities. From the 13th century, a rich secular vernacular rhetoric developed in Italian communes (Cammarosano, 2000; Artifoni, 2001; Bartushat, 2017). Outside universities, but applying their methods, key elements of medieval thought emerged, including reflections on linguistic diversity, lexicographical advances toward bilingual tools, and dissemination of academic achievements to broader audiences as writing spread.

#### 3.3.1. Thinking about Linguistic Diversity

Though Roger Bacon's linguistic reflections are noted (Van Rooy, 2020; Rosier-Catach, Cesalli, & Libera, 2022), two major thinkers emerged outside the universities, both focusing on Babel (Borst, 1957-1963): one Hispanic and one Italian. Rodrigo Jimenez of Rada (1170/80-1247), Archbishop of Toledo, military strategist, and historian of the Iberian Peninsula, wrote the *Historia Gothica* at Ferdinand III's request, completed in 1243. He developed ideas about languages, their origins, and evolution. Despite being a churchman bound by biblical accounts, Rodrigo's originality lay in sketching a coherent continuum from Babel to his time, presenting empty continents welcoming their first inhabitants. His political experience, familiar with linguistic divisions between kingdoms, led him to equate language differences with conflict tendencies. He hypothesized that Babel's sudden, divine division was extended into infinite human-origin subdivisions linked to human psychology. According to Rodrigo, human groups' natural propensity for conflict drove linguistic fragmentation (Grondeux, 2005). Parallels can be drawn between these reflections and Dante's *De vulgari eloquentia*, composed around 1304-1305, possibly in Bologna. Unfinished, it stops in Book II (of the four planned), and presents reflections on language variability and the quest for an illustrious vernacular, the "rule and measure of Italian speech." Dante distinguishes between Adam's language in Paradise (*certa forma locutionis*), post-Babelian *idiomata*, and the resulting *vulgaria* (Rosier-Catach, 2011).

### 3.3.2. Lexicography

On March 7, 1286, John of Genoa completed his *Catholicon*, a comprehensive work in five parts (four grammatical, one dictionary, with cross-references) (Powitz, 1996). The *Catholicon* was the last lexicographical tool common to the entire Latin-speaking world, before the scattering of national traditions. It inspired numerous vernacular adaptations, such as the *Vocabularius Breuilogus* and the *Vocabularius Ex quo* in Germanic countries (Weijers, 1981) and the *Aalma* series in France (Merrilees, Edwards, & Grondeux, 2019). Around 1250, a Hebrew Bible dictionary was compiled at Ramsey Abbey for Robert Grosseteste, producing a Hebrew-Latin-Ancient French-Ancient English tool for Hebraising Christians (Olszowy-Schlanger, 2008), akin to biblical *correctoria*, which aimed to provide access to the *hebraica veritas* (Dahan, 1992; 2020).

### 3.3.3. A Host of Anonymous Authors

The late Middle Ages saw an expansion of secondary schools, leading to numerous commentaries and small, often anonymous, works with evocative titles such as *Compendium grammaticae*, *De constructione*, *De litteris et syllabis*, *Flores grammaticae*, *Gemma regiminis*, *Grammaticae institutiones*, *Introductorium*, *Massa grammaticae*, *Medulla grammaticae*, *Notabilia grammaticae*, *Regulae de accentibus*, *Regulae grammaticae (constructionis)*, *Regulae grammaticales*, *Rudimenta grammaticae*, *Summa (artis) grammaticae*, and *Tractatus grammaticae*. These supported commentaries on the *Doctrinale* and *Graecismus*, targeting intermediate audiences to teach morphology and syntax. Bursill-Hall's *Census* (1981) and Hunt (1991) provides a valuable overview of this largely unknown anonymous literature, which was designed for local schools.

### Conclusions

A century of historiographical research has overturned Thurot's view (Thurot, 1869) of medieval grammar as a display of long-term decline. Linguistic thought in the Middle Ages synthesized Greek and Latin, logic, and grammar traditions. This millennium of innovation, both doctrinal and formal, adapted tools to a society where the spoken word was central to oaths, sacraments, and preaching, addressing theological concerns. Scholars like Priscian and later grammarians introduced concepts tied to syntax, logic, and philosophy. The late 12th century saw versified grammars requiring commentaries. 13th-century universities fostered debates on performative language. In the late Middle Ages, anonymous opuscles proliferated, simplifying grammatical rules for broader education. Ultimately, this period's linguistic thought, synthesizing Greek and Latin traditions, laid the groundwork for modern grammatical studies.

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