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edited by

Annamaria Bartolotta

**The Emergence
of Syntactic Categories
in the History
of Linguistics:
From Medieval to Modern Age**

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Hermes

Collana di Scienze del Linguaggio

THE EMERGENCE OF SYNTACTIC
CATEGORIES IN THE HISTORY OF
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Annamaria Bartolotta (Ed.)



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Between *dependens* and *terminans*: the Conjunction Dilemma

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Abstract

This paper examines how conjunctions challenge the Modist framework of *dependens-terminans*, a syntactic model rooted in Aristotelian metaphysics and central to medieval speculative grammar. Designed to capture all grammatical relations through asymmetric dependencies, mirroring potentiality and actuality, the model struggles when applied to coordinate structures, where elements hold equal syntactic weight. Conjunctions, which function relationally rather than hierarchically, resist classification as either *dependens* or *terminans*. By analysing key authors such as Thomas of Erfurt, Radulphus Brito, Michel de Marbais and Siger of Courtrai, the study explores how modists responded to this theoretical tension. The conjunction thus becomes a point of conceptual innovation, revealing the limits of Modist theory while also suggesting new theoretical possibilities. This analysis contributes to a deeper understanding of medieval syntax and its philosophical foundations.

Keywords: Grammaticography, Latin Syntax, Syntactic Dependency.

1. Introduction

The Modistic grammar, particularly as formulated through the binary framework of *dependens-terminans*, represents an effort to sys-

tematise grammar in the High Middle Ages.¹ This approach is rooted in Priscian's integration of etymology and syntax, elucidating how linguistic forms generate meaning through hierarchical and relational structures through the *modi significandi* (Padley 1976; Bursill-Hall 1979; Benedini 1988; Law 2003; Cotticelli-Kurras 2021a, 2021b). The conceptual pair *dependens* – denoting the element in need of completion – and *terminans* – the element that completes or actualises the construction – became the cornerstone of a grammatical theory that not only classified parts of speech but also sought to reflect the ontological principles of potentiality and actuality in language (Rosier-Catach 1983; Covington 1984; Luhtala 2020; Cotticelli-Kurras 2023, 2024). However, the rigour of this binary model gave rise to theoretical tensions, particularly with respect to elements whose syntactic and semantic behaviour defied a strict hierarchical categorisation, as in the case of conjunctions.

According to the Modistic grammar, conjunctions, unlike verbs, nouns, and adjectives, do not straightforwardly instantiate the hierarchical relation of dependency and fulfilment. Their syntactic function is inherently relational rather than asymmetrical: they typically connect two elements of equal syntactic status, rather than subordinating one to the other. As such, their behaviour resists classification within the binary framework of *dependens-terminans*, which presupposes an asymmetric relation between a completing and a completed element. Consequently, endeavours to position conjunctions within the *dependens-terminans* structure gave rise to a re-evaluation of the system's explanatory scope (Graffi 2012; Luhtala 2020). As argued by Marmo and Bellucci (2023), the conjunction functioned as a theoretical fault line,

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thereby exposing the limitations of employing a strictly dyadic and asymmetrical model to the entire spectrum of syntactic phenomena. The model was found to be inadequate in accommodating asymmetrical structures, and it was unable to adequately articulate the syntactic behaviour of polyfunctional, non-hierarchical elements. In this sense, the medieval debate can be said to have anticipated modern concerns in linguistic theory regarding coordination and parataxis, and to have foreshadowed contemporary efforts to account for syntactic symmetry within formally asymmetric systems (Graffi-Pagliaroli 2016).

2. Reframing the Modistic methodology

The methodological approach adopted in this paper is an interdisciplinary framework integrating linguistic, historiographical, and philosophical dimensions to explore medieval Modistic grammatical theory comprehensively. The study is founded upon a thorough examination of primary texts by key-grammarians such as Thomas of Erfurt (fl. c. 1300), Simon of Dacia (fl. 1255-1270), Radulphus Brito (1270 -1320), Michel de Marbais (fl. 1280-1300), and Gentile da Cingoli (fl. 1280-1300) (Covington 1979, 1984; Law 2003; Cotugno 2023; Marmo 2023; Cotticelli-Kurras 2023, 2024). This approach entails a meticulous examination of Latin manuscripts and early printed editions, with a focus on terminological nuances, textual variations, and interpretative subtleties (see also Cotticelli 2021a, 2021b). The metalinguistic focus is supported by critical historiographical practice, which systematically assesses secondary literature to position the study within current scholarly debates. The study identifies areas of consensus, disagreement, and interpretative gaps, and traces conceptual refinements across generations of grammarians. A comparative historical analysis further reveals how Modistic thought evolved through intellectual dialogue, demonstrating both continuity and innovation, especially with regard to the nuanced roles of *dependens*, *terminans*, and the difficult classification of conjunctions within a binary framework. A fundamental facet of the methodology under scrutiny is its philosophical dimension, incorporating Aristotelian metaphysics, particularly potentiality and actuality, matter and form, as con-

ceptual tools for analysing syntactic and semantic relations. This alignment of grammar with broader metaphysical systems reflects a central feature of medieval intellectual traditions.

2.1 The *dependens-terminans* framework

In the context of medieval linguistic theory, the Modistae set out an architectural model of language – one capable of integrating etymology and syntax within a single theoretical edifice. At the heart of this project was the theory of *modi significandi* – a conceptual toolkit designed to articulate how linguistic forms function within syntactic configurations to produce meaning (Covington 1984; Cotugno 2023). Among the distinctive features of this framework is the aforementioned pairing of *dependens* and *terminans*. The former term refers to a linguistic element that initiates a syntactic relation in need of completion; the latter provides that completion. Although deceptively simple, this dichotomy allowed for a strikingly systematic analysis of grammatical dependency, allowing the Modistae to trace how meaning is assembled through structural hierarchies rather than mere linear sequencing. This relationship was not understood purely in grammatical terms but was often embedded in the metaphysical language of Aristotelian potentiality and actuality. The *dependens* was likened to matter – not yet complete, yet pregnant with possibility – while the *terminans* was its actualising form. They recognised more nuanced forms of determination, such as the way adjectives qualify nouns without governing their morphological case or form. As noted by Covington (1984: 41-42), this broader understanding of dependency allowed for a more flexible and context-sensitive analysis of syntactic relations.

By contrast, medieval theorists did not conflate syntactic dependency with overt morphological control. They acknowledged subtler modes of determination such as the way adjectives contribute to the interpretation of nouns without governing them grammatically. As Covington (1984) observes, this expanded conception of dependency enabled a more adaptable and semantically informed account of syntactic relationships. The *dependens-terminans* model demonstrated considerable explanatory range across familiar grammatical configurations. It was well-suited to prototypically transitive constructions

and found plausible application in cases involving hierarchical dependencies, such as embedded clauses or modifier – head structures. Scholars like Thomas of Erfurt, Simon of Dacia, and Radulphus Brito used the model to delineate how linguistic elements operate within systems of semantic fulfilment and syntactic expectation (Graffi-Pagliaroli 2016; Marmo 2023; Bellucci-Marmo 2023).

However, the model's applicability diminishes considerably when it is extended to coordinate structures, particularly conjunctions. The reason is structural as much as conceptual: coordination does not clearly instantiate the asymmetrical relation presupposed by the *dependens-terminans* framework. In coordinated constructions, one element does not obviously depend on the other for completion in the same way that, for instance, a verb depends on its object. Instead, coordinated elements typically hold equivalent syntactic and semantic status, reflecting a fundamental symmetry in their relationship. Consequently, the conjunction itself does not function as a terminans within the modistic *dependens-terminans* framework, as it neither completes a dependent linguistic unit nor fills a missing grammatical valency. Rather, conjunctions assume a connective or relational function, serving primarily to express logical, temporal, additive, or adversative relationships without occupying an explicit fulfilment role within the syntactic hierarchy. This lack of hierarchical dependency in coordination is consistent with cross-linguistic typological evidence extensively documented in Haspelmath² (2004: 3-6).

Medieval grammarians such as Siger of Courtrai and Gentile da Cingoli were acutely aware of this theoretical tension. Their analyses reveal the difficulty of reconciling the inherent symmetry of coordination with a model fundamentally built on asymmetrical dependency. While the *dependens-terminans* framework offered a productive means of formalising many types of grammatical relation, its extension to

² Haspelmath's comprehensive survey of coordinating constructions demonstrates that coordination universally involves elements of equal grammatical rank, contrasting sharply with subordinating constructions that inherently encode hierarchical dependency. Such typological studies clarify that conjunctions typically mark symmetrical relationships, reinforcing the argument that modistic grammatical models struggle with these non-hierarchical constructions, thus revealing significant limitations in frameworks reliant solely on dependency-based classifications.

conjunctions exposed its limits, both in terms of descriptive adequacy and theoretical coherence.

This tension underscores a broader methodological point: the attempt to impose a unified metaphysical model onto all syntactic phenomena risks obscuring rather than clarifying grammatical diversity. While the *Modistae* succeeded in aligning many syntactic structures with principles drawn from logic and metaphysics, their system also reveals the conceptual challenges of applying such principles across the full range of linguistic data (Bursill-Hall 1971: 311–312; Pinborg 1973; Covington 1979, 1984: 48–50).

3. *Dependens* and *terminans* in Modistic Grammar: Syntactic Asymmetry and Ontological Grounding

During the High Middle Ages, Latin grammarians gradually refined their understanding of how words in a sentence related to each other. Early on, they inherited from late antique sources (especially Priscian) the notion of grammatical *regimen*, in which one word ‘determines’ the case or form of another. In the 12th century, however, a new semantic perspective emerged through the concept of *determinatio*, which focused on how one word restricts or specifies the meaning of another. Over the next few centuries, these ideas were synthesised into a theory of *dependentia*, formalised by the Modist grammarians with technical terms such as *dependens* and *terminans*.

This development was not linear, but marked by debates: some thinkers equated *determinatio* with government, while others insisted on distinguishing the two relations (Graffi 2020; Luhtala 2020; Cotticelli 2021a, b, 2023, 2024). Ultimately, the *dependens-terminans* framework articulated by Thomas of Erfurt in the early 14th century represents the culmination of these developments, integrating insights from earlier figures and adding a hierarchical view of syntactic relations (Graffi-Pagliaroli 2016). However, to understand Thomas’s contribution, one must first trace how key medieval scholars conceptualised *determinatio*, government and dependency in the centuries before him.

3.1 Master Guido and Peter Abelard: Opposing views on *Determinatio* vs. Government

In the 12th century, Master Guido took a position that closely aligned *determinatio* with the traditional idea of government. According to an account preserved by later scholars, Master Guido used *determinante* as a synonym for *regens* and *determinato* as the governed word (i.e. *rectum*). In other words, he identified the determining element in a construction with the word that imposes case or form on another, mapping determination directly onto the syntactic power of *regimen*. This view implies a head-driven understanding of *determinatio*: the primary word in the construction (e.g. a verb or a dominant noun) is what determines (or limits) the other, just as it governs it grammatically (Graffi 2012: 296; Cotticelli-Kurras 2021: 19). A markedly different approach was taken by Peter Abelard (1079-1142), whose innovative ideas foreshadowed a dependency perspective. Abelard reversed the roles: for him, the subordinate term in a sentence is the *determinans* and the main term is the *determinatus*. In examples such as *video lupum* or *domus Socratis*, Abelard identifies *lupum* and *Socratis* – the object and the genitive adjunct – as the *determinantes*, while *video* and *domus* are the *determinata*.

The subordinate words specify or complete the meaning of the head words: without an object *lupum*, *video* would be vague or incomplete in meaning. In Abelard's view, *determinatio* thus points to meaning-dependence: the verb needs the object to fully determine "what is seen," and the noun *domus* needs the genitive to determine "whose house". Interestingly, Abelard explicitly links the notion of *determinatio* to the semantic completeness of a predication. He distinguishes between what he calls 'transitive' and 'intransitive' determinations: a construction like *video lupum* or *domus Socratis*, where an additional term is needed to complete the sense, is a 'transitive determination', whereas an expression like *animal rationale mortale*, where the adjectives (i.e. *rationale*, *mortale*) narrow the meaning of a noun without an external object, is an intransitive determination. Here Abelard anticipates the idea that a verb taking a direct object involves a different kind of determination (one that "passes over" to another entity) than a simple modifier attached to a noun. His position effectively separates

determinatio from formal case-government and refocuses it on semantic dependency: the added term provides the necessary information to determine the meaning of the head term. Abelard's contemporary influence ensured that his conception of *determinatio* was widely discussed in the 12th century. The stark contrast between the two scholars on this point set the scene for further reflection. On the one hand, Guido's equation of *determinans* with *regens* represented a conservative or straightforward reading, essentially that syntax and semantics coincide so that the word which grammatically governs is also the one which governs meaning. Abelard, on the other hand, introduced a more nuanced, perhaps counter-intuitive, idea that the word that is grammatically governed can semantically determine its governor. This raised questions and even objections among later scholars: if Abelard is right, does this mean that a governed word can be said to "govern" in a different sense? Critics wrestled with such questions in the decades that followed, leading to clarifications of terminology.

3.2 Petrus Helias: Distinguishing Semantic Determination from Syntactic Government

By the mid-12th century, Petrus Helias (c. 1160) provided a complex account that explicitly separates the semantic and syntactic aspects of a construction as he noted that his contemporaries often spoke of one word "governing" another in a construction, thereby extending Priscian's language of a word *exigere* or *requirere*. He observed that government can be defined in a particular way:

*dictionem regere dictionem non est aliud quam unam dictionem assumere aliam in constructione ad determinationem suae significationis.*³ (liber constructionum, praecepta specialia, de regimine, 2, 1050, 92)

This definition explicitly links government to semantic determination, as it suggests that whenever one word governs another – such as a verb governing a subject or object – it does so in order to refine or complete its own meaning. Indeed, from this perspective,

³ Trans.: "for a word to govern another is nothing other than to take another word into a construction for the determination of its meaning"

one would say that the verb *currit* governs the subject in *homo currit* in order to specify who is running; the verb, in this case, requires a nominative to clarify its referent (Covington 1984; Cotticelli-Kurras 2021). However, Helias ultimately rejects equating government with determination as he carefully distinguishes two relations that occur in syntax: a morphosyntactic relation of government and a semantic relation of determination. In Helias's account, a word may govern another without the governed element necessarily determining the signification of its governor. Thus, while every finite verb in Latin requires a subject in the nominative case to form a complete utterance – and may therefore be said to govern the nominative – Helias maintains that this relation fulfils a structural necessity of predication rather than contributing to the semantic determination of the verb itself. In *Socrates currit*, the verb *currit* indeed requires a subject in order for the sentence to be formally well-formed, but one may argue that the nominative *Socrates* does not introduce any new conceptual property to the verb, merely fulfilling the role of *agens* within the predication. Helias therefore maintains that the verb governs the subject to complete the construction (*ad complendam constructionem*), not to determine its meaning (*ad determinandam significationem*). In this, he departs from those who viewed the *subiectum* as a *determinans* of the verb. By contrast, in a noun–adjective phrase such as *homo albus*, no *regimen* is involved: the noun does not impose any morphological form on the adjective beyond basic *concordantia*. Yet a clear instance of *determinatio* occurs, as *albus* modifies and restricts the semantic content of *homo*. Helias points out that *homo* does not govern *albus* in any grammatical sense, yet *albus* acts as a *determinans* with respect to the noun. On this basis, he concludes that *determinatio* and *regimen* must be regarded as distinct relations: *regimen* refers to the imposition of formal features by a *regens* upon a *rectum*, whereas *determinatio* denotes a semantic influence by which one term contributes to specifying the meaning of another.

Petrus Helias's nuanced position effectively synthesizes the insights of Guido and Abelard into a coherent framework. He agrees with Abelard that a governed term (like an adjective or genitive modifier) contributes to the meaning of another word, but he stops short of saying that this makes the governed term a “governor”. Instead, Helias reserves the term *regere* (to govern) for the morphological

cause (the word that causes another's case inflection) and uses *determinare* (to determine) for the semantic effect one word has on another's signification. Under this view, a single pair of words can exhibit both relations simultaneously: e.g. in a typical subject-verb pairing, the verb governs the case of the subject, and the subject (by providing a person who performs the action) helps determine the verb's full meaning. Helias himself emphasizes the verb's need for a subject for completeness: *currit* alone is too indeterminate ("is running" – who?); adding *Socrates* supplies the needed determination of reference. Yet he maintains that in such a case we should say the verb governs the subject (syntactically), and perhaps simply that the verb's meaning is *completed* rather than "determined" by that subject. For truly *determinative* relationships, one should look to noun phrases, where a modifier limits the scope of a head noun's meaning. In sum, Helias dissociated semantic and syntactic dependency, allowing medieval grammarians to talk about meaning relationships (*determinans-determinatum*) without always conflating them with case government.

3.3 From Construction to Dependency

Around the year 1200, grammatical theory began shifting toward greater abstraction, setting the stage for the Modist framework. Martin and Simon of Dacia introduced technical vocabulary to classify parts of a construction as primary or secondary and as dependent or independent. A key Modistic innovation was the notion of the *constructibile*, roughly "that which can enter into construction." Every construction was analyzed as consisting of a *primum* and a *secundum constructibile*. This essentially recapitulated the distinction between what modern grammar calls the head and the dependent in a phrase. Martin's insight was to redefine the old categories of "intransitive" vs. "transitive" construction in terms of dependency on the *primum constructibile*. In his scheme, an intransitive construction is one in which one term, the second constructible, depends on the first constructible, the primary term, – either *immediately* or *mediately* – for its completion. Conversely, a transitive construction is one in which no such dependence on the first term exists (the second term does not ultimately depend on the first). For example, Martin would classify a simple subject-pred-

icate sentence *homo currit* as intransitive, because the predicate *currit* depends immediately on the subject *homo* (the *primum constructibile*) for its reference. Likewise, in *homo albus*, the adjective depends on the noun (the noun is the *primum*, and the adjective is attached to it). Even a more complex string like *homo currit bene* is intransitive in Martin's analysis: *currit* depends on *homo*, and *bene* (an adverb) in turn depends on *currit* – thus, indirectly, *bene* depends on *homo* as well, through the mediation of the verb. By contrast, a sentence with a direct object, like *homo videt lupum*, Martin would call transitive, because here the second constructible (*videt*–*lupum* form a verb-object pair) does not involve everything depending from the subject. The object *lupum* does not trace its dependence back to *homo*; rather, *videt* depends on *homo* (subject) and *lupum* depends on *videt*, so the chain of dependency does not unite all elements under one head in the same way. In Martin's terms, *lupum* "recedes" from the subject's orbit, making the construction transitive, and the action passes over to a second entity.

Martin of Dacia's definitions formalized earlier intuitions about "two persons *vs* one person" in a sentence, but recast them in terms of abstract dependency relations. His approach, however, raised some subtle problems. As later commentators like Pinborg (1973) noted, Martin's strict criterion struggled with cases like a noun-adjective in oblique contexts. For instance, *percutio hominem albus* would, in Martin's system, count as a transitive construction (because *albus* depends on *hominem*, which as an object does not depend on the subject). However, *homo albus currit bene* was intransitive (adjective depending on subject). The relationship between *homo* and *albus* is essentially the same (the adjective determines the noun) in both sentences, but Martin's criterion classed one as transitive and the other as intransitive due to the presence of the verb and the different role of the noun (subject *vs* object). This inconsistency prompted refinements by the next generation of modists.

Instead, Simon of Dacia generally adopted the new *constructibile* framework but did not fully embrace one of Martin's more radical moves: treating the *primum constructibile* as a "suppositum" that could be in any case. Martin and later Thomas of Erfurt allowed that the first constructible need not always be a nominative subject; for example, in a phrase like *filius Socratis*, one might consider *filius* the *primum* and *Socratis* (a genitive) the *secundum*, even though neither is

a nominative. Simon of Dacia, however, apparently preferred to tie the *primum* to the grammatical subject position. As a commentator notes, Simon did not accept the conception of *suppositum* (the subject of predication) being sometimes in an oblique case – a view that Martin and Thomas used to generalize the idea of *primum constructibile*. Thus, Simon may have been more conservative, keeping closer to the idea that the subject (in the nominative) is the primary term of an intransitive construction. Despite such nuances, Simon of Dacia's work, like Martin's, employed the language of dependency: he wrote *Quaestiones* on Priscian's smaller grammar where he analysed syntactic relations in a modistic vein. Both Simon and Martin helped establish that every two-word construction involves a hierarchy – one element can be regarded as primary (providing a foundation, such as a subject or a governing noun/verb) and the other as secondary (relying on the first, either for syntactic completeness or semantic specification). Crucially, the Modistae introduced the specific terminology of dependence. Martin of Dacia uses the terms *dependens* and *terminans* in his discussion of constructions. The *dependens* is the term that *depends* on something else (higher in the hierarchy), whereas the *terminans* is the term that *terminates* the dependency chain – essentially the lowest element which “just gives itself” without needing another. In practice, this meant that in any given construction, one word could be labeled *dependens* and the other *terminans*. For example, in a simple subject-verb pair (*Socrates currit*), Martin would call the verb *currit* the *dependens* (since it needs the subject to satisfy its requirement of a doer) and *Socrates* the *terminans* (since the subject is a self-sufficient *suppositum*, providing the needed person). In a noun-adjective phrase (*Socrates albus* understood as “Socrates is white”), the adjective *albus* is *dependens* (it cannot stand alone without specifying who is white) and *Socrates* is *terminans*. In a verb-object phrase (*lego librum*, “I read a book”), the verb *lego* is *dependens* (it “asks for” an object to complete its meaning) and *librum* is *terminans* (it supplies the content to satisfy the verb). What is novel here is that *dependens* and *terminans* cut across the older categories: whether a construction was considered *regimen* or mere *determination*, one term will act as the one that depends (seeks something) and the other as the one that provides or finishes the idea. This allowed the Modistae to handle uniformly cases that previously seemed disparate. For instance, as noted earli-

er, the relation of noun and adjective (*Socrates albus*) was viewed by Peter Helias purely as determination yet in the *dependens-terminans* framework it is simply an intransitive construction with the noun as *terminans* and adjective as *dependens*. The *dependens/terminans* relation thus subsumed both government and determination under a single hierarchical model.

Martin of Dacia's definitions of *dependens* and *terminans* in relation to *primum-secundum* constructible were further refined by others. As a matter of fact, Radulphus Brito (fl. 1290s) offers a refined interpretation of the *dependens-terminans* relation that diverges from the mainstream Modistic tradition. In his *Quaestiones super Priscianum Minorem*, Brito introduces a dynamic view of syntactic construction by distinguishing between two temporal phases: the moment *before* construction, where the *dependens* is in potentiality (like matter) and the *terminans* in actuality (like form), and the moment *after* construction, where these roles are reversed, and the *dependens* becomes the more formal element within the unity of the sentence (Covington 1984: 50; Marmo 1994).

Before syntactic union, Brito aligns with a standard Modist metaphor: the *dependens* is something in potency, seeking its completion in the *terminans*, which serves as the actual terminus of its syntactic need. In this phase, the *dependens* is analogous to matter, and the *terminans* to form. But once the construction is actualized, that is, once the words are joined into a grammatical unity, Brito proposes that it is the *dependens* that contributes more fundamentally to the *form* of the construction, because the construction itself arises from the very relation of dependency. As a result, Brito suggests that the *dependens* is in a deeper sense more constructible than the *terminans* because it operates more decisively in forming the construction:

Et si dicas immo magis videtur quod extremum terminans habeat rationem actus qui magis est ens cum sit per se stans et aliud dependens, dicendum quod constructibile secundum quod constructibile dicit dependentiam, et ideo magis dependens est magis formale constructibile, licet non sit magis ens et formalius, quia hoc est de ratione constructibilis, scilicet esse alterius universaliter, et ideo quod magis est dependens est magis constructibile (...). Vel dicendum quod constructibile dependens est magis formale constructibile, quia constructio causatur ex dependentia unius constructibilis ad alterum. Quod ergo magis operatur ad formam orationis quae est unio construc-

*tibilium, hoc est constructibile formalius.*⁴ (Rad. Brito, Quaest. sup. Prisc. min., cit., I, q. 6. P. 110-111)

This view marks a significant departure from the *communis opinio* of the Modists, such as Thomas of Erfurt, who strictly opposed attributing any dependency to the *terminans*, on the grounds that an actual entity (the *terminans*) cannot be composed of two merely potential ones (if both *dependens* and *terminans* were seen as dependent) (Marmo 1994: 385). Brito's philosophical innovation lies in interpreting *dependens* and *terminans* not as fixed ontological roles, but as *functional* positions within a relational system that mirrors the metaphysical interplay of potency and act. This approach offers a bilaterally relational model – rather than a unidirectional one – thereby framing grammatical dependency as a dynamic and reciprocal interaction. Both elements are *constructibilia* (i.e. constructible), yet they contribute in distinct ways: the *dependens* participates more directly in the causal mechanism of construction, while the *terminans* functions as the semantic anchor or actualiser of that construction.

This move allows Brito to maintain the Aristotelian metaphysical analogy central to Modistic grammar while overcoming the asymmetries that troubled earlier formulations. His account stands out for its internal coherence and for repositioning grammatical theory within a broader ontological and semiotic framework. Thus, while maintaining continuity with earlier Modist thinkers like Simon and Martin of Dacia, Radulphus Brito proposes a more balanced and philosophically robust model of syntactic

⁴ Trans.: “And if you say, ‘Rather, it seems more appropriate that the final *terminans* should have the character (*ratio*) of act, since it is more fully a being (*ens*), being self-standing, and that the other, *dependens*, is subordinate,’ one should reply: the *constructibile*, insofar as it is a *constructibile*, expresses dependency. And therefore, the more dependent element is the more *formal* constructible, though it is not more of a being (*ens*) nor more formal in the ontological sense, because it pertains to the very nature of the *constructibile* to be universally of another. Hence, that which is more dependent is more *constructibile*. (...) Alternatively, it can be said that the *dependent constructibile* is more formal because construction is caused by the dependency of one *constructibile* upon another. Therefore, that which contributes more to the form of speech, which is the union of constructibles, is the more *formal constructibile*”.

4. Dealing with conjunctions

The role of conjunctions within the *dependens-terminans* framework constitutes one of the primary theoretical challenges faced by medieval speculative grammar. Various medieval grammarians, such as Folchinus de Borfonibus, Radulphus Brito, Michel of Marbais, Siger of Courtrai, Gentile da Cingoli, and Thomas of Erfurt, engaged deeply with this issue, demonstrating both the theoretical strengths and inherent limitations of the Modist binary framework of *dependens* and *terminans*.

Folchinus de Borfonibus utilised the terms *dependens* and *terminans* to describe fundamental grammatical relationships within syntactic constructions, defining each construction as the union of mutually dependent elements. According to Folchinus, a *dependens* element is one that inherently requires another element to complete or specify its meaning, while the *terminans* element provides the necessary semantic completion. Yet, Folchinus himself acknowledged that conjunctions challenge this binary structure. Since conjunctions primarily function as connectors rather than as clearly hierarchical elements, their role resists a straightforward classification as either *dependens* or *terminans* (Marmo 1994).

*Constructio igitur est unio constructibilium ratione dependendi et terminandi ad inuicem relatorum.*⁵ (Folch., *Cremonina*, 3, 4, 35)

His definition of construction explicitly emphasises the reciprocal relationships of dependency and termination (*dependendi et terminandi*) that structure sentence elements. This duality is central to Modist grammar, where syntactic relations were understood analogously to philosophical concepts of potentiality and actuality. One element (the *dependens*) is incomplete or “potential,” seeking fulfillment or completion from another (the *terminans*), the “actualising” element. In Folchinus’ analysis, these grammatical roles directly reflect metaphysical structures, blending linguistic description with philosophical interpretation.

⁵ Transl.: “Construction, therefore, is the union of constructible elements based on their mutual dependency and relation”.

*Cuius partes sunt duplices, scilicet subiectiue et integrales. Partes subiectiue sunt transitiua et intransitiua, congrua et incongrua, perfecta et imperfecta.*⁶ (Folch., Cremonina, 3, 4, 37-38)

*Et dicuntur subiectiue quia de ipsis subiectis constructio bene predicatur ut congrua constructio est constructio, et incongrua constructio est constructio, et sic de aliis. Partes integrales sunt nomen, uerbum, participium, pronomen, prepositio, aduerbium et coniunctio. Et dicuntur integrales quia ex aliquibus ipsarum uel ex omnibus constructio integratur.... Transitiua constructio est illa in qua ostenditur fieri transitio de una persona in aliam, ut "Filius Petri dat michi panem". Intransitiua uero constructio est illa in qua non ostenditur fieri transitio de una persona in aliam, ut "Filius meus est discretus". Et sub his continentur reciproca et retransitiua.*⁷ (Folch., Cremonina, 3, 4, 39)

The subjective parts (transitive/intransitive, congruent/incongruent, perfect/imperfect) represent different ways in which the relationship of dependency is realised within constructions, further categorising sentences based on their syntactic and semantic transitions between elements. For example, the transitive construction explicitly shows a relational shift or transfer from one element (often a subject) to another (often an object). By contrast, the intransitive construction is complete without such a relational shift, as it does not explicitly transfer meaning or action between distinct entities.

Folchinus then elaborates the integral parts (noun, verb, participle, pronoun, preposition, adverb, conjunction) as essential grammatical units from which constructions derive their completeness. Here, the conjunction presents a particular challenge to the Modist framework. Conjunctions do not fit easily into the *dependens-terminans* binary schema because their semantic role is primarily connective rather than dependent

⁶ Transl.: "Its parts are of two kinds, namely subjective and integral. Subjective parts are transitive and intransitive, congruent and incongruent, perfect and imperfect".

⁷ Transl.: "And they are called subjective because the notion of construction is properly predicated of them: for example, "a congruent construction is a construction" and "an incongruent construction is a construction", and likewise for the others. The integral parts are noun, verb, participle, pronoun, preposition, adverb, and conjunction. They are called integral because the construction is constituted from some or all of them. A transitive construction is one in which a transfer from one person to another is expressed, as in "The son of Peter gives me bread." An intransitive construction, on the other hand, is one in which no such transfer is expressed, as in "My son is wise." Included under these are reciprocal and retransitive constructions."

or completing in a straightforward hierarchical manner. Unlike verbs, nouns, or adjectives, conjunctions generally do not create direct hierarchical relations of semantic dependency but instead establish a kind of horizontal unity or continuity among grammatical constituents.

Grammarians of this period attempted different solutions to integrate conjunctions within the Modistic framework. Folchinus includes conjunction explicitly as an integral element, acknowledging its indispensable role in sentence integration. However, the complexity arises from its ambiguous status: a conjunction does not simply “terminate” or “depend” on another element, but rather connects elements without assuming hierarchical dominance.

Folchinus’s inclusion of conjunctions among the integral parts reflects a broader historical effort by medieval grammarians, such as Michel de Marbais and Radulphus Brito, to account for conjunctions within the framework of Modistic dependency theory, despite the theoretical challenges they posed. Michel de Marbais notably argued that conjunctions possess a distinct “mode of signification” (i.e. *modus significandi coniungentis*) as connectors, allowing them to participate actively in the syntactic construction despite their atypical role. Similarly, Radulphus Brito explored how conjunctions could establish intransitive unity, contributing to the overall syntactic coherence of sentences without directly governing or being governed by the terms they join.

In fact, Radulphus Brito introduced philosophical complexity by arguing that grammatical constructions involve mutual dependency relationships analogous to philosophical notions of potentiality and actuality. Initially, Brito identified the *terminans* as potential matter, existing in a state of potentiality prior to syntactic union, while the *dependens* functions as form, actualising that potential. After their union, however, these roles reverse: the *dependens* assumes centrality and formal importance by determining the nature of the construction. This dynamic reversal demonstrates a more nuanced understanding of dependency, challenging the static hierarchical assumptions that underpin simpler interpretations of the Modist system (Marmo 1994: 110-111).

Unum extremorum in qualibet constructione se habet ut terminans et per se stans et ut potentiale constructibile, et aliud extremum quod habet se ut dependens est ut formale ... Vel dicendum quod constructibile dependens est magis formale constructibile, quia constructio causatur ex dependentia unius constructibilis ad alterum. Quod ergo magis operatur ad formam ora-

*tionis quae est unio constructibilium, hoc est constructibile formalius. Et hoc est dependens, ergo et cetera.*⁸ (1.6, 110-111)

Radulphus Brito's interpretation of the *dependens-terminans* framework diverges from the traditional views expressed by contemporary grammarians such as Simon and Martin of Dacia. Conventionally, the *terminans* had been considered the active formal component, imparting structure and actuality, while the *dependens* represented potentiality awaiting actualization. Radulphus explicitly reverses this hierarchy, asserting instead that the *dependens* should be considered the more formal element – *magis formale constructibile* – since the actual act of syntactic construction arises precisely from its inherent requirement to establish relationships with other elements. Brito also emphasizes the dynamic role played by the *dependens*, underscoring that the syntactic union results primarily from dependency rather than from the self-contained sufficiency traditionally ascribed to the *terminans*. Such re-evaluation had profound implications for medieval syntactic theory: by elevating the status of an element previously perceived as subordinate due to its incompleteness (the *dependens*), Radulphus implicitly called for a re-orientation of the entire hierarchical framework underpinning Modist grammar. He thus highlights the productive and relational nature of syntactic dependency, connecting it explicitly to the notion that the fundamental “form” of a proposition arises directly from the force that binds and unifies two grammatical elements.

In this theoretical context, integrating conjunctions posed significant challenges for Modist grammarians. Conjunctions, traditionally viewed as purely connective and lacking clear semantic autonomy, did not readily fit within the binary schema of *dependens-terminans*. Indeed, as contemporaries such as Michel of Marbais and Siger of

⁸ Trans. “In any construction, one of the elements functions as the terminans, standing independently and existing as a potentially constructible element, while the other, serving as the *dependens*, is formal. Moreover, it might be argued that the constructible acting as *dependens* is the more formal element, since construction itself arises from the dependency of one constructible upon another. Consequently, the element contributing most significantly to the formal unity of the proposition, this being the syntactic union of constructibles, is to be considered the more formal constructible. Precisely this element is the *dependens*”.

Courtrai observed, conjunctions appeared problematic precisely because they resisted immediate semantic dependency classification.

Certain Modists attempted to address this by assigning conjunctions an active role, defining them as constructible elements possessing their own distinct “mode of signifying,” specifically that of connection. Michel of Marbais argued explicitly that conjunctions should be recognized as constructible precisely because they possess this connective mode, enabling them to establish syntactic unity. Similarly, Siger of Courtrai proposed that conjunctions create inherently intransitive constructions, serving to unite elements without producing hierarchical dependencies directly.

*Coniunctio similiter est pars orationis indeclinabilis habens duos modos significandi essentielles, quorum unus dicitur generalis, alter specialis sive specificus. Modus significandi generalis essentialis coniunctionis est significare per modum disponientis, qui dicitur generalis quia in alia specie reperitur, ut in adverbio, ut visum est prius. Modus autem specialis coniunctionis est significare per modum unitatis extendendo unionem, et hoc plane videtur velle Priscianus, in Maiore, ubi dicit quod coniunctio est pars orationis indeclinabilis coniunctiva aliarum partium orationis, vim vel ordinem demonstrans; per hoc quod dicit « coniunctiva » tangit modum disponientis quia coniungere disponere est, vel per hoc quod dicit « vim vel ordinem demonstrans » circumloquitur modum significandi specificum ad illa duo, scilicet, modum unitatis, et hoc modo in diffinitione verbi circumloquitur modum fieri esse vel motus peragendi vel patiendi et in hoc videtur concordare primo Minoris, ubi vult quod coniunctio sic se habet ad alias partes sicut vinculum ad corpora, modo vinculum habet duplicem comparisonem ad corpora, tum quia disponit, tum quia unit ea ad invicem.⁹ (Siger of Courtrai, *Summa modorum significandi* 58-59)*

⁹ Transl. The conjunction, likewise, is an indeclinable part of speech that possesses two essential modes of signifying, one of which is called general and the other special or specific. The *modus significandi generalis essentialis* of the conjunction is to signify *per modum disponientis* (in the manner of arranging), and it is called general because it is also found in another part of speech, such as the adverb, as has previously been shown. The specific mode of the conjunction, however, is to signify *per modum unitatis extendendo unionem* (in the manner of unity by extending union). This is clearly what Priscian seems to intend in the *Institutiones Major*, where he states that the conjunction is an indeclinable part of speech that connects other parts of speech, demonstrating force or order. By saying “connective,” he touches on the *modus disponientis*, since to connect is to arrange; and by saying “demonstrating

This passage from Siger highlights how conjunctions posed considerable theoretical difficulties. Traditionally viewed as purely functional, lacking inherent semantic content and morphological inflection, defined by Siger *indeclinabilis*, conjunctions seemed not to fit neatly into the binary relational schema central to the Modistic analysis (see Pinborg 1977 and also Cotticelli-Kurras 2023 which discusses such traditional view). Siger addresses this theoretical challenge by attributing two distinct modes of signifying to conjunctions: one general, involving the disposition or arrangement of syntactic elements, and one specific, pertaining to the unifying function performed exclusively by conjunctions. The general mode (*modus significandi generalis*) refers to the organisational or dispositional function shared with other grammatical categories, such as adverbs. Through this mode, conjunctions contribute to the structural arrangement of elements within the sentence, situating them within the syntactic hierarchy characteristic of Modist grammar.

Conversely, the specific mode (i.e. *modus significandi specialis*) delineates the conjunction's exclusive role in creating unity and coherence between otherwise independent syntactic elements. Through this unifying function, the conjunction is no longer considered merely an empty syntactic link but becomes an essential and active participant within the structure of the sentence, enabling linguistic elements to mutually acquire semantic and syntactic coherence.

Notably, Siger explicitly references Priscian, a primary authority within medieval grammatical thought, linking his innovative interpretation back to established grammatical tradition. Priscian's assertion that conjunctions "demonstrate force or order" is critically reinterpreted by Siger as encompassing both the disposition and semantic cohesion of elements. In doing so, Siger aligns Priscian's

force or order," he alludes to the specific mode of signifying, namely the *modus unitatis*. In a similar way, in his definition of the verb, Priscian describes its *modus significandi* by circumlocution, referring to the manner of coming to be, of enacting movement or of undergoing it. In this, he appears to be in agreement with the beginning of the *Institutiones Minor*, where he asserts that the conjunction relates to the other parts of speech as a bond does to bodies, where the bond has a dual relation to the bodies, both in arranging them and in uniting them with one another.

classical grammatical framework with the innovative analytical principles of speculative grammar.

The analogy Siger employs, comparing the conjunction to a *vinculum* – a “bond” connecting bodies – reflects philosophical traditions prevalent in medieval scholarship. This analogy effectively encapsulates the dual nature of conjunctions, which simultaneously serve both as an organiser (disposing elements structurally within the sentence) and as a combiner (establishing semantic-syntactic coherence among these elements). The metaphor underscores the sophisticated dual functionality of conjunctions as theorised by the Modists, aligning linguistic analysis with philosophical reflection.

In *Quaestio* 15 (117–153) of the *Quaestiones supra Prisciano Minori*, Gentile da Cingoli assigns the *coniunctio* a central role within both syntactic structure and intellectual activity. He argues that when two elements are not linked by a relation of *dependentia*, they cannot be joined without a mediating *copula uniente*. The *coniunctio*, then, functions not as a peripheral syntactic marker but as a grammatical reflection of the *actus intellectus* by which the mind forms a *propositio*. Citing Aristotle’s *Metaphysics* V, Gentile notes that the mediating *est* is an *ens secundum animam*, a mental rather than real entity, thereby granting the copula full ontological and cognitive status within the Modistic metalinguistic system.

Tamen duo subiecta, ex eo quod unum non est dependens ad aliud, non possunt coniungi sine copula uniente, et ideo oportet quod uniuntur medio sive aliquo coniungente, sicut etiam nos videmus in natura... Et ex his apparet quod constructio est possibilis. (...)...et propter hoc Philosophus V Metaphysicae dicebat quod ‘est’, quo mediante intellectus sibi format propositiones, est ens secundum animam et non ens reale. (Gentile da Cingoli, Quaestio 15 (117–153))¹⁰

In this passage, Gentile explains that when two subjects are to be joined syntactically, they cannot be connected arbitrarily or directly un-

¹⁰ Trans.: “However, two subjects, insofar as one is not dependent upon the other, cannot be joined without a unifying copula; and therefore, it is necessary that they be united by some intermediary or connective, just as we observe in nature... And from this, it becomes evident that construction is indeed possible. (...) “...and for this reason, the Philosopher stated in Book V of the *Metaphysics* that the term ‘is’, by means of which the intellect forms propositions for itself, is a being according to the soul and not a real being”.

less one depends upon the other. In cases where no such dependence exists, a mediating element – a *medium* – is required to unite them. He likens this to physical examples in nature, such as two pieces of wood that cannot be joined without nails, glue, or some connecting material (a metaphor widely known in the grammatical framework of analysis, see Cotugno 2023). Likewise, a syntactic union requires a connective element, such as the verb *est*, which functions as an intellectual tool for forming propositions. Gentile emphasizes that this conjunction does not occur randomly or by chance. Rather, it takes place *per debitum modum* – through a due or proper mode. This means that syntactic construction follows the nature of things as they exist and as they are understood. For instance, the intellect recognises the distinction between a subject and its accident, such as a body and its colour, and then unites them in a meaningful way. The intellect does not merely observe passively; it actively participates in generating meaning by forming structured statements, such as “the wall is white”. Moreover, Gentile explicitly states that the construction is not just possible but necessary, and that it operates through a process informed by sense perception, imagination, and the agent intellect. The verb *est* serves not only as a grammatical connector but as an intellectual construct that makes comparison and combination of distinct entities possible. Even radically different concepts, such as *being* and *non-being*, can be syntactically joined, not because they are united in reality, but because the mind produces a logical framework that allows such propositions to be formed.

Boethius of Dacia shows a more radical solution. He argued that within a sentence, a conjunction only serves a connective function and does not construct with either of the two elements it connects. Therefore, a conjunction acts merely as a medium between two names or verbs, enabling their mutual construction but not entering into a construction itself:

*Non enim potest impositor quamlibet rem sub quibuslibet modis significare ... Est enim quaedam constructio rerum per suas proprietates ... Est etiam alia constructio dictionum per suos modos significandi.*¹¹ (*Quaestiones super Priscianum maiorem*, 132)

¹¹ Trans.: “For it is not within the power of the name-giver to signify just anything in any arbitrary manner... For there is, indeed, a certain construction of things accord-

This passage highlights Boethius's view that conjunctions do not create syntactic constructions with the elements they join but merely link them semantically. This stance was a significant departure from the traditional Modist perspective and sparked various interpretations and debates among other medieval grammarians.

Another modist, Michel of Marbais, criticizes previous grammatical theories that did not consider conjunctions as constructible elements because they lacked the conventional grammatical modes of signifying, such as gender, number, and case, which typically serve as foundational principles for syntactic construction:

*Unde indubitanter quamplurimum peccaverant grammatici et magni po-
nentes et firmiter asserentes ipsam coniunctionem non esse constructibilem,
cum ipsa deficiat secundum quod dicunt in omnibus modis significandi qui
sunt principia constructionis in aliis partibus, scilicet genere, numero, casu,
et ceteris. Hoc vero totaliter non habet veritatem. Nam et licet ipsa coniunctio
non habeat omnes istos modos significandi quos inducunt, ipsa habet tamen
modum significandi coniungentis, qui dictus est, cui correspondet modus
coniungibilis in alio constructibili. Et sic tales decipiuntur per fallaciam con-
sequentis ab insufficientia.*¹² (Michel de Marbais, *Summa*, p. 122)

Michel argues the traditional viewpoint, stating explicitly that it is fundamentally incorrect to dismiss conjunctions on these grounds. While acknowledging that conjunctions indeed do not exhibit all the conventional modes of signification shared by other parts of speech, the author asserts that conjunctions possess their own distinctive mode of signifying, specifically described as the “mode of connecting” (i.e. *modus significandi coniungentis*). This unique mode corre-

ing to their proper properties... Likewise, there is another kind of construction – of words – according to their respective modes of signification”.

¹² Trans.: “Whence it is without doubt that many grammarians, even eminent ones, have gravely erred in asserting firmly and confidently that the conjunction is not capable of construction, on the grounds that – according to their claim – it lacks all the modes of signification which serve as principles of construction in other parts of speech, namely gender, number, case, and the like. This position, however, is entirely false. For although the conjunction does not possess all of those modes of signification they cite, it nevertheless possesses the mode of signifying a relation of connection, as previously stated, to which there corresponds a mode of being connectible in the other element within the construction. Thus, such grammarians are deceived by the fallacy of the consequent arising from insufficiency.”.

sponds directly to a complementary mode present in the elements they connect, termed as “connectable” (i.e. *modus coniungibilis*). Thus, according to the author, those grammarians who deny the constructive role of conjunctions are committing a logical error, specifically a “fallacy of consequent from insufficiency,” by assuming that the absence of standard grammatical features necessarily excludes the conjunction from syntactic construction altogether.

Also, Michel discussed that conjunctions can indicate multiple types of semantic relationships between elements, such as addition, disjunction, contrast, causality, and logical relations. He emphasises that the function of conjunctions is not restricted to a single, simple role but it is rather complex and inherently relational:

*Unde aliquae coniunctiones coniungunt aliqua inter se et respectu alicuius tertii, ut patet dicendo, ‘Socrates et Plato currunt’. Aliae coniungunt aliqua inter se, disiungunt tamen ea respectu tertii, ut patet dicendo, ‘Socrates vel Plato currit’. Aliae vero coniungunt aliqua inter se in ratione expletionis, ut patet dicendo, ‘Ego quidem affui, tu vero non’. Aliae coniungunt aliqua inter se in ratione causae et effectus, ut dicendo, ‘Socrates flet, nam verberatus est’. Aliae vero coniungunt aliqua inter se ratione prioris et posterioris et per consequens in ratione antecedents et consequentis, ut patet dicendo, ‘Socrates currit, ergo movetur’.*¹³ (Michel de Marbaix, *Summa*, p. 146)

In the same part of his *Summa de Modis significandi*, Michel explicitly points out that conjunctions do not represent any defined semantic or mental concept in themselves. Rather, they acquire meaning exclusively through the conceptual relationships they establish between other linguistic elements and reinforcing the notion that conjunctions are semantically neutral in isolation and that their function is entirely relational and determined by the context provided by the elements they connect.

¹³ Transl.: “Hence, some conjunctions connect elements both with respect to each other and with respect to a third, as is clear in the sentence “Socrates and Plato run.” Others connect elements with respect to each other, but separate them in relation to a third, as in “Socrates or Plato runs.” Others connect elements in terms of *expletio* (completion or contrast), as in “I, indeed, was present, but you were not.” Still others connect elements in terms of cause and effect, as in “Socrates weeps, for he has been beaten.” Finally, some connect elements with respect to what is prior and what is posterior, and consequently in terms of antecedent and consequent, as in “Socrates runs, therefore he is in motion.”

Ex quo statim haberi potest quod coniunctio unde coniunctio est non significat aliquam determinatam rem sive mentis conceptum determinatum, cum diversae uniones rerum sive diversi mentis conceptus possunt esse significata diversarum coniunctionum, ut pro parte iam tactum est. Unde ipsa coniunctio secundum quod huiusmodi nullam imitatem sive mentis conceptum sibi determinat, nec etiam aliqua unio sive mentis conceptus sibi repugnat, cum eius modus significandi specificus non magis uni approprietur quam alteri, secundum quod apparet intellectum habenti. Et sic ex his omnibus patet quod ipsa coniunctio imposita est et finaliter adinventata ad designandum aliquam unionem rerum adinvicem unibilium vel coniungibilium quaecumque illa fuerint, secundum quod alia et alia per coniunctiones speciales designantur¹⁴ (Summa de Modis Significandi 146, 33)

5. Final remarks

The Modist theory of *dependens-terminans* represents one of the most ambitious and philosophically grounded attempts in the history of grammatical thought to provide a universal framework for syntactic structure. Rooted in metaphysical analogies of potentiality and actuality, this binary model seeks to classify all grammatical constructions according to asymmetrical relations of dependency and completion. However, the case of the conjunction – both in theory and in practice –

¹⁴ Trans.: “Thus, certain conjunctions unite elements with respect to each other and also in relation to a third term, as illustrated by the phrase, “Socrates and Plato run”. Others connect elements mutually but separate them in relation to a third term, exemplified by the expression, “Socrates or Plato runs.” Still others join elements to express completion or contrast, such as “I indeed was present, but you were not.” Some conjunctions denote cause and effect relationships, as in “Socrates weeps, for he has been beaten,” while others indicate a sequential or logical order, demonstrating antecedent and consequent relations, as in “Socrates runs, therefore he moves.” From this it immediately follows that conjunctions, by their very nature, do not signify any determinate thing or fixed mental concept, since diverse unions of entities or various mental concepts can be indicated by different conjunctions, as previously touched upon. Consequently, the conjunction itself does not inherently signify any singular or fixed concept, nor does it inherently oppose any particular conceptual or relational union, since its specific mode of signification is equally applicable to various types of conceptual connections. Therefore, it is clear that conjunctions were established and ultimately devised to denote any kind of union among entities capable of being combined or joined, according to the distinct functions expressed by different specific conjunctions.”.

proves a particularly instructive site for observing the system's limits, and for understanding how Modist grammarians negotiated them.

Throughout the Modistic tradition, conjunctions posed a persistent challenge to the *dependens-terminans* system, not because they lacked importance, but because their function did not fit neatly within a grammatical framework defined by hierarchical, asymmetric dependencies. Unlike verbs and their arguments, or nouns and their modifiers, conjunctions do not instantiate a directional or hierarchical relationship where one term clearly governs or completes another. They neither complete nor are completed in the traditional sense, but instead operate as mediators or bonds linking elements of equal syntactic weight. This connective role resists the asymmetrical dependency structure presumed by the *dependens-terminans* model, which aligns grammatical relations with metaphysical distinctions such as potentiality and actuality. Rather than excluding conjunctions from the scope of *constructio*, many modists sought to reinterpret their function in ways compatible with Modistic metaphysics. Scholars like Michel of Marbais and Siger of Courtrai proposed that conjunctions possess a distinctive *modus significandi coniungentis*, a mode of signifying relational union rather than semantic content. This signifying mode did not rely on case, gender, or number, and thus broke with traditional principles of morphosyntactic construction. Instead, it was conceptual and functional, expressing the capacity of the conjunction to create structural and logical cohesion between otherwise unconnected elements. Siger, in particular, conceptualised the conjunction as a *vinculum*, a bond that arranges and unifies, thus aligning grammatical theory with philosophical and ontological reflection.

More radically, thinkers like Gentile da Cingoli and Boethius of Dacia reimagined conjunction not simply as a grammatical tool but as an epistemological function: a principle by which the mind itself synthesises elements into intelligible wholes. For Gentile, the conjunction acts as the intellectual medium necessary to unify two non-dependent syntactic units, mirroring the metaphysical role of the verb *est* as the constitutive force of propositionality.

In contrast, Boethius of Dacia suggested that conjunctions are not constructible elements in themselves but merely serve as conduits for other constructions, thereby displacing their grammatical function onto the elements they connect. Still, other grammarians, notably Radulphus Brito, deepened the metaphysical stakes of the discussion.

By reversing the traditional roles of *dependens* and *terminans*, suggesting that the former, not the latter, is more fundamentally constructive, Brito reframed dependency not as a lack to be fulfilled but as the active condition of syntactic formation. His model, while ostensibly designed to explain standard constructions, indirectly accommodated the peculiar status of conjunctions: if syntactic construction arises from dependency itself, then the conjunction, which signals a relational need without occupying either terminal pole, might be seen as a formal marker of that dependency's potential extension, rather than its fulfilment.

What emerges from this long and multi-faceted reflection is a profound recognition of the conjunction's theoretical importance. Far from being marginal or peripheral, conjunctions compelled the Modistae to expand the boundaries of their framework, to re-express grammatical logic in terms that could account not only for syntactic hierarchy but also for horizontal, connective, and in some cases epistemological relations. The struggle to fit conjunctions within the *dependens-terminans* model thus illustrates not its failure, but its dynamism, its capacity to provoke conceptual innovation when confronted with linguistic phenomena that elude simple categorisation.

In conclusion, the role of the conjunction within Modist grammar serves as a touchstone for the entire enterprise. It exemplifies the Modists' commitment to building a grammatical theory that is both logically rigorous and philosophically responsive. The theoretical difficulties posed by conjunctions did not undermine the *dependens-terminans* system but rather stimulated its refinement and revealed its philosophical depth. In addressing these anomalies, medieval grammarians developed a more nuanced and sophisticated conception of grammar – one that sought to integrate the relational, functional, and cognitive dimensions of language into a coherent and enduring theoretical framework.

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