# PETER RAMUS (1515-1572) AS THE FIRST 'MODERN' STRUCTURALIST*

Manuel Breva-Claramonte

University of Colorado at Denver

## ABSTRACT

This paper attempts to show that Peter Ramus was the first
scholar to consciously break with the earlier grammatical tradition
and to establish a new linguistic model. In the first part, I treat
the beginnings of 'Western' grammatical theory:  the initial philo-
sophical debates involving the study of language, Plato's theory,
Aristotle's views, and Thrax's τέχνη. This presentation shows (1) the
type of model established by the ancients and (2) how Aristotle's
and Thrax's approach to language description, contrary to recent
opinions, is not essentially 'structural'. In the second part, I
analyze the basic tenets of Ramus' linguistic theory (scope of grammar,
role of meaning, rules of grammar, separation of disciplines and
division of grammar, and data analysis) in an attempt to prove my
main thesis, above, and to present Ramus' position in the history of
theoretical linguistics.

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0.0 INTRODUCTION.  Although the idea that Peter Ramus was
a structuralist avant le mot has already been suggested (Verburg 1952:
177, Kukenheim 1962:18, and Chevalier 1968:304), I feel that a new
analysis is needed for several reasons.  (1) Recent developments in
contemporary scholarship give additional light for a better understanding
of Ramus' position in the history of linguistics.  (2) Verburg's con-
siderations (1952:172-184) on Ramus are limited to a few comments; in
fact, he does not even include in the bibliography Ramus' Scholae
grammaticae, i.e.  Ramus' theoretical work, which is the basis for my
paper.  (3) Kukenheim (1962:18) is even briefer than Verburg since,
after casting doubt on Ramus' modernity, he only mentions that the
French scholar makes efforts "pour rechercher dans chaque langue une
structure qui lui est propre," and that he is "un très lointain
précurseur des structuralistes."  (4) Chevalier (1968:47-307) was the
first scholar to present at some length Ramus' grammatical views; in
addition, he perceived the theoretical significance of the Scholae
grammaticae, which he introduced as "Méditations sur la grammaire"
(1968:262).  In spite of Chevalier's excellent presentation, his work
is not exclusively devoted to Ramus' theoretical tenets but also
contains a description of his Latin, Greek, and French grammars.  Also,
Chevalier's work started with Priscian, thus he did not compare Ramus
with the early structuralists, Aristotle and Thrax.  Finally, and more
importantly, he did not foresee at the time that linguistic studies
with underlying levels appear to have preceded 'modern' structuralism.
Moreover, lacking this historical perspective, Chevalier did not take

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into consideration several of Ramus' theoretical findings which, in my opinion, show more adequately Ramus' position in the history of linguistics.

This paper attempts to show that Ramus was the first scholar to consciously break with the earlier grammatical tradition and to become the first 'modern' structuralist. I should clarify my use of the expression 'modern' structuralism: a method to describe languages in which generalizations concerning words, phrases, and sentences are obtained from observables, i.e. data, speech, or recorded examples. This method studies language as a two dimensional system: (1) structure ('letters' or sounds) and (2) the meaningful units represented in the letters. 'Modern' structuralism is not concerned with 'meaning'. Each language has its own rules and its own structural differences; the emphasis is on linguistic diversity. Finally, this method does not stress syntactic analysis and excludes the postulation of underlying levels.[1] Before Ramus, theoretical[2] (not classroom) grammars basically studied the relationship between language and nature. This view had led to a theory of language of the process type. A first process involved <u>nature</u> ——> <u>concepts</u> ——> <u>sounds</u>. A second process covered the historical development of the 'original' language. In order to prove my point, I first analyze Plato's and Aristotle's considerations on language and then discuss briefly Thrax's τέχνη. Finally, I present the essential tenets of Ramus' linguistic theory.

## THE BEGINNINGS OF 'WESTERN' GRAMMATICAL THEORY

1.0  PHILOSOPHICAL BACKGROUND,  The initial debates around the study of language were connected with the problems of nature and existence.  Plato and Aristotle were concerned with whether language was a reflection of reality, and the two concluded, although in different ways, that language indeed represented this reality.  There are several passages in the <u>Sophist</u> of Plato where this philosopher appears to indicate that language partakes of 'being', i.e., it represents the things in nature.  During this dialog Plato tries to ascertain what is 'being' and what is 'not-being'.  At one point he argues about language:

> Stranger. ...He will probably say that some forms partake of not-being, and some not, and that language (λόγos) and opinion are of the non-partaking class; and he will still fight to the death against the existence of the image-making and phantastic art, in which we have placed him, because, as he will say, opinion and language (λόγos) do not partake of not-being, and unless the association can be formed there can be no such thing as falsehood.  And with the view of meeting this evasion, we must begin by inquiring into the nature of language (λόγos), opinion, and imagination, in order that when we find them we may observe their communion with not-being, and, having done so, may this prove that falsehood exists [Jowett 1953, Vol. 3:260d-261, also Fowler 1961].

It appears, therefore, that Plato through the mouth of the Stranger, a character in the dialog, wants to study language in order to discover whether it reflects reality or nature, or whether it is part of a "phantastic art" and represents only "falsehood."  Plato then devotes two pages to these considerations and concludes that language represents the thoughts of our minds, i.e. true reality:

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> Stranger. Are not thought and speech (λόγος) the
> same, with this exception, that what is called thought
> is the unuttered conversation of the soul with himself?
>   Theaetetus. Quite true.
>   Stranger. But the stream of thought which flows
> through the lips and is audible is called speech (λόγος)?
>   Theaetetus. True [Jowett 1953, Vol. 3:263e, also
> Fowler].[3]

On the other hand, Plato in the Cratylus also studies this relationship

between language and nature.

Aristotle treats this topic in several of his works. In

Sophistical refutations, he mentions:

> It is impossible in a discussion to bring in the
> actual things discussed: we use their names as
> symbols (σύμβολα) instead of them...[Ross 1928,
> Vol. 1, Chap. 1:165a, also Forster 1955].

Thus, one uses language to refer to the real being outside the mind.

Also, the Categories is an attempt to explain the varieties of

essential being (extramental entities such as substance, quality,

quantity, relation, action, passion, time, place, etc.). Larkin

(1971:84-88) describes this when she states that "corresponding to

the signification of the predicates are the meanings of being." She

further indicates that the varieties of essential being are shown

by the categories because in as many ways as there are categories,

things are said to be. Aristotle finds the categories of reality

from the way men speak. In other words, men speak the way they do

because things are the way they are. Trendelenburg (1963:23-24)

went so far as to say that the categories of Aristotle were derived

from grammatical distinctions. Finally, in De interpretatione,

Chap. 1, Aristotle refers to the same topic:

> Spoken words are the symbols (σύμβολα) of mental

> experience and written words are the symbols of
> spoken words.  Just as all men have not the same
> writing, so all men have not the same speech
> sounds, but the mental experiences, which these
> directly symbolize (are signs σημεῖα), are the
> same for all, as also are those things of which
> our experiences are the images (ὁμοιώματα) [Ross
> 1928, Vol. 1, also Cooke 1962].

In conclusion, Aristotle, like Plato, studies language in relation to nature; consequently, he is not a structuralist in the modern sense.  Although their ultimate philosophical finding is the same, i.e., language reflects reality, their views on language itself are different as we shall see below.

1.1 PLATO'S THEORY.  Related to the previous problem, more grammatical questions were asked, namely, whether language was natural or conventional both in relation to the word and to the sentence.  Thus, the study of language was connected with the process of language creation from nature.  In fact, the beginnings of grammar in the 'Western' tradition were intimately related to considerations on language genesis.  Several interpretations have been given to the view, proposed by the ancients, that words 'imitated' (represented) the things in nature, i.e., were images, likenesses, copies, representations.  Some of these are more correct than others, yet much confusion still exists.

Let us see what Plato meant  when he wondered if words represented the 'essence' of things.  Did he understand that words represented both conceptual and grammatical meaning?  In the Cratylus, at an early stage of the word-meaning controversy, Plato

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does make specific reference to grammatical markers of words;

however, he mentions the 'letter' (sound) and the syllable,

probably in the sense of grammatical markers which indicated

meaningful properties of words:

> In like manner, he who also by syllables
> and letters imitates (ἀπομιμέομαι) the substance
> (οὐσία) of things, if he renders all that
> is appropriate will produce a good image
> (εἰκών), or in other words a name; but if
> he subtracts or perhaps adds a little, he
> will make an image but not a good one...
> [Jowett 1953, Vol. 3:431d, also Fowler 1963].

Thus, if one accepts the highly likely view that Plato in the Cratylus

discards the onomatopoeic origin of language, one should interpret

the Greek philosopher as meaning that syllables and letters represent

conceptual and grammatical meaning such as masculine, feminine,

singular, plural, and so on.

Plato's assertion that words are natural appears in the

Cratylus.  Critics, however, have given many interpretations to

'natural' as used by Plato.  For instance, Sandys (1903:94) claims

that Plato supports the onomatopoeic theory.  In the more recent

past Warburton (1969:2) denies the likelihood of the onomatopoeic

view in Plato's analysis.  Not only is there misunderstanding as

to what Plato meant by 'natural', but also there are doubts as to

whether Plato expressed the view that language itself was natural.

Thus, Steinthal (1890, Vol. 1:107 and 150) claims that Plato, by

mouth of Socrates, begins by assuming that words exist  as a product

of nature but later seems to conclude that they exist as a result of

convention.  On the other hand, Campbell (1875-1889) interprets this

dialog in a more plausible manner when he indicates that Hermogenes

supports <u>convention</u> and that all names have a conventional origin,

while Cratylus holds that language is natural and that a word is a

true expression of a thing.  Finally, Campbell concludes that

Socrates maintains an intermediary position saying that language is

founded on nature but modified by convention.  In my judgement,

Campbell's analysis is the most logical.  Nonetheless, in this connec-

tion, I would like to explain what Plato meant by 'natural'.

The definition of 'natural' must be understood, I believe, in

relation to the process of language creation from nature (first

process).  Consequently, Plato indicates that there is a semantic

universe (thought, ideas) representing nature.  This is thoroughly

examined by the name-giver who, in turn, assigns names to each

'essence' (οὐσία) or concept by using 'letters' and combining them

into words.  The name-giver is careful not to give the same

combination of letters (word) to different 'essences'.  For Plato

'natural' means that, at the time of language creation, there was

one-to-one correspondence between the shape of a word and its

meaning.  These indeed would be the 'ideal' names or 'ideal' forms,

i.e., at the original stage of language there was one <u>signifiant</u> for

each <u>signifié</u>.  In addition, words were natural or imitated the

things in nature, i.e., they had 'letters' (markers) which represented

the 'essence' (conceptual and grammatical meaning) of things.  These

were letters for the concept and for gender, number, and case in

imitation of the properties of the things in nature.  In conclusion,

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when language (or languages?) was created, this was natural and

perfect without the possibility of missing markers or changed

genders, or without the possibility of homonymy and synonymy since

these are the result of a historical development (second process).

One may further observe that in the Sophist, Plato explains

the real being of language, although this time his analysis is not

in terms of isolated words as is the case for the Cratylus, but in

terms of syntax. His considerations are significant because they

constitute the first known attempt to establish a theory of syntax,

which, ironically, is not based on observable structure but contains

as one of its tenets the postulation of an underlying level:[4]

> Stranger. Then, as I was saying, let us first
> of all obtain a conception of language (λόγος) and
> opinion, in order that we may have clearer grounds
> for determining whether not-being has any concern
> with them, or whether they both are always true,
> and neither of them ever false.
> Stranger. Then, now, let us speak of names, as
> before we were speaking of forms (ideas εἴδη) and
> letters; for that is the direction in which the
> answer may be expected.
> Stranger. ...There are two sets of expressions
> which are uttered in sounds in order to represent
> nature.[5]
> Stranger. One of them is called nouns and the
> other is verbs.
> Stranger. The expressions which denote action
> we call a verb.
> Stranger. And the vocal sign imposed on those
> who perform actions, is called a noun.
> Stranger. Now a succession of nouns alone can
> never form a sentence (λόγος); neither can a
> succession of verbs without nouns.
> Stranger. I mean that words like "walks,"
> "runs," "sleeps," or any other words which denote
> action, however many of them you string together,
> do not constitute a sentence (λόγος).

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> Stranger.  Or, again, when you say "lion,"
> "stag," "horse," or any other words which denote
> agents--neither in this way of stringing words
> together do you produce a complete sentence
> (λόγοs); for the sounds convey no expression of
> action or inaction, or of the existence of any-
> thing which exists or does not exist, until verbs
> are mingled with nouns; then the words fit, and
> the smallest combination of them forms a sentence
> (λόγοs), and is the simplest and least form of
> speech (λόγοι).
> Stranger.  When anyone says "A man learns,"
> would you call this the simplest and the smallest
> sentence (λόγοs) that there is?
> Stranger.  Yes, for he now arrives at the point
> of an expression about something, which is, or is
> becoming, or has become, or will be.  And he not
> only names, but achieves something, by connecting
> verbs with nouns; and therefore we say that he
> discourses (λέγειν), and to this connection of
> words we give the name of sentence (λόγοs).
> Stranger.  Every sentence must have and cannot
> help having a subject [cf. Jowett 1953, Vol.
> 3:261c-262e, also see Fowler 1961].

Plato here writes about the perfect and underlying sentence, and not

the observable one.  According to this passage, a sentence, in order

to be complete, must contain a noun and a verb since a noun by itself

or, for that matter, a verb by itself does not have a real existence

in nature.  In order to constitute language, i.e., language as a

reflection of nature partaking of real 'being', a verb and a noun

have to be connected.  Another consequence which can be extracted

from this passage is that the smallest unit of grammar partaking

of 'being' is the sentence.  Other units as the noun and the verb

are possible, but merely as working assumptions, since on their own

they do not constitute anything real:  in nature these single units

do not occur in isolation.[6]

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1.2 ARISTOTLE'S THEORY. By contrasting both Plato's
and Aristotle's views, my thesis is strengthened: namely, Aristotle's
conception of language is not structural in the modern sense.
Aristotle was also concerned with the controversy involving the
natural or conventional origin or words and syntax. His grammar
is part of the first model as described in the Introduction. In
De interpretatione, Chap. 2, he defines the noun as follows:

> By noun we mean a sound significant by convention
> (by agreement συνθήκη), which has no reference to
> time, and which no part is significant apart from
> the rest [Ross 1928, Vol. 1, also Cooke 1962].

Further preoccupation for this problem appears in the same chapter
of De interpretatione, when he attempts to define what he means by
convention in relation to nouns:

> The limitation by 'convention' was introduced
> because nothing (no sound) is by nature a noun
> or a name--it is only so when it becomes a
> symbol (σύμβολον); inarticulate sounds, such as
> those which brutes produce, are significant, yet
> none of these constitute a noun [Ross 1928, Vol. 1,
> also Cooke 1962].

In the Rhetorica, Book 3, Chap. 1:1404a, Aristotle appears to
contradict his earlier statements since he declares that not only
names are signs or symbols but also imitations:

> ... for words are imitations (μιμήματα), and
> the voice also which of all our parts is best
> adapted for imitation (μιμητικώτατον) was
> ready to hand ...[Freese 1959].

Larkin (1971:24) is surprised that Aristotle would refer to names
in that way since he seems to exclude any theory of imitation by
calling them conventional. She also adds that if one considered

this remark in its proper context, one should not necessarily

interpret Aristotle as admitting the theory of the Cratylus.

Thus, Aristotle, according to Larkin, refers to the function of

language in poetry. In my judgement, however, there is no

contradiction since Aristotle simply means that words 'imitate'

(represent) or are used to talk about or symbolize the things

in nature.[7]

Finally, in De interpretatione, Chap. 4, Aristotle examines

once more the notion 'convention' in relation, this time, to the

sentence:

> Every sentence has meaning, not as being the
> natural means by which a physical faculty is
> realized, but, as we have said, by convention
> [Ross 1928, Vol. 1].[8]

The above quotations show two things: (1) They stress the

fact that Aristotle understands by 'conventional' arbitrary sound

representations which are used to symbolize, represent, speak

about, the objects in nature; in other words, there is no connection

between sounds and meaning since one assigns a sound representation

to a concept and its properties in an arbitrary or conventional

manner. Obviously, since words have no correlation to thought,

there is the possibility of "synonymy, homonymy, different languages

and different alphabets," as Larkin (1971:22) points out correctly

in her interpretation of Aristotle. (2) These quotations show

that Aristotle's conception of grammar is basically connected

with the study of language genesis and the relationship between

language and nature. Consequently, his grammar is not structural

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in the modern sense.

In the Poetics, Aristotle classifies the parts of speech, but these will not be discussed here. However, I shall present other passages from De interpretatione, Chaps. 2 and 4, in order to explain the overall picture of Aristotle's theory. His definition of noun has been cited previously; his definition of verb is as follows:

> A verb is that which, in addition to its proper
> meaning, carries with it the notion of time. No
> part of it has any independent meaning, and it is
> a sign of something said of something else ...
> Verbs in and by themselves are substantival (nouns
> ὀνόματά) and have significance, for he who uses
> such expressions arrests the hearer's mind, and
> fixes his attention; but they do not, as they
> stand, express any judgement, either positive or
> negative [Ross 1928, Vol. 1, Chap. 2, also
> Cooke 1962].

Further down he declares:

> A sentence is a significant portion of speech,
> some parts of which have an independent meaning,
> that is to say (as something, that is, that is
> uttered), as an utterance, though not as the
> expression of any positive judgement [Ross 1928,
> Vol. 1, Chap. 4, also Cook 1962].

Finally, another comment relevant to this particular point appears in the Poetics, Chap. 20:

> A sentence (λόγος) is a composite significant
> sound; some of the parts have a certain signifi-
> cance by themselves. It may be observed that a
> sentence (λόγος) is not always made up of a Noun
> and a Verb; it may be without a Verb, like the
> definition of man;[9] but it will always have some
> part with a certain significance by itself. In
> the sentence "Cleon walks," Cleon is an instance
> of such part [cf. Ross 1946, Vol. II, also
> Bywater 1909].

These quotations show several things in relation to Aristotle's
conception of language. He attempts to accommodate Plato's view
with his own. Thus, he appears to define the verb as "a sign of
something said of something else," implying that verbs cannot
stand on their own and have to be accompanied by a noun. However,
it is apparent from other quotations that it is not necessary to
join both a noun and a verb in order to have meaning, i.e. a
sentence: either a noun or a verb is sufficient. In more
philosophical terms, he accepts, contrary to Plato's view, nouns
and verbs in isolation as true realities existing in nature.
Aristotle, therefore, did prepare the ground for modern
structuralism, since he studies the sentence in terms of
observables and not in relation to underlying structures and
missing elements. On the other hand, Aristotle claims that the
parts have no independent meaning as expressions of any positive
judgement. Thus, when one refers to judgements, i.e. sentences,
there must be a noun and a verb. It may be noticed that several
inconsistencies occur. In some instances Aristotle appears to be
Platonic; in others he is not. In De interpretatione, some passages
appear very close to Plato's view; these contradict other parts of
this work as well as parts of the Poetics. The second set of
arguments provides supportive evidence for the position maintained
by those scholars who throughout history attempted to reconcile
Plato's and Aristotle's views. In my opinion, Aristotle initiated
the development of structuralism, despite his apparently opposite
stands. However, he is not a structuralist in the modern sense

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for the reason that his conception of language is still linked to
the study of language genesis:  the connection of language and
reality, the problem of nature versus convention, his definitions
of noun and verb, all involve semantic criteria taken from nature.

1.3  THE GRAMMAR OF DIONYSIUS THRAX.  The τέχνη γραμματική
has been characterized by many modern critics, such as, for example,
Robins (cf. 1968:31), as the first model of structural grammars
since it is argued that Thrax does not surpass the observational
level of analysis.  According to these same critics, he observes
the usage of the poets and makes a descriptive statement of the
data.  I shall not argue against those points since there are many
things in the τέχνη which can be considered as referring to the
area of observables.  Yet the τέχνη should not be considered as the
first model of structural description in the modern sense.

The τέχνη appears to be an extension of what Aristotle wrote
in Chap. 20 of his Poetics.  Thus, when Thrax analyzes the structure
of Greek, his description is structural.  However, his grammar
includes other areas which are not structural.  It does not divorce
grammar and literature since Thrax makes literature and the analysis
of texts the most important part of grammar.  In addition, there is
another passage in the τέχνη which indicates that the author's
conception of grammar is connected with an underlying level.  Indeed,
he states:

> There are two Species of nouns, the primitive
> (πρωτότυπον) and the derivative (παράγωγον).
> A primitive noun is one which is said according
> to original imposition (κατὰ την πρώτην θέσιν),

as γῆ (earth); a derivative noun is one which
derives its origin from another noun, as γαιήιος
(earth-born) [Davidson 1874:331, also Uhlig 1883].

This quotation implies a set of original words (imposition),
very much like Varro's approach, from which other words were
derived. This set of original words was assumed and cannot be
observed. This quotation, therefore, goes against the view that
Thrax was the first structuralist grammarian.[10]

On the other hand, the τέχνη may not be considered the first
structural model because the author seems to have written it as a
textbook for the schools of the Roman Empire (Davidson 1874:326);
as such, it belongs to the non-theoretical grammars made for
didactic purposes. Its author was not interested in making any
theoretical claims since his intention was to write a simple grammar
that could be understood by students. He eliminates the theoretical
considerations made by Aristotle and possibly Varro; as a result,
this grammar appears to the modern reader to deal only with obser-
vables. A final point which distinguishes between Thrax and Ramus
is that the former did not make his method explicit except when he de-
fines grammar as "an experimental knowledge (ἐμπειρία) of the usages of
languages as generally current among poets and prose writers"
(Davidson 1874:326), while the latter explicitly explains the type
of theory he follows and why he selects it.

2.0 PETER RAMUS' THEORY. It can be claimed that Ramus'
theory of language, as expressed in his <u>Scholae grammaticae</u> (1581),
represents the first postulation of a structural view of language in

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the modern sense. Before Ramus, structural linguistics, even in relation to Aristotle and the modistae, was connected to the study of meaning, i.e., how language was created from the objects in nature. The modistae, for example, called morphology 'etymology', not randomly but because morphology at that time involved the explanation of the causation of words from meaning and previously from nature.[11] Ramus still uses the term etymology, although etymology for him does not include considerations on the origin of words from nature and on whether the causation process of words is natural or conventional; this is not part of grammar. It is no wonder that Ramus criticizes Aristotle when he defines the noun in De interpretatione ("Perihermenias") and in Ars poetica as "vox significans ex arbitrio sine tempore, cujus nulla pars separata significat," because, in Ramus' words, whether words signify according to the arbitrary judgement (arbitrium) of men or from nature is not a matter relevant to the usage (usus) of grammar (Book 5:98). Scholars who have not analyzed Ramus' theory in its totality might consider Ramus' criticism of Aristotle as of no consequence. But Ramus is in fact opening up with his attack a new conception of grammar: modern structuralism.

2.1 SCOPE OF GRAMMAR. Ramus explains that any science must be made of matter and form. The matter and the form of grammar had already been proposed by the foremost grammarians. However, he repeats what Aristotle had said in the Analytics, namely, that the subject matter of any science must be verifiable rather than

assumed by everyone according to some general consensus and

agreement.  Ramus mentions as an example that the matter of

arithmetic is numbers and that of grammar is speech.  Grammar

studies a certain speech:  all popular, familiar, and customary

styles as spoken by people.  But since, even within these styles,

there are several usages, grammar only describes correct and

praiseworthy usage (Book 1:19).  He further explains that in a

strict sense grammarians only study problems which can be analyzed

through the observation of usage,[12] either proving them true or

false.  In Ramus linguistic analysis, there is no possibility of

postulating abstract underlying levels in order to account for

linguistic phenomena.

Ramus' areas of study revolve around usage.  He (Book 4:90-91)

objects to Varro's theory in relation to the creation of the

vocabulary of a language:

> ...the declension has been introduced not only
> into Latin speech, but into the speech of all
> men, because it is useful and necessary; for if
> this system had not developed we could not learn
> such a great number of words as we should have--
> for  the possible forms into which they are
> declined are numerically unlimited... [Kent 1938,
> Vol. 2, Book 8:3-4].

Ramus as a structural linguist criticizes the above statement

because it surpasses the realm of observables.  He indicates that

those are the advantages of declensions; yet this matter may not

be part of the study of grammar because he had established--from

principle (regula) and from the logic of philosophy which requires

verification of any rule (logica philosophiae sanctione)--that

the matter of grammar is verifiable rather than assumed.  In this particular passage, Ramus is assailing the inference that all the words of a language are derived from a primeval set, which, in the case of Latin, consists of one thousand words.  He argues that this is an assumption that cannot be proven because no one can find the so-called one thousand words.  Varro's comments, however, have been hailed by Langendoen (1966) as evidence that Varro's theory represents a shift from considering language at the level of observation to studying it at the more adequate level of explanation.

2.2  THE ROLE OF MEANING.  Ramus declares that grammars are crowded with the study of the meaning of words.  In relation to some parts of speech nothing is taught by grammarians except meaning.  However, he argues that grammar does not include the teaching of the meaning of words but their usage.  And in connection with usage, grammar analyzes not the things that are signified, but those which are 'adsignified' as number, gender, degree, case, person, tense, and so on.  Grammar also studies words in relation to their endings, and from these endings one can extract the declension of nouns and the conjugation of verbs.  Ramus understands meaning in relation to nature:  meaning outside the mind, the process of language creation, defining nouns as permanent things and not in terms of their structure, and the study of moods because they have no markers in the word.  'Adsignification', however, refers to those elements of meaning which are marked through letters in the structure of words.  In short, in Ramus' theory there are only two components to be examined:  'adsignification' and structure.  Consequently, the

Platonic, Aristotelian, and Mediaeval notions of substance of
language (meaning), which is universal, and from which language
is created, have no room in the study of grammar. There is no
need to stress the importance of either view for linguistic theory.
Ramus' view leads to linguistic diversity, while the Platonic,
Aristotelian, and Mediaeval views emphasize points common to all
languages (Book 1:20-21).

As an illustration of the elimination of meaning one can
mention Ramus' attack on Priscian. The latter (Institutiones,
Book 8) states that grammarians define mood as an inclination of
the soul, showing its different dispositions. Ramus argues that
this definition explains nothing and that it is part of the human
will (voluntas) rather than part of any property of the verbal
element. He claims that through the species of the finite mood
no features belonging to the nature of verbs may be distinguished
or systematized. On the contrary, all these moods are confused
internally since the imperative may appear as the subjunctive, and
the subjunctive as the indicative. Furthermore, the imperative
and the optative may also be blended with one another. Ramus
shows examples of how some moods appear instead of others adding
that, as a result, the grouping that grammarians make into several
moods contains no real grammatical value; this grouping is rather
part of an absurd and discreditable confusion. Because of this
there is no doubt that the classification of the finite mood into
indicative, imperative, optative, and subjunctive does not belong

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to the 'etymology' of grammar (Book 14:189-192).

2.3 THE RULES OF GRAMMAR. According to Ramus, Varro answers the question of what is meant by speaking correctly in his De lingua Latina when he declares that usage in speech is established from some natural and perpetual logic, i.e. analogy, and from un-certain and erring things, i.e. anomaly, produced through the arbitrary decision (arbitrium) of the multitude (Book 2:25). Following the ancients, Ramus suggests that there is some order in the world. Thus, if anyone were to deny the ratio ('logic') of analogy, he would not only fail to grasp the nature of sentences but also of the world. For Ramus, the ratio of language reflects nature, but in a weak sense: it does not originate in the universal ratio but is man's creation.

Ramus (Book 2:26-27) explains that Quintilian (Institutio oratoria, Book 1, Chap. 6; see Butler 1961-1966) cites Varro and Cicero. In this particular chapter, Quintilian mentions the four principles to judge correct Latinity: ratio, consuetudo, auctoritas, and vetustas. In addition, Ramus quotes Quintilian when he declares that analogy was not sent down from heaven at the creation of mankind but was discovered after men began to speak. This analogy, Quintilian continues, is not based on ratio but on example; nor is it a law of language but observation which is the offspring of usage. Ramus also refers to a later passage of the same chapter in which Quintilian makes usage (consuetudo) the most correct master of speaking: Ramus appears to place consuetudo before ratio. Lastly, grammar is

not based on authority because the Latin language is made from the
agreement and consuetudo of the people.  From this Ramus justifies
his view that the Italians, the Spaniards, the French, the Germans,
and the British have different manners (consuetudo) of speaking.
Latin consuetudo, therefore, is not valid for speaking those languages.
Following Quintilian, Ramus appears to understand by consuetudo the
agreed practice in speech of all educated men or the agreed practice
of all good men (Book 2:29).  Our individual consuetudo must follow
the consuetudo of all people.

Other Renaissance grammarians, like Sanctius, who placed ratio
as the first criterion, believed that language was extremely
regular and, as such, one had to discover those regularities which
in many respects cut across languages since they all share the same
properties.  For Ramus, however, consuetudo was the first because
the ratio of language did not depend on any universal principles
but was based on the regularity that man creates for each particular
language.  Contrary to Sanctius, for whom irregularity plays no
significant role, Ramus stresses both regularity and irregularity.
As a consequence, irregularity is quite extensive in Ramus'
description of Latin.  In the Scholae, indeed, he covers many pages
analyzing irregular paradigms.

2.4  SEPARATION OF DISCIPLINES AND DIVISION OF GRAMMAR.
Following tradition, Ramus assails Quintilian's classification of
grammar into historice and methodice.  The former refers to the
interpretation of authors and includes many other disciplines; the

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latter covers what is generally understood by grammar. Ramus, contrary to Quintilian, wants to eliminate from the study of grammar all other disciplines. Although he argues in favor of the separation of disciplines, he declares that the logician is better equipped to handle linguistic problems because many grammarians who do not know logic fall into 'deceitful pits'. His approach to the study of language includes as one of its fundamental elements the knowledge of philosophy.

Ramus makes a twofold division of grammar. One deals with single words ('etymology') and the other with connected words (syntax). 'Etymology' comes first since it refers to the nature of words; it includes analogy and treats the properties of each single word. On the one hand, it comprises the study of the nature of sounds of words and, on the other, the sounds of words in relation to their adsignifications (dictions). His grammar, however, does not consider the meaning of those words as was mentioned earlier. This twofold division, Ramus continues, is the same one which Quintilian classes under his term methodice. Ramus (Book 1:23-24) makes a statement recognizing the difficulty in describing Latin syntax on the basis of his two-dimensional or structural method of analysis (cf. Chevalier 1968:307). Incidentally, in the Scholae Ramus devotes only two and a half pages to syntax, and in his Grammatica (1560), grammar for didactic purposes, he devotes two books to this topic, but with no attempt at theoretical considerations. He claims that the complexity of the organization of grammar is like the distribution of functions in a city. In the innumerable multitude of words, the

arrangement brings about by far the greatest difficulty. There are changed genders, changed species, changed differences, changed properties, even if the speech and the sentence occur from all these.

2.5 DATA ANALYSIS. As a final item, several samples of how Ramus analyzes and systematizes his data are considered. In Book 5 he studies the parts of speech. His central distinction (Book 5:93-93) revolves around number since there is one class with number and another class without number. He feels that the distinction between inflected and non-inflected parts of speech is not valid because adverbs may be inflected into nouns: cras becomes crastinus. However, number cannot adsignify among the adverbs. Thus, for Ramus number alone divides nouns, pronouns, verbs, and participles from the remaining parts of speech.

On the other hand, the noun is inflected by means of markers expressing gender and degree: doctus, docta, doctum, and doctus, doctior, doctissimus. The verbs also can be conjugated in a single person, thus expressing different forms and tenses as amor, amabar, and amabor.

In Book 8 Ramus defines the noun as a word which has number with gender and case. He wants to describe the anomalies of the first declension and, in turn, those of the other declensions. These are always presented in terms of form. Thus, he cites genitives in -ai, e.g. Aeneai instead of Aeneae, in -as as paterfamilias which became later familiae. He claims that the Greek accusative in -n is frequently used instead of the Latin -m

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as <u>Aenean</u>.  Finally, he refers to several nouns that make the dative and the ablative in -<u>abus</u> instead of -<u>is</u> as <u>equabus</u> (Book 18:119-129).

His general analysis of case should also be mentioned.  In this he follows Varro who explains that cases can be learned more easily by the separation of 'letters' than by any other case features.  Thus, in Ramus' words, when Varro mentions the -<u>a</u> in <u>hac</u> <u>terra</u>, the -<u>e</u> in <u>hac</u> <u>lance</u>, the -<u>i</u> in <u>hoc</u> <u>levi</u>, the -<u>o</u> in <u>hoc</u> <u>caelo</u>, and the -<u>u</u> in <u>hoc</u> <u>versu</u>, he indicates that there are five types of declensions in relation to the ablative.  Following this same method grammarians observed (<u>specto</u>) the differences in the genitive, and, because they are fivefold (-<u>ae</u>, -<u>i</u>, -<u>is</u>, -<u>us</u>, -<u>ei</u>), the resulting types of declensions are also five (Book 8:117).

Finally, Ramus enumerates the tenses, describing some of their usages, and also giving their forms.  For instance, he states, quoting Priscian from Book 9, that for the preterite perfect the ending of the first person is in -<u>i</u> as in <u>amavi</u>, the ending of the second person is in -<u>sti</u> as <u>amavisti</u>, the -<u>t</u> is for the third as <u>amavit</u>, -<u>mus</u> is for the first person plural, -<u>s</u> is added to the corresponding second person singular; lastly the third person plural originates out of the first person singular, where either -<u>runt</u> or -<u>re</u> is added to the -<u>i</u> which has been previously changed into an -<u>e</u>- as <u>amaverunt</u> or <u>amavere</u> (Book 14:194-195).

3.0  SUMMARY AND CONCLUSIONS.  This paper has outlined some aspects of the evolution of linguistic theory in the 'Western' tradition.  It has shown the philosophical beginnings of language analysis and Plato's and Aristotle's theories of language.  The τέχνη

of Dionysius Thrax has also been discussed. Finally, the basic tenets of Ramus' linguistic theory have been covered in brief.

The procedure to compare Ramus directly to the ancients could be questioned on the grounds that a skeptic could argue that Ramus was not, after all, the one who broke with previous grammatical tradition, but that one of his predecessors did so. It might further be argued that, if one wanted to demonstrate that Ramus innovated, one should rather compare him with his immediate predecessors. In response to these objections, I should like to state that Plato's theory is important because he appears as the initiator of a linguistic analysis of the process type in the 'Western' tradition. This analysis basically contrasts with the structural model. Aristotle is mentioned because Ramus criticizes his views since they do not conform to what he believes to be the correct theory. Besides, Aristotle has been proclaimed by several modern scholars as the initiator of structuralism; it is therefore logical that I should compare his views to Ramus'. Thrax's work also has been greeted in contemporary scholarship as the first structural description of a language. Accordingly, I feel justified in comparing Thrax and Ramus in order to prove the main thesis of my paper.[13] Finally, in my judgement, comparisons of theories of language, and, for that matter, of any other science, defy limitations of time and space since, otherwise, no comparison between Ptolemy and Copernicus would be possible, to cite only one example.

Although the presentation of theories, by force, had to be

succinct, I have tried to demonstrate through quotations and data

three main points, in addition to my main goal:  to prove Peter

Ramus as the first structural linguist in the modern sense.  (1)

Contrary to what has been widely believed, the study of grammar

in the 'Western' tradition began with a theoretical framework

which included the postulation of underlying levels:  nature $\longrightarrow$

concepts $\longrightarrow$ sounds.  (2) Structuralism was a later development

since theoretical works up to Ramus pertain to the first model.

Before him there were efforts toward structural analysis, but

these were not devoid of the study of nature and meaning.  (3)

A final point, which has been mentioned but not proven in detail,

is the fact that the notion of underlying level--primitive

(imposition) versus derivative noun and complete (original, natural)

versus incomplete (figurative)--is to be understood in a historical

sense.[14]

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# N O T E S

1.  I should not like to draw too close a connection with twentieth century scholars, but these are several of the basic theoretical assumptions, tenets, and other modi operandi contained in the models established by Saussure, Bloomfield, and their successors.

2.  The distinction between theoretical and didactic grammars is of extreme significance for a correct analysis of the history of linguistics.  All too often, historiographers of linguistics lump the two together.  Ong (1958), who is primarily concerned with Ramus' ideas on dialectic and rhetoric, presents the French scholar's views as essentially didactic; thus, he (1958:264 and 322) interprets the word usus as the equivalent of "practice," "drill" and as a synonym for exercitatio (cf. Garin 1957:184-185).  This, of course, should not serve as a guideline for researchers in the history of linguistics, especially since an examination of Scholae grammaticae indicates that the word usus is employed in a different meaning.  See note 12 for further information on the term usus.

3.  This passage, incidentally, bears much similarity to Aristotle's words in De interpretatione, Chap. 1 (see page 5, below).

4.  I omit from this quotation Theaetetus' words which, in general, are of an assertive nature.  At the same time, I shall slightly modify Jowett's translation to give it a more grammatical character.

5.  As an example, Jowett interprets this passage:  "There are two sorts of intimations of being which are given by the voice."

6.  This particular passage was quoted by the Renaissance scholar Sanctius (1587:85), in order to justify his underlying syntax, and, I have a feeling, it must have been in the minds of grammarians when, after Plato, they distinguished between oratio naturalis and oratio figurata.  For information on the linguistic and philosophical connections between Ramus and Sanctius, see Breva (1975a:54, 1975b:51-53, and 1975c, Chapter III:  182-212).

7.  My interpretation is supported further by the translation of this particular passage furnished by W. Roberts "...for words represent things, and they had also the human voice at their disposal, which of all our organs can best represent things" (Ross 1946, Vol. 11).

8.  Cooke (1962) translates this passage as follows:  "But while every sentence has meaning, though not as an instrument of nature, but as we observe, by convention, not all can be called propositions."

9.  He probably refers to the definition of man in Topica, 130b as "animal capable of acquiring knowledge" (Ross 1928, Vol. 1).

10.  This particular passage appears as internal evidence in support of Di Benedetto's and Romeo's claims that the τέχνη was written after Varro wrote his De lingua Latina.  Indeed, it seems to imply that the author was acquainted with Varro's view that words in language developed from a primeval set.  Davidson (1874:326) explains that the genuineness and authenticity of this work has been impugned. In contemporary scholarship, see Di Benedetto (1958:210 and following) who maintains that the τέχνη was written not in the second century B.C., just before Varro, but in the third or fourth century A.D.  Also cf. Romeo (1976:196-197).

11.  For a traditional interpretation of Modistic theory see Wallerand (1913), also Chevalier (1968).  For a detailed analysis see Bursill-Hall (1971 and 1972).  For an overall view see Breva (1975c, Chapter II:89-107).

12.  Usage here means data, speech, recorded examples.  Chomsky (1966:54) apparently maintains the traditional theoretical meaning, when he states "Vaugelas's goal is simply to describe usage...he disclaims any intention of explaining [emphasis mine] the facts of speech or finding general principles that underlie them."  Also, cf. Chevalier (1968:262) for an interpretation of usus in relation to Ramus and Robins (1968:31) for his comments in connection with Thrax. Percival (1976:274-382) presents a good translated summary of instances where Vaugelas employs that particular word and gives a few phrases in Latin in which Scaliger, Ramus, and Sanctius cite usus.  However, Percival's attack on Chomsky in relation to the theoretical views of Vaugelas and the Port-Royal grammarians is debatable because he remains at the level of the translation and the quotation and does not include them in any theoretical framework.  Chomsky, indeed, is arguing at the level of the theory.

13.  I could mention other philosopher grammarians of the Graeco-Roman tradition (Varro, Apollonius, and Priscian), the Modistic 'school' (Thomas of Erfurt and Siger de Courtrai), and the Renaissance period (Linacre and Scaliger).  However, they have not been labeled structural; in addition, their respective views would show (cf. Breva 1975c, Chapters II and III) that they analyze language through the postulation of underlying levels to a greater or lesser degree.

14.  For detailed analysis of this particular issue in the 'Western' tradition, see Breva (1975c, Part I).

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