1 Attitudes and concerns in eighteenth-century English

RAYMOND HICKEY
Essen University

1 Introduction

Like any period in the history of English there are certain recurrent themes to be found in the eighteenth century. Some of these have become standard wisdoms and are widespread among scholars and students alike. Other topics have not been in the forefront to the same extent but increasingly the focus of researchers has been directed towards them too. Among these matters can be counted the large body of grammars by female writers (Navest, Percy, Tieken-Boon van Ostade [1], this volume) and the role of discourse communities within eighteenth-century English society (Fitzmaurice, this volume).

The most prevalent standard wisdom about the eighteenth century is that it is the period in which prescriptivism in English established itself. Like all such wisdoms it is largely true but the details of both the nature of prescriptivism and the manner in which it arose have been shown not to correspond to the somewhat two-dimensional view which is often found, especially the view of the author who is seen as the arch-prescriptivist, Robert Lowth (Tieken-Boon van Ostade [2], this volume).

Another common view of the eighteenth century is that it is the period in which codes of politeness (Nevalainen and Tissari; Taavitsainen and Jucker, both this volume) became fixed and mandatory for the established classes in English society, and for those who aspired to belong to these. Again this is no doubt true and rules of etiquette were evidently rigid and compulsory. But there are clear differences between notions of politeness then and those which are prevalent today. Above all, the issue of face in social interactions (Brown and Levinson 1987) would seem to have been different in the eighteenth century. In addition, the tenor of disputes in print between authors had a directness and harshness which would not be accepted today.

1.1 Britain and Ireland in the eighteenth century

The previous century, the seventeenth, was a period of violent upheavals. It was a century of forced plantations in Ireland and of military conflict in all
2 Eighteenth-century English

parts of Britain and Ireland. It was the century of the Civil War in England (1642–9), which saw the execution of Charles I in 1649 and the rise of Oliver Cromwell as Lord Protector (1653–8). The century saw the restoration of the monarchy in 1660 but also the discontent of the Jacobites (Szechi 2002) in Scotland and Ireland which included violent rebellion against English forces. Stability and order in England returned towards the end of the century with the reign of William III (of Orange) from 1689 to 1702. The reign of Queen Anne (1702–14), which opened the eighteenth century, was thus one of internal calm in England. For Scotland, the eighteenth century opened with the union with England in 1707 and, despite the attempts of the Jacobites to seize power, it was the union which determined Scottish political life in this century. For Ireland the eighteenth century was ‘the long peace’ (Johnston [1974] 1994) which lasted essentially from the Jacobite defeat in 1690 to the United Irishmen uprising in 1798.

The internal stability of eighteenth-century England means that in the present book, historical events do not play a central role in the discussions. It is perhaps significant that the two contributions concerned with English in Scotland (Jones) and Ireland (Hickey) respectively are those in which political and military events are referred to. There is little or no mention of politics in any of the other chapters, but much discussion of the social developments of the time. The chapters of the book are largely about externally motivated change whose roots lie in English social life, in attitudes to language and in the desire to have stability and order in language (Bailey 2003), much as it had been attained in English public life for the eighteenth century.

1.2 The English language in the eighteenth century

It is true to say that the eighteenth century is a period in the history of English in which the major changes in the language had already taken place (Denison 1998: 93) and few, if any, categorial shifts occurred in the grammar. This fact is reflected in the nature of the contributions in this volume. Only one is specifically concerned with grammatical change (Fanego), whereas others consider the reactions in society to change which had already been initiated and which was still in a state of flux (Tieken-Boon van Ostade [2]). Indeed in many ways, the advice, if not to say strictures, of many authors has led to the continuing existence of variation in areas of English grammar in which one would expect incoming variants to become dominant and lead to the disappearance of older ones in the course of a few generations at the most. A case in point is prepositional stranding (Yáñez-Bouza 2008a, 2008b, Percy, this volume) which came to be considered inappropriate, this then triggering its avoidance in formal and prescriptive styles down to the present day (see the assessment in González-Díaz and Auer 2005).

The majority of contributions in this volume are concerned with external factors, with language use and the role which individual authors may have
Attitudes and concerns in eighteenth-century English

played in its development. The size of the names index clearly shows this. The discussions in the volume are repeatedly about how language was seen and discussed in public, how individuals whose profession was connected to matters of language – grammarians, lexicographers, journalists, pamphleteers, publishers – judged on-going change.

The eighteenth century is also the period in which speakers of English looked to see what variants among items of change in process were preferred by their social superiors. This is very obvious in the linguistic comments of John Walker (Beal 2003) who was singularly concerned with usage among the English nobility, for instance, with the English of Lord Chesterfield. On the other hand, those who already belonged to the established classes turned to recognised literary writers for guidance on form and usage, as can be seen with Lowth who in this matter held Swift in high esteem.

2 Books on the English language

Among the salient features of the eighteenth century is the sheer number of books on language which appeared (see Late Modern English language studies, this volume). This situation was the result of an expansion in a tradition of linguistic commentary which had begun earlier. The seventeenth century had seen many publications on language, chiefly concerned with (i) the difficulties in English vocabulary caused by the many creations and borrowings from classical languages, (ii) the pronunciation and orthography of English and (iii) the nature of English grammar compared to classical languages, above all Latin. One or two of these works actually date from the late sixteenth century, for instance John Hart's An Orthographie of English (1569). However, it would be incorrect to see the works of eighteenth-century authors as a mere extension of the linguistic concerns of the previous century. There was also a change in orientation. To set this in context, the motivations for publishing works on language hitherto are outlined briefly below.

2.1 Religious background

Before the eighteenth century studies of the English language frequently displayed a distinctly religious bias. It is a truism to say that before the advent of modern linguistics in the nineteenth century, much ‘linguistic’ work was produced in the belief that all languages can be traced to Hebrew, the language of the Old Testament, via Classical Greek, the language of the New Testament. Latin took its place after Greek and the result was a triad of classical languages which were continually referred to. For instance, in Robert Robinson’s The Art of Pronunciation (1617) there is no mention of the social aspects of pronunciation but in the preface there are references to the derivation of words from Hebrew, Greek and Latin and many grateful references
Eighteenth-century English

to God from whom speech comes. This religious slant is in evidence in later works of the seventeenth century, for example Thomas Lye’s *A New Spelling Book* (1677) which specifies in the subtitle that *all the Words of our English Bible are set down in an Alphabetical order, and divided into their distinct Syllables Together with the Ground of the English Tongue laid in Verse, wherein are couch’d many Moral Precepts.*

2.2 Explaining ‘hard words’

The label ‘hard words’ is a technical term referring to those words which were either borrowed from Latin or Greek or which, more often than not, were created on the basis of stems whose origins lay in the classical languages. Already by the early seventeenth century, these words were perceived as a source of difficulty for speakers of English and the necessity was felt to produce books in which hard words were defined. For instance, *The New World of English Words* by Edward Phillips (1658) specifies in the subtitle that it *contains the Interpretations of such hard words as are derived from other Languages … Together with … All those Terms that relate to the Arts and Sciences … A Work very necessary for Strangers, as well as our own Countrymen, for all Persons that would rightly understand what they discourse, write, or read.* Clearly the author felt called upon to supply such information as was necessary for both foreigners and natives alike to understand and use these words correctly.

It might be imagined that one such definitive work would be sufficient to satisfy the needs of the reading public. However, already in the sixteenth century one finds in this area a degree of repetition, a duplication of effort, which was to mushroom in the eighteenth century. For instance, Elisha Coles mentions in the long subtitle to his *English Dictionary* (1676) that it explains *Many Thousands of Hard Words (and proper names of Places) more than are in any other English Dictionary or Expositor, together with The Etymological Derivation of them from their Fountains, whether Hebrew, Greek, Latin, French, or any other Language. In a Method more comprehensive, than any that is extant.* Here one can see a confident assessment of one’s own efforts. And what better way of justifying one’s own work than to point to the putative shortcomings of one’s predecessors? This tack can be recognised in the titles of other works. Not only that but a blunt tone is found in the references to the work of colleagues. Already by the beginning of the eighteenth century, Richard Johnson (1706) had published a book entitled *Grammatical Commentaries* which in the subtitle included the following: *by way of animadversion [= severe criticism, RH] upon the falsities, obscurities, redundancies and defects of Lilly’s (sic!) system now in use.* It may well be that in the interaction of the classes, for instance in both public and private correspondence, polite modes of address were prevalent during the eighteenth century (Nevala 2007: 102–9). However, one should not assume that the regulations
of etiquette meant that modern notions of politeness applied on all levels and in all areas of society. In the realm of academic discourse authors had little trepidation when it came to criticising one another.

2.3 The divergence of sound and spelling

It was not only the results of the Great Vowel Shift (Pyles and Algeo 1993 [1964]: 170–3) that led to a divergence between the pronunciation and spelling of English. There are a number of other developments of the early modern period which contributed to this divergence. The lowering and unrounding of short [ɔ] to [ʌ] in the STRUT lexical set (Wells 1982: 131f.) and the vowel lengthening in the BATH lexical set can also be mentioned in this context. Many changes of this period gave rise to homophony and hence to distinctions in spelling which did not correspond to differences in pronunciation, for instance the TERN /trn/ and TURN /tɹn/ lexical sets which merged to a rhotacised schwa /tən/ which was then simplified solely to schwa /tən, tɜn/ (in south-eastern English).

There is no formal distinction between stressed [ʌ] and unstressed [ə] in the transcription systems used by eighteenth-century prescriptivists. In his scheme of vowels (1781: 26) Sheridan refers to the former as the sound in but, calls it u’ and uses it in transcriptions of unstressed short vowels. Walker also has this sound, but represents it in different ways. For instance, he distinguishes six types of o-sound and contrasts his scheme with that devised by Sheridan. However, Walker’s fourth o-sound is Sheridan’s first u-sound, only written differently: ‘For a fourth, I have added the o in love, dove, &c.;’ (Walker 1791: 35). Hence the transcription he offers for a word like horizon is ‘ho-ri-zo’n’ which can be interpreted as [hoˈraɪzoʊn] with a close mid back vowel in the first syllable and a schwa in the last syllable.

The phonetic nature of unstressed vowels in eighteenth-century English has been a matter of some debate (see the comments in Beal 2004a: 149–53). While some scholars, such as Roger Lass (1999: 133), see little evidence for the existence of schwa before the late modern period, Joan Beal is more cautious. She points out that the prescriptivists refer to what is later schwa as an ‘obscure u-vowel’ which suggests that it was indeed already a schwa in the eighteenth century. Spelling variations and not least the loss of inflectional syllables already in the early Middle English period would also seem to indicate that short unstressed vowels have had a centralised pronunciation in English for something like a thousand years.

1 I am grateful to Erik Smitterberg, Uppsala University, for a discussion about unstressed vowels and for suggesting that I deal with this matter in the current chapter.

2 In the transcription used by the eighteenth-century prescriptivists, including Sheridan and Walker, the numbers are actually placed over the vowel symbols.
Walker further noted that there were two variants of short unstressed vowels which in IPA transcriptions would be [ə] and [ɪ]:

[ə]: ‘there is a certain transient indistinct pronunciation of some of them [vowels] when they are not accented ... when the accent is not upon it, no vowel is more apt to run into this imperfect sound than the a; thus the particle a before participlers, in the phrases a-going, a-walking, a-shooting, &c....’ (Walker 1791: 29).

[ɪ]: ‘The a goes into a sound approaching a short i, in the numerous termination [sic!] in age, when the accent is not on it, as cabbage, village, courage &c. and are pronounced nearly as if written cabbige, villige, courige, &c.’ (Walker 1791: 29).

The increasingly divergent nature of writing and pronunciation was a concern which was dealt with openly. At the beginning of the eighteenth century one has works like John Jones Practical Phonography: Or, the New Art of Rightly Speling [sic!] and Writing Words by the Sound thereof and of Rightly Sounding and Reading Words by the Sight thereof. Applied to the English Tongue (1701). Lists of words which were spelt one way and pronounced another were published, for example Richard Brown The English School Reformed (1700) which in the long subtitle specifies that the book contains A Collection of Words that are writ one way and sounded another. This concern is a common motif in many works on phonetics throughout the century, for example that by Abraham Tucker (1773) which contains a section ‘English not spelt as spoken’ (Tucker 1773: 3–7).

The phonological changes in English at the time led many authors to publicly campaign for a fixed form of the language in which these changes would no longer disrupt the relationship of spelling and sound. For example, Rice (1763) closes his treatise on education with an appendix in which he offers ‘the sketch of a plan for establishing a Criterion, by which the Pronunciation of Languages may be ascertained; and, in particular that of the English Tongue, reduced to a Certain fixt Standard’ (1763: 307) [emphasis mine]. This notion of fixing the language is different in motivation from that put forward by Jonathan Swift in his famous Proposal for Correcting, Improving and Ascertaining the English Language (1712). While Swift wished to have the language fixed so that works of literature would be accessible to later generations, later non-literary authors, such as Rice just quoted, were concerned with the practical implications of not having a fixed standard.

The divergence of the written and spoken language did occasionally lead to radically new proposals for English spelling. One such proposal is James Elphinston’s Inglish Orthoggraphy Epitomized: And Propriety’s Pocket-Dictionary, containing Dhe Inglish Roots arrainged and explained (1790) which in its title already shows the type of semi-phonetic spelling which he favoured. For other authors, notably the lexicographers and grammarians
of the latter half of the eighteenth century (Johnson, Kenrick, Sheridan, Walker), tampering with English spelling was not an option.

2.4 An educational dilemma

Both the expansion in vocabulary and the changes in phonology posed a dilemma for teachers of English. Of these two aspects of the language, it is probably the phonology which was the focus of eighteenth-century scholarship. The ‘hard words’ which caused such difficulty in the late sixteenth and seventeenth centuries had been largely assimilated into the language, the less used among these words had disappeared again and the remainder were there to stay and so were conveyed to following generations who mastered them more easily than when they were still fresh in the language.

English phonology in the eighteenth century shows a number of instances of change where co-variation existed for some time and where it was not certain which variants would be preferred in a ‘fixed standard’ of the language. Syllable-final /-r/ was being lost in the south-east of England and those writers who favoured a more conservative pronunciation or one where there was the greatest degree of correspondence between spelling and sound were uncertain about what to recommend.

John Walker was one of these. He espoused the notion of ‘analogy’ (< Latin *analogia* ‘proportion’), by which was meant regularity and conformity to general patterns and a correlation or correspondence between components of a whole. When applied to language, analogy was understood to be a one-to-one relationship between spelling and sound. For this reason Walker supported the use of syllable-final /-r/ while recognising that it was being lost across a broad front in the English society of his day.

2.4.1 Target groups for educational works

A particular concern of the time was the education of children. Works intended to offer assistance in this field had already appeared in the late seventeenth century. In 1688 Thomas Osborn published *A Rational Way of Teaching. Whereby Children and others may be introduced in True Reading, Pronouncing and Writing of the English Tongue; in an Easier and Speedier Method, than any hitherto Published*. Shortly after this Edward Cocker’s *Cockers Accomplished Schoolmaster: Containing Sure and Easie Directions for Spelling, Reading and Writing English* (1696) appeared. This established a line among language studies which continued throughout the eighteenth century; consider, for instance, Henry Dixon’s *The English Instructor; or, the Art of Spelling improved. Being a more Plain, Easy and Regular Method of Teaching Young Children, than any Extant* (1728) and John Hornsey’s *A Short English Grammar in Two Parts: Simplified to the Capacities of Children* (1793).

An author who directed her particular attention to the education of children is Ellenor Fenn (1798, 1799a, 1799b). She was also concerned with
Eighteenth-century English

providing an instrument to those women who might not have had the opportunity to learn grammar during their own education. This concern is reflected in the title of her book *The Child’s Grammar. Designed to Enable Ladies Who May Not Have Attended to the Subject Themselves to Instruct Their Children* (1799b).

In the long titles of language studies, eighteenth-century authors readily named their target group. Among the many grammars of this time there is a clear subset intended for the education of young ladies (see Percy and Tieken-Boon van Ostade [1], both this volume). Most of these grammars were written by women, for example Devis (1775), Eves (1800), Gardiner (1799), Mercy (1799), though not always, see Ussher (1786), or the target group is mixed as is the case with Newbery (1745).

The concern of women for the education of their children is a natural one, but there may have been additional motivation which lay in the social conditions and mores of the eighteenth century. In his study of women and the family, Ramsbottom (2002: 221) notes that ‘domestic harmony, as portrayed by commentators such as Addison and Steele at the beginning of the century and by Evangelicals at the end, depended upon the wife’s exclusive devotion to her husband’s comfort and welfare.’ Given this situation, the scope for personal intellectual development was limited and so it is understandable that women often turned to the education of their children to attain fulfilment, if only vicariously.

Language use was an issue of relevance to a social group which was increasing steadily in numbers throughout the eighteenth century: the middle classes. Referred to as the ‘middling orders’ at this time (Earle 1989, Rogers 2002), this was a group which obviously sought acceptance by the established elite who were above them on the social scale.

In this context it is worth considering who formed the market for the very many books on language in the eighteenth century. For the poorer segments of English society – servants, artisans, agricultural workers, small farmers – books were beyond their financial reach, even if they were interested in acquiring them. It is also doubtful whether the landed aristocracy were the buyers of the language studies produced by their social inferiors. The all too often futile pleas of the latter for patronage would suggest that the interest of the nobility in matters linguistic was limited to say the least.

This leaves a middle section which, by exclusion of the others, must have formed the bulk of book buyers in eighteenth-century England. An issue in research into the strata of eighteenth-century society concerns the relative weight of the ‘middling orders’. Rogers (2002: 177) points out that ‘only a small cohort of merchants and lawyers consistently achieved parliamentary status, comprising at best 15 per cent of the House; and some of these men
Attitudes and concerns in eighteenth-century English

were entangled in the patronage of the greater landlords'. Statements like these are a reminder that the middle class was still small, but also that it was striving upwards. In this search for social acceptance, the right pronunciation and grammar of English was essential.

The middle classes in any society are an essentially urban phenomenon. If the middle classes were increasing numerically, then this must have been true of the cities in Britain at the same time. Indeed this is the case: there is a growing urban population in the eighteenth century (Borsay 1990). In 1700 about 9 per cent of the population lived in centres of more than 10,000. By 1800 this figure was 16 per cent in Britain (Borsay 2002: 196f.). London had increased from half a million to over a million in the course of the eighteenth century. Edinburgh and Glasgow had similar growth rates, with Glasgow the faster-growing of the two. By the close of the eighteenth century both cities had reached populations of some 80,000 each. The population of Dublin went through a similar increase in size: from 50,000 to 60,000 at the outset of the eighteenth century, it grew to about 250,000 by the close of the century (Dickson 1987).

While much of this population growth was at the end of the century and was due to in-migration of people from the surrounding countryside in search of work in the sites of mechanical production, it was also due to a growth in the urban ‘middling orders’ who would have been in charge of enterprises into which labour from the countryside was drawn.

2.6 Grammars for the nation

The union of England and Scotland in 1707 led to the dissolution of the Scottish parliament and the transfer of all parliamentary powers to Westminster. The Treaty of Union was greeted in London but was the cause of anti-English riots in Scotland despite the large degree of autonomy which it bestowed on the church and legal system in Scotland. The union with Ireland was not to follow until almost a century later, coming into force on 1 January 1801. However, the United Kingdom of Great Britain in the eighteenth century made a single nation of the entire island of Britain and one of the spin-offs of this single nation was an increased desire to have a single form of English across Britain. An anonymous publication from 1724 makes this point in its title: The Many Advantages of a Good Language to any Nation with an Examination of the present State of our own: And also, an Essay towards correcting some Things that are wrong in it. At once there is the view that a single nation requires a single language and that what was available at the time was insufficient. This language should be rational and clearly structured:

without something of a regular Grammatical Way of joining Words together, there can be no such thing as an intelligible Language. For a Language is not bare Words and Names put together without Art
and Reason; but words in such Construction, that Persons, and common Things, and their Qualities, Actions, States, Agreements and Disagreements, may be understood according to their Number and Times. Words spoken without the Benefit of the rational Construction, are not Sense, or the Voice of Reason, but Confusion. (Anon. 1724: 13f.)

The deficiencies of English are repeatedly emphasised in the many language studies of the eighteenth century; indeed it is this view which usually offered justification for each new book on the English language. The disarray in which English was at the time was to some a reflection of a general social malaise (or so they would have others see it). Thomas Sheridan, the self-appointed Irish authority on the English language, took this stance early on in his publishing career and in 1756 sought to put himself in a position to offer remedies for the then dire situation. Sheridan was not someone to mince words and in his British Education or, the Sources of the Disorders of Great Britain (1756) he spells out in no uncertain terms what he feels is wrong and needs to be done; just consider the long subtitle to this work: Being an Essay Towards Proving, that the Immorality, Ignorance, and False Taste, which so Generally Prevail, are the Natural and Necessary Consequences of the Present Defective System of Education with an Attempt to Shew, that a Revival of the Art of Speaking, and the Study of our own Language, Might Contribute, in a Great Measure, to the Cure of those Evils.

The notion that a grammar should serve the political entity of Great Britain and Ireland is evident in the eighteenth century. Richard Johnson (1706) talked of his Grammatical Commentaries as ‘being an Apparatus to a new National Grammar’. A special place in this field must be accorded to Scottish and Irish authors. Growing up in the Celtic regions would have put them at a social disadvantage compared to their writer contemporaries from England. Thus many of them were more than anxious to gain acceptance from at the centre of power in the south-east of England. On occasions the Celtic writers in fact recommend themselves as more linguistically aware than those in England. Here is the Scotsman William Kenrick commenting on this issue:

It has been remarked as a phenomenon in the literary world, that, while our learned fellow subjects of Scotland and Ireland are making frequent attempts to ascertain, and fix a standard, to the pronunciation of the English tongue, the natives of England themselves seem to be little anxious either for the honour or improvement of their own language: for such the investigation and establishment of a rational criterion of English orthoepy, must certainly be considered. (Kenrick 1784: i)

By ‘rational criterion of English orthoepy’ Kenrick would seem to have meant a consistent and unambiguous means of indicating the pronunciation of English. As a Scot and fellow Celt, Kenrick supported the linguistic efforts
of Thomas Sheridan. When considering how to indicate pronunciation using the spelling of English, he remarks that ‘The celebrated Mr Sheridan has avoided falling into this erroneous practice [of not having a consistent orthography], and very judiciously proposes to distinguish the sound of words by certain typographical marks to be placed over particular syllables (Kenrick 1784: iv). Kenrick is not alone among Scottish authors in advocating uniformity and consistency in the use of English throughout Great Britain. His fellow Scot, James Buchanan, was equally zealous in his efforts (Emsley 1933). The title of his 1766 book shows this unequivocally: *An Essay Towards Establishing a Standard for an Elegant and Uniform Pronunciation of the English Language Through the British Dominions.*

### 2.7 Training for public speaking

The idea of a single nation and a single form of language emanating from its centre is a predominant theme in eighteenth-century writings. These are public matters and the use of language in public was an integral part of the national language complex. Hence, training for speaking in public was a concern which was addressed in print; consider, for example, the title of John Mason’s *An Essay on Elocution, Or, Pronunciation intended chiefly for the Assistance of those who instruct others in the Art of Reading. And of those who are often called to speak in Publick* (1748).

The major language commentators of the time were concerned with elocution and some of them published dedicated books on the subject. Notable among these is Thomas Sheridan’s *Course of Lectures on Elocution* (1762) and John Walker’s *Elements of Elocution* (1781). The tradition continued across the threshold to the nineteenth century with Samuel Whyte’s *An Introductory Essay on the Art of Reading, and Speaking in Public* (1800) and William Graham’s *Principles of Elocution* (1837). Indeed one can note that in 1842 Benjamin Smart’s *The Practice of Elocution* was already in its fourth edition.

### 2.8 What is publicly acceptable?

It is only a small step from the effectiveness of public speech to the acceptance of its pronunciation and with this step one reaches that concern of eighteenth-century authors which has had the most enduring effect in English society, namely a concentration more on the form of speech than on its content. First and foremost, the form of speech encompassed pronunciation with grammar a good second.

The shift in emphasis can be recognised by considering what authors highlight in their discussions. For instance, it is significant that Mason (1748: 6–39) in his list of points about what constitutes a bad and what a good pronunciation does not mention any social factors, such as acceptance
12 Eighteenth-century English

of one’s accent in public. This changes with Sheridan who a little more than a decade later in his *A Course of Lectures on Elocution* (1762) is concerned with specifying a standard for English, a lasting concern of this author; consider his *General Dictionary of the English Language* (1780), published towards the end of his life, of which Sheridan says that ‘one main object of [the dictionary] is to establish a plain and permanent standard of pronunciation’.

2.9 Appropriation or plagiarism

To do something better than one’s predecessors was motivation enough for publishing in the seventeenth century. In the following century it was not necessary to have recourse to this justification. Indeed many books dealing with more or less the same subject matter were simply published, perhaps with the expectation of the authors that the reading public would see their efforts as an improvement on those of their predecessors, but it was not necessary to specify this in the title of a book or in a preface to it.

However, there are cases where the desire to improve on the works on one’s predecessors was openly declared. By the tenth anniversary of Thomas Sheridan’s death in 1798, Stephen Jones’s *Sheridan Improved: A General Pronouncing and Explanatory Dictionary of the English Language* was already in its third edition. Similar works continued well into the nineteenth century; consider for instance, Benjamin Smart’s *Walker Remodelled: A New Critical Pronouncing Dictionary of the English Language* which was published in 1836. This practice perhaps goes to show that the authors quoted in the titles of such works were household names and the mention of their names would evoke a feeling of both familiarity and authority in readers. It is true that certain authors had become well known as authorities in their fields and were acknowledged as such by others. For instance, Sèdger (1798: v) stated, some 36 years after Lowth’s grammar had first appeared, that ‘Dr. Lowth […] contributed more to promote the knowledge of English Grammar than any other’.

Using precisely the same title of an already published work was not taboo either. In 1764 William Johnston brought out *A Pronouncing and Spelling Dictionary of the English Language*. In 1786 John Burn published a book with a very similar title. Only three years after Sheridan produced his *Rhetorical Grammar of the English Language*, William Kenrick published a book with precisely the same title (Kenrick 1784). It is true that this was originally prefaced to his dictionary of 1773, but so was Sheridan’s grammar which was published in 1781, one year after the dictionary.

Does this practice count as plagiarism? It is difficult to be certain in this period. Generally, authors acknowledge the sources of data which they replicate in a wholesale manner. For instance, the anonymous *Pronouncing Dictionary of the English Language* (1796) gives explicit recognition of sources
and predecessors in specifying that ‘the accentuation [is] adjusted according to SHERIDAN and WALKER and the orthography [is] chiefly taken from JOHNSON’. It may well be that the mention of established authors was a guarantee of quality and hence helped book sales.

3 Variation in language

The linguistic study of dialectal variation is generally associated with the rise of historical linguistics in the nineteenth century and with the activities of such scholars as Henry Sweet (1845–1912) and somewhat later Joseph Wright (1855–1930). The lack of academic concern with dialects could be put down to the absence of a scientific framework for the study of language in general. But there is more to this issue than meets the eye. Looking at the eighteenth century one recognises a deliberate neglect of regional features in English (Beal, this volume), indeed of severe condemnation of all traits of language which do not correspond to ‘standard’ usage, whatever the latter might mean exactly.

An awareness of dialect differences in England goes back at least to the Middle Ages: Geoffrey Chaucer used Northern English for the purpose of character portrayal in The Reeve’s Tale (Wales 2006: 75). The dichotomy between north and south is referred to by later authors on language, notably George Puttenham (d.1590) who, in his The Arte of English Poesie (1589), states his preference for ‘our Southerne English’ which is the ‘usual speech at court and that of London and the shires lying about London within lx. myles and not much aboue’ (Mugglestone [1995] 2003a: 9). Somewhat earlier John Hart (d.1574) in An Orthographie of English (1569) had offered a reformed spelling of English so that ‘the rude countrie Englishman’ can speak the language ‘as the best sort use to speak it’. Furthermore, there was an awareness of the kinds of English spoken in the Celtic regions. Indeed Shakespeare in the ‘Four Nations Scene’ in Henry V uses eye dialect to characterise the speech of English, Welsh, Scottish and Irish characters.

Given this awareness of dialects one might imagine that a concern with them would be obvious in works of the seventeenth century. There would seem to be two attitudes here. One is neutral with regard to dialect and the other decidedly in favour of southern speech. John Hart spoke of ‘the flower of the English tongue’, referring to the language of the court in London. About a century later, Christopher Cooper in his Grammatica Linguae Anglicanae (1685) stated that he regarded London speech as ‘the best dialect’, the ‘most pure and correct’. But, significantly, he was liberal towards variation: ‘Everyone pronounceth them [= words] as himself pleases’. Another study worth mentioning here is by John Ray (1674, A Collection of English Words not Generally Used) in which he mentions regional pronunciation, but without evaluative comments.
14 Eighteenth-century English

The more neutral attitude can be recognised in the detailed entries which some authors offer in dictionaries of English of the seventeenth century. Here is William Bullokar on dialect:

Dialect, a difference of some words, or pronunciation in any language as in England the Dialect or manner of speech of the North, is different from that in the South, and the Western dialect differing from them both. The Grecians had five especiall Dialects: as in The property of speech in Athens: 2. in Ionia; 3. In Doris; 4. In Eolia: and 5. that manner of speech which was generally used of them all. So every country hath commonly in divers parts thereof some difference of language, which is called the Dialect of that place. (Bullokar, 1616, entry for Dialect, [no pagination])

His entry is echoed later in the century by Thomas Blount who has an even more comprehensive definition:

Dialect. is a manner of speech peculiar to some part of a Country or people, and differing from the manner used by other parts or people, yet all using the same Radical Language, for the main or substance of it. In England, the Dialect, or manner of speech in the North, is different from that in the South; and the Western differs from both. As in this example: At London we say, I would eat more cheese if I had it, the Northern man saith, Ay sud eat mare cheese gin ay hader, and the Western man saith, Chud ee’at more chiese on chad it: Chud ee’at more cheese un ich had it. The Grecians had five especial Dialects … So every Country commonly hath in diverse parts of it some difference of language, which is called the Dialect or Subdialect of that place. In Italy, there are above eight several dialects or Subdialects as … (Blount, 1656, entry for Dialect, [no pagination]).

Blount is remarkable in that he gives examples to illustrate different dialects of English. However, he was not followed by others. Some time later (1676), Elisha Coles published An English Dictionary in which he sees dialects as ‘Logick, speech; also a particular Propriety or Idiom in the same speech’ with no reference to regions whatever. Some authors do at least specify that dialects are found in different parts of a country, for example John Kersey who in his Dictionarium Anglo-Britannicum (1708) defines dialect as ‘a Propriety of manner of Speech in any Language, peculiar to each several Province or Country’. This reference to region is also found in Thomas Spence (1775) who says of dialect that it is ‘A polite manner of speaking, or diversity made in any language by the inhabitants in any part of the country where it is spoken; stile; speech’ (The Grand Repository of the English Language, entry for Dialect, [no pagination]).

But the great lexicographers of the eighteenth century pay no attention to the regional essence of dialect, at most referring to dialects of classical Greek. Instead they concentrate on its meaning as a manner of expression. Here is the definition offered by Johnson in his authoritative Dictionary of the English Language (1755):
DIALECT

1. The subdivision of a language; as the Attic, Doric, Ionic, Æolic
   dialects.
2. Stile; manner of expression.
   When themselves do practise that whereof they write, they change
   their dialect; and those words they shun, as if there were in them
   some secret sting. Hooker, b. v. s. 22.
3. Language; speech.

Both Thomas Sheridan and John Walker are content to adopt this definition
and repeat it, for instance ‘Dialect. The subdivision of a language; stile, man-
ner of expression; language, speech’ (Sheridan, 1780, A General Dictionary
of the English Language, entry for Dialect, [no pagination]). Both Sheridan
and Walker had no time for dialectal variation in speech as this was in direct
conflict with their ideology of a standard in English, hence their derisory
comments on regional speech in Britain and Ireland.

But if one leaves aside the prescriptivism of both Sheridan and Walker
then another motivation is recognisable in the neglect of dialect in the eight-
teenth century. To see this, one can return briefly to Puttenham’s The Arte of
English Poesie where one finds the following: ‘After a speach is fully fashioned
to the common vnderstanding, & accepted by consent of a whole countrey &
nation, it is called a language’. This is again the view of language as a unify-
ing factor, in this case among the different regions of Britain. Here we have a
very early reference to a ‘national language’, a notion which was picked up by
later authors, see section 2.4 above. Attention to dialects would not be recon-
cilable with the desire for a ‘national language’.

In the course of the eighteenth century notions of national language and
standard language would seem to have merged, at least for many authors.
The variation which was to be suppressed was regional (Beal, this volume)
with the parallel valorisation of English in the south-east. As the variation
was first and foremost phonetic, especially for speakers whose speech was
otherwise non-local, one’s accent became an indicator of one’s relative stand-
ardness as a speaker (Beal 2004a, 2004b), something which has remained the
case to the present day (Beal 2008).

Standard pronunciation was identified with the pronunciation of the
socially higher classes in London and its surroundings. In speech, as in
other matters, it was deemed natural to ‘approve as elegant what is custom-
However, standard pronunciation was a fluid entity in itself. Nonetheless,
it could be specified sufficiently to delimit speakers with this pronunciation
from those without it. Thus the standard became a yardstick with which to
measure others and very quickly became a prerequisite for social advance-
ment. The view that mastering the standard improves one’s lot in life
becomes increasingly apparent during the eighteenth century. Some of the
Eighteenth-century English

authors of this era explicitly recognise this, for example female grammarians such as Anne Fisher, Ellin Devis and Ellenor Fenn, as well as male authors such as Thomas Spence and William Cobbett.

The prescription of the standard meant that the regional accents were condemned accordingly: ‘a strong provincial accent … destroys all idea of elegance’ (Roscoe in Mugglestone [1995] 2003a: 43). Indeed the more the standard became an instrument of social inclusion or exclusion, the more it lost its geographical basis in the south-east. By the early nineteenth century the standard was being defined as a form of speech which is characterised by the lack of just this regional basis. Consider the remarks of Benjamin Smart in Walker Remodelled (1836): ‘The common standard dialect is that in which all marks of a particular place and residence are lost, and nothing appears to indicate any other habit of intercourse than with the well-bred and well-informed, wherever they be found’. This is not far from what contemporary sociolinguists regard a ‘standard’ to be: ‘an idea in the mind rather than a reality – a set of abstract norms to which actual usage will conform to a greater or lesser extent’ (Milroy and Milroy 1998: 23).

Linguistic insecurity: intention or side-effect?

Beal (this volume) rightly remarks that there was a change during the first half of the eighteenth century in the assessment of pronunciation. While Defoe in the 1720s could remark non-judgementally on the attitude of the Northumbrians to features of their pronunciation, after the mid eighteenth century comments are far more critical. A vocabulary was adopted by authors on language which was quite censorious. Some usages were praised but more were condemned as not part of received southern English usage.

Although ‘vulgarisms’ and ‘provincialisms’ are lampooned by commentators such as Sheridan and Walker, there is little attempt to specify just what is meant by the standard pronunciation. The standard would seem to have arisen not through an explicit specification of what it entailed, but rather by a process of exclusion. In a way, the standard pronunciation arose by default: it was what remained after all the ‘unacceptable’ features had been weeded out.

One could ask why the late eighteenth-century commentators did not attempt a specification of the standard rather than an exclusion of features

3 This kind of language was to continue through the nineteenth century; consider the titles of such works as W. H. Savage, The Vulgarisms and Impropieties of the English Language, London (1833).

4 Attitude to language use outside the British Isles could be notably different. For instance, Noah Webster complained about the self-appointed persons ‘who dictate to a nation the rules of speaking, with the same impierness as a tyrant gives orders to his vassals’. Webster also notes that ‘even well-bred people and scholars, often surrender their right of private judgement to these literary governors’.
Attitudes and concerns in eighteenth-century English

Table 1.1. *Expressions of praise (positive) and condemnation (negation) in eighteenth-century language studies*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Positive</th>
<th>elegant, polite, refined, cultivated</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Negative</td>
<td>vulgar, ignorant, inaccurate,</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>uneducated, shameful, disgraceful,</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>glaring error, monstrous pronunciation</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

they disapproved of. One of the difficulties lay in the variation which existed with speakers whom these authors would have approved of. Walker not infrequently sees himself in a quandary given that the established classes of English society used pronunciations which he would not have favoured himself, for example the variation in the pronunciation of *great* – with [eː] or [iː]:

240. *Ea* is pronounced like long slender *a* in *bare*, in the following words: *bear, bearer, break, forbear, forswear, great, pear, steak, swear, to tear, wear.*

241. The word *great* is sometimes pronounced as if written *greet*, generally by people of education, and almost universally in Ireland; but this is contrary to the fixed and settled practice in England. That this is an affected pronunciation, will be perceived in a moment by pronouncing this word in the phrase, *Alexander the great*; for those who pronounce the word *greet*, in other cases, will generally in this rhyme it with *fate*. It is true the *ee* is the regular sound of this diphthong; but this slender sound of *e* has, in all probability, given way to that of *a* as deeper and more expressive of the epithet *great*. (Walker 1791: 30, *A Critical Pronouncing Dictionary and Expositor of the English Language*)

When compared to Sheridan one can see that Walker is more systematic: he insists on the value of ‘analogy’ (the one-to-one relationship of sound and spelling) in determining what item in a situation of variation should be preferred. This can be seen with syllable-final /-r/ which was disappearing in south-east English in the eighteenth century. In general, both Sheridan and Walker condemn loss of phonetic substance which is indicated orthographically and see this as a clear sign of vulgarity and slovenliness.

‘Vulgar’ is one of the key labels used by the eighteenth-century prescriptivists (Beal, this volume). Walker is particularly keen to point out what he thinks merits this label. For instance, given that provincial speakers are required to look to the capital for phonetic guidance, any ‘vulgarisms’ used by the inhabitants are especially to be condemned. In his *Critical Pronouncing Dictionary* a list of ‘faults of the Londoners’ is given, faults of people, who, he argues, ‘as they are the models of pronunciation to the distant provinces, ought to be the more scrupulously correct’ (1791: xii). Three
of these ‘faults’ are interesting with regard to the history of London English in the last two centuries:

SECOND FAULT – Pronouncing w for v, and inversely.
The pronunciation of v for w, and more frequently of w for v, among the inhabitants of London, and those not always of the lower order, is a blemish of the first magnitude.

THIRD FAULT – Not sounding h after w.
The aspirate h is often sunk, particularly in the capital, where we do not find the least distinction of sound between while and wile, whet and wet, where and were, &c.

FOURTH FAULT – Not sounding h where it ought to be sounded, and inversely.
A still worse habit than the last prevails, chiefly among the people of London, that of sinking the h at the beginning of words where it ought to be sounded, and of sounding it, either where it is not seen, or where it ought to be sunk.

The ‘second fault’ listed above is no longer present, nor is the ‘third fault’, though it is found in conservative varieties of English in Scotland and Ireland. The ‘fourth fault’ has since become a prominent marker of urban vernaculars in Britain. By the mid eighteenth century ‘h’-dropping had been singled out as a particularly ‘vulgar’ trait of English pronunciation. Thomas Sheridan in his Course of Lectures on Elocution (1762: 113–15) offers the following advice to those seeking to reinstate initial /h/ in their speech: ‘The best method of curing this [‘h’-dropping, RH] will be to read over frequently all the words beginning with the letter H and those beginning with Wh in the dictionary, and push them out with the full force of the breath, “till an habit is obtained of aspirating strongly”.’

Apart from the features, the ‘types’, the phonetic instances, the ‘tokens’, are of interest because many of them reflect usages which failed to establish themselves in standard British English. For instance, contrary to present-day usage, Walker suggests that hospital and humble are properly pronounced without initial /h-/ (Walker [1791] 1815: 59).

The upshot of all this criticism and brow-beating of the public was to create an atmosphere of linguistic insecurity. The message from the prescriptivists was clear: English as spoken by nearly everyone was in a perilous state and people needed to act to improve their language. But Sheridan, Walker and other authors like them do not offer a clear solution to what they see as a serious problem. Instead they are content to criticise at every turn without offering an overall remedy. However deficient this stance, it did ensure them continuing attention from an audience plagued by linguistic doubt. Of the two authorities discussed here, it is Walker who was to
Attitudes and concerns in eighteenth-century English

become the authority on English usage throughout the entire nineteenth century. It is difficult now to imagine the esteem in which Walker’s dictionary was held, but the very many editions during the nineteenth century testify clearly to this. At the outset of the nineteenth century it was claimed to be ‘a glorious monument of human genius’ (Russel in Mugglestone [1995] 2003a: 41) and by the last third of the nineteenth century it could still be claimed that ‘the name of WALKER, as one of our earliest orthoepists, is known and duly appreciated wherever the English language is spoken’ (Peter Nuttall in Mugglestone [1995] 2003a: 41).

5 Disputed grammatical features

When it comes to grammar one cannot find quite the same tenor of condemnation which characterises the comments on English pronunciation. It is true that of all eighteenth-century grammarians, Robert Lowth has the greatest reputation for prescriptivism in the popular imagination, and all too often in the academic imagination as well. But it is to Ingrid Tieken-Boon van Ostade’s merit to have shown that this view of Lowth is two-dimensional. In her contribution to this volume (Tieken-Boon van Ostade [2]) she has demonstrated that a more nuanced view of Lowth is called for. Posterity has readily seen him as the embodiment of eighteenth-century prescriptivism; whether this assessment is justified or not is a moot point.

Notwithstanding the historical accuracy of later views of Lowth, prescriptivism clearly has had a grip on English grammar since the eighteenth century. There are many prohibitions which can be traced to this time. Among these are the following three which are discussed in detail in Tieken-Boon van Ostade [2], this volume.

(i) Double negation

They do not want no support.

(ii) Preposition stranding

Something I am delighted about.

(iii) Split infinitives

He advised them to seriously consider the matter.

The second and third of the above features have had a precarious existence down to the present day. Preposition stranding (Yáñez-Bouza 2008a, 2008b, Percy, this volume) is more or less the rule today though it can still be avoided in formal styles, as can split infinitives (Fischer 2007). Double negation disappeared entirely from standard English in the nineteenth century.

5 Just why Walker won out over Sheridan in this respect cannot be determined with certainty. But Sheridan’s Irishness was clearly a disadvantage. Samuel Johnson was annoyed at an Irishman pronouncing on the English language and Victorian England would certainly have favoured an Englishman over an Irishman as a guide to correct usage in language.
and is now seen as a purely dialectal feature. The relegation to non-standard English is a fate which many grammatical features experienced. For instance, double comparatives are no longer found in standard English (Schlüter 2001; González-Díaz 2004, 2006, 2007) though they are amply attested dialectally.

Change among grammatical constructions continued throughout the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries. In particular, structures involving non-finite verb forms (Molencki 2003) and sentential complements (Fanego, this volume) underwent subtle shifts in the past two centuries, but were not the object of prescriptive comment in the eighteenth century.

In general one can say that during the codification of English in the eighteenth century one variant was given preference and the others suppressed. This applied in nearly all cases in phonetics, though the variants given preference were not necessarily those which are found today, for instance the CLOTH lexical set (Wells 1982: 136f.) now has a short vowel in Received Pronunciation. In grammar, codification led to strictures being applied which in many but not all cases led to the demise (in the standard) of one structure in favour of another, for example double negation. In other cases there is variation, for example with preposition stranding, and this has in turn led to insecurity among many speakers about which structure is to be preferred in standard speech and writing. Indeed on the whole one can point to linguistic insecurity as a lasting, if unintended, legacy of the eighteenth century and one which still characterises the relationship between vernacular and formal forms of English.