1 Attitudes and concerns in eighteenth-century English

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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

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

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

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 [ʊ] 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/tɛrn/ and TURN/tʊrn/ lexical sets which merged to a rhotacised schwa /təːn/ which was then simplified solely to schwa /təːn, tɜːn/ (in south-eastern English).

There is no formal distinction between stressed [ʌ] and unstressed [ə] in the transcription systems used by eighteenth-century prescriptivists.[1] In his scheme[2] of vowels (1781: 26) Sheridan refers to the former as the sound in *but*, calls it u[1] 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[1]-ri[1′]zo[4]n' which can be interpreted as [ho'raizən] 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 Epittomized: 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

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.

2.5 The question of class

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

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 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