Eighteenth-Century English
Ideology and Change

The eighteenth century was a key period in the development of the English language and is when the modern standard emerged and many dictionaries and grammars first appeared. This book is divided into thematic sections which deal with issues central to English in the eighteenth century. These include linguistic ideology and the grammatical tradition, the contribution of women to the writing of grammars, the interactions of writers at this time and how politeness was encoded in language, including that on a regional level. The contributions also discuss how language was seen and discussed in public and how grammarians, lexicographers, journalists, pamphleteers and publishers judged on-going change. The novel insights offered in this book extend our knowledge of the English language at the onset of the modern period.

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Ideology and Change

Edited by
RAYMOND HICKEY
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Preface

In the past decade or so the study of English in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries has established itself as an area of historical linguistics in its own right. This period has come to be known as Late Modern English and covers the period roughly from the reign of Queen Anne – the Augustan Age, that of Pope, Dryden and Swift – down to the end of the Victorian era at the beginning of the twentieth century. This is not a period of major categorial changes in English but of more subtle shifts in syntax and vocabulary and above all it is the time when pronunciation became a yardstick of acceptability in English society. The study of English in the late modern period is inextricably linked to the rise of prescriptivism, a phenomenon which has determined the attitudes to spoken language in present-day English society.

The validity of the late modern period has been underlined by a series of recent conferences which have taken place at the universities of Edinburgh, Vigo and Leiden. The range of topics dealt with at these conferences testifies to the interest of English scholars in the period. In particular the rise in grammar writing has been a focus, but also the spread of dictionaries and their use as authoritative works in language use.

The field of Late Modern English studies has been strengthened by a number of seminal publications in recent years. Joan Beal’s English in Modern Times (2004) has provided an introduction which is already regarded as a standard. The proceedings of the Late Modern English conferences – Insights into Late Modern English (2003) and New Insights into Late Modern English (2007) – have gathered together the innovative work of many international scholars, both established in and new to the field. The area of grammar writing has been enriched by volumes such as that by Ingrid Tieken-Boon van Ostade (2008), Grammars, Grammarians and Grammar Writing in Eighteenth-Century England, which summarises current thinking on this subject.

It is hoped that the present volume – like its predecessor for nineteenth-century English: Kytö et al. (2006) – will contribute in the same vein to this vibrant field of research and be a useful source for those wishing to inform themselves about topics and insights into English in this formative period of its development.
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In the preparation of this book the editor received great assistance from the series editor, Prof. Merja Kytö, Uppsala University. Helen Barton, commissioning editor for linguistics at Cambridge University Press, was, as always, a great source of assistance and encouragement and ready to answer all the questions which arose in the course of the current project.