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# 1

## Background

### 1.1 Grammar and education in the first half of the eighteenth century

One reason, and it is perhaps the principal one, why we are fortunate in having so much material relating to language in all its forms in the eighteenth century, is the contemporary concern for establishing the worth of linguistic knowledge in the school and university curriculum. Knowledge of language and its structure (be that language English or Latin) was viewed throughout the century as an essential component in the educational attainment of the scholar, resulting in a proliferation of handbooks and textbooks on language serving this end (Michael 1993). Yet despite the centrality of such a language component (sadly lacking in much of today's educational curriculum), many of the authors of works concerned with pronunciation, spelling, reading and general treatises on grammar in the first half of the eighteenth century show a certain ambivalence towards the worth of their undertakings in the eyes of their readership. On the one hand there is a recognition that their efforts are a response to a general, public concern at the poor standard of reading and writing ability in society at large: 'I need not inform the World of its miserable Ignorance, and Want of good Instruction in this Case: the constant Complaints of People plainly shew, that they are sensible of both, it being justly grown a common Cry' (Jones 1701: *Preface*). On the other, they are very often almost obsequiously defensive about the intellectual and social worth of the exercise they have taken upon themselves. Jones (1701: *Preface*), for instance, laments that his 'general Motive to condescend to the Undertaking; [is] mean, and despicable as to its subject (in common Estimation) ...', while the anonymous author of *The Many Advantages* (1724: 5) apologizes to the Lord High Chancellor that the 'low parts [of his study] are but like cleaning the Streets, or mending the High-Ways'; any recommendation to the study of words and grammar to those who are already 'learned' is 'but advising Eagles to spend their Time in catching Flies' (1724: 35). This schoolmaster describes the work of compilation as tedious, laborious and long and, as a practitioner himself, his appreciation of the

difficulties of grammar teaching are heartfelt (1724: viii–ix):

Both Masters and Scholars in all the European Schools, are so miserably toil'd and perplex'd in teaching and learning [Latin] Grammar, that almost all learned and ingenious Persons shun to be School-masters, but whom necessity drives to those Workhouses for the necessary subsistence [*sic*] of Life ... The Author, who has been long chain'd to these Gallies, and tugg'd at the Oar for many years, having a Fellow-feeling, and being a Fellow-sufferer with his Brethren in this kind of Calamity, is willing, among others, before he go off the Stage of this World, to cast his Mite into the common Treasury; which he hopes will contribute more to the ease and comfort of his Fellow-labourers, and their Scholars, than any thing that has ever yet been attempted, to alleviate their Bondage, and sweeten their Lives while they grind in those Mills.

Yet such a level of self-deprecation may well simply reflect a deference to patrons and potential supporters in high places, as in Tuite's obsequious *Dedication* to the young Prince William Augustus in his *The Oxford Spelling Book* (1726): 'there is not, in all the Dominions of Your Royal Grandfather; a Subject, who more zealously prays to God, to shower down all manner of Blessings on every Protestant Branch of Your Illustrious Family'.

At the same time, however, writers of grammars and spelling books in the period are also in no doubt about the ultimate value of their enterprise, one which encompasses education, religion, literacy and self-expression (Aarsleff 1983; Michael 1970, 1993). Indeed, the views of the author of *The Irish Spelling Book* (1740: *Preface*) could profitably be heeded by course organizers in some of today's university English departments:

The Children of Ireland are generally train'd up in reading idle Romances, which fill their Heads with wild, and unnatural Fancies, and corrupt their Morals also. And, whereas Books, furnish'd with Observations and Rules, setting forth the Nature of the English Language, would, with Certainty and Expedition, carry them on towards the reading and understanding of it; in the Romances they have no such Instruction: they have nothing at all to help them, but only the Voice of the Teachers, who themselves are mostly very ignorant and unskilful; and hence their Progress in Learning is very often slow, and tedious, and they scarcely ever arrive at any tolerable knowledge in the Language.

Nearly all writers on language issues recognise the difficulty of the task they face, stressing that the teaching of grammar and knowledge of language structure in general is both time-consuming and intellectually challenging. Not surprisingly, therefore, almost all claim that their own work provides a simple, quick and effective method to grammatical knowledge and its application. John Jones is in no doubt about the virtues of his undertaking, and none too subtly advocates the

advantages of his printed *Tutor* (1701: *Preface*):

Now, if I save Millions much trouble and Time, that may be otherwise beneficially bestowed; it must be a very considerable Advantage to the Nation, as well as Ease to the Learner; which, I perceiving, thought it not only worthy my Undertaking, but my utmost Care, Diligence and Contrivance, to make it answer those great Ends. What is the Labour and Time of one for some Months, to be compared with that of innumerable Persons for a much longer Time?

Often too there are high intellectual and even moral claims made by many authors of grammatical treatises. One common, shared aim is that grammar books (both for Latin and English) should be simple and clear and based on rational and rule-governed principles, and 'aimed at our English Youth who have for a long time esteemed the study of this useful Art very irksome, obscure and difficult' (Greenwood 1711: *Preface*). Treatises on grammar and spelling should be 'made familiar and easie to the meanest capacity' (Sproson 1740). Yet writers like Lane and Mattaire also see the production of grammar books as serving a high and important social and intellectual goal: 'To write an *English Grammar for English Youth*, may seem to many, at first view, a very superfluous and ridiculous thing; but if the Reader have a little patience, I hope to make it appear to all the World, that it is so far from being superfluous, that on the contrary it is the most necessary, and best Expedient to promote all good Learning that ever was thought of since the dissolution of the *Roman Empire*'; 'this noble Art that so much improves and refines humane Understanding, and is the Golden Key to unlock all other Liberal Arts and Sciences' (Lane 1700: *Preface* viii); 'this Art, which is the Key to all Learning; the necessity of which was never call'd in question but by the Ignorant; which none ever neglected, but who sometime or other paid very dear for't by betraying the want of that sound either in writing or common discourse' (Mattaire 1712: *Preface* i). Other writers view the function of general grammatical knowledge and, in particular, the rules of correct spelling, as simply utilitarian: 'A Child, or any other Person, who cannot read or write, may by the Help of this Book ... learn perfectly to spell and write ... and so render himself a compleat Clerk ... and thereby fit the Person for any writing Employment' (Jones 1701: *Preface*). But for many commentators more exalted, even virtuous effects could be achieved. A common theme throughout the period is that the knowledge of the workings of an internalized grammar acts not only as a pragmatic, social advantage but is also a primary means whereby a case can be made for humans to claim a unique status, distinguishable from that of the animals. Likewise it is through grammatical knowledge that individuals are better able to express their innermost thoughts and feelings. Perhaps it is the author of *The Many Advantages* who takes the most utopian position as to the essential, inherently social and moral value of the study of language (1724: 36–7):

We doubt not but many wise Men have too mean an Opinion of the Power of Words, and take too little care about them: For though the Words of a Fool are

little, the Words of a wise Man are wonderful. Words are the images of our Thoughts, the Landmarks of all Interests; and the Wheels of our human World are turned by them. They move Interests that are greater than Mountains, and many a time have subdued Kingdoms; Riches and Poverty, Love and Hatred and even Life and Death are in the Power of the Tongue.

He goes on to make an impassioned plea for the production of ‘good dictionaries’ the lack of which means that ‘our best words lie scattered in dark corners ... That makes us difficult and slow of Speech, as if we had a Padlock on our Tongues; and Silence, and Roughness, and Spleen, are a kind of Character upon our Nation; and the Air and Soil bear the Blame of it’ (1724: 24). But it is not merely the lack of dictionaries which causes this defect, it is the lack of attention paid in the educational system and, indeed, in society at large, to the knowledge of grammatical structure. He paints an image of the phlegmatic, tongue-tied Englishman whose lack of structural linguistic knowledge deprives him of communicative skills (although, he hints, there are also negative consequences arising from the British weather!) (1724: 32–3):

Nothing is more common amongst us, than false grammar in English; and even our learned Men who can write it true, yet come to the Knowledge of it slow, and write it true with Difficulty. In Conversation, silence and difficulty of Speaking, and fewness of Words, are a kind of national Characters [*sic*]. Though we love Society as well as others, and are glad when we have spoken a civil Thing rather than a disagreeable, and are angry with ourselves when we have been in Company without bearing Part in the Conversation; yet Words come slow, and with Difficulty, and a fluent extemporary Speaker is a kind of Wonder amongst us. This makes Conversation the less pleasant to us; and in Solitude, Silence and Spleen gain ground; and they who observe it, lay the blame of it upon our Air and Climate.

Yet the grammar book is not by itself the only means of gaining social and intellectual improvement; with the notable exception of Jones (1701: *Preface*) [‘it will (*without* a Teacher) ... perfect the Learner who can read and write, in the Art of spelling English’] a *personal* tutor is also a prerequisite, a fact perhaps reflecting the need of the authors of these works to find paid employment: ‘as for those who think to become good Grammarians by the book alone, without a Master, they will find themselves mistaken, and lose their Labour: for the art of Grammar, tho in plain English, is no less a mystery to the unlearned, than a Mechanick Trade in plainer English, which yet requires a Master, and seven years Apprenticeship’ (Lane 1700: *Preface* xviii).

It is perhaps Lane and the anonymous author of *The Many Advantages of a Good Language to Any Nation* (who very much follows the line taken by Lane and often utilizes his descriptive and metaphorical terminology) who make the clearest statements concerning the usefulness of a knowledge of grammatical structure in the broadest sense. Lane, for instance, praises what he considers to be the unique

facility of English for the borrowing of foreign vocabulary as a means of ‘enriching our Mother-Tongue with all manner of good Literature’; such would improve the minds of the English ‘having such an easy and native Vehicle as the Mother-Tongue’ (*Preface* xix). Likewise, the teaching and learning of grammar would enable the formation of clearer Laws since the clarity of language thus produced would lead to a reduction of ‘Ambiguities’ (*The Many Advantages* 1724: 4), and it would facilitate as well ‘the spread of Christianity among non English-speaking people’ (a central theme as well of *A Needful Attempt*). Behind this endeavour too would be a ‘more effectual means to reform the corruption of Manners, so much complain’d of among us’ (Lane 1700: *Preface* xix).

There are a few places where ease of acquisition of foreign languages is held up as an advantage to be gained in a speedier and more effective knowledge of the workings of grammar: ‘a rational Education in the Mother-tongue ... is the true Standard and Measure of all our Attainments in Forein Languages’ (Lane 1700: *Preface* xiii). But most of these occur in contexts, as we shall see below, where principled positions are taken concerning the primacy of Mother-tongue grammatical knowledge in language teaching in the English classroom. Perhaps surprisingly – given the contemporary recognition of the philosophical position of the Port Royal grammarians – there is little mention made in the period of the usefulness of grammatical knowledge as a means of creating a universal language. Jones (1701: *Preface*) claims that ‘Any Nation may (because I shew which are the easie, and sweet simple sounds in Speech) sweeten their language thereby, or one may easily invent an universal Language, that may excell all others in Easiness and Sweetness; which I would do (by God’s Help) if I knew, that People could be induced to use it’. *The Many Advantages* (1724: 30) takes this argument a stage further:

All the essential parts of Grammar are the same ... in all Languages: and since the Characters of the Letters have now that great Convenience of being alike, I think, in all Countries in Europe, one good Grammar well learnt with a little Observation, will be a key to unlock them all with greater Ease.<sup>1</sup>

### 1.1.1 Latin or vernacular grammars?

As in the majority of instances in the previous century, grammarians in the eighteenth viewed the acquisition of the ‘noble Art’, ‘the useful Art’ of Grammar as dependent upon the educational system, who it was able to reach, how it presented the subject and – above all – the relative primacy it gave to the teaching of the vernacular language over Latin and Greek. Two dominant themes appear in the writings of many grammarians in the 1700–1750 period: the poor quality of grammar teaching in schools and the detrimental effect of the precedence given by educational institutions to the teaching of Latin grammar over that of the vernacular.

We recall how the author of *The Many Advantages* complained of being ‘long chain’d to these Gallies’ of the teaching of grammar in schools, schools which, for Lane, were ‘those Workhouses for the necessary subsistance [*sic*] of Life’. In his

*Letter to a Friend*, while passionately commending the study of grammar as a vehicle for moral and cultural enlightenment, Lane recognizes that the endeavour, as currently undertaken, might well be open to criticism (1700: 84):

Or if you had rather exercise our Talent in Satyr, ridicule the Faults and Defects of our Language that want mending. Collect our deep Gutterals, our comical Abbreviations, our twenty Diphthongs; and run a prong into the Backside of our Schoolmasters, that keep their Schollers seven Years under their Rods and Axes, and then send them home without being able to write English. That is a subject that will bear Satyr, and deserves it.

As a schoolmaster himself, Lane's voice perhaps carries the most conviction (1700: viii): 'generally all Children are utterly averse to go to the Schools, where they find nothing for several years together, but a constant series of insuperable Difficulties, like one Wave upon the back of another, ready to overwhelm their weak Understandings'. Twelve years earlier, Mattaire too was concerned about the off-putting effects of poor teaching on the student of grammar (1712: *Preface* iii–iv):

It is now a-days the miserable Fate of Grammar to be more Whip't than Taught: and the Children, like Slaves, are bred up into the hatred of it: Many fancy, that there needs but a small stock of learning to set up a Grammatian; and both the Esteem and Freedom of the profession is debased: the Pedant values himself for handling best the weapon of the Beadle: and the poor Boy is made dull, and then beaten for being so; because the duller Master knows neither what to teach, nor how to suit himself to the several Capacities of Children, which are as different as their Features.

And he, like many contemporaries, sees this as a consequence of children 'being hurried into Latin, before they are well able to read English ... The ignorance of English can never be a good Foundation or ingredient towards disposing of Youth for the Learned Language' (1712: *Preface* iv). Lane (1700: iv) takes an especially strong 'vernacular grammar first' line: 'it seems to be contrary to Sense and Reason, as well as to Antiquity, to put English Youth to toil in any Foreign Tongue whatever for the attainment of good Learning, while their own excellent Language lies neglected and uncultivated'. It is, he claims (1700: viii–ix), the fact that children 'are forc'd to cleave the Block with the blunt end of the Wedg' – 'like an Error of the first Concoction' – that there is so little success in grammar teaching in schools. Both metaphors are picked up and used in a similar context by the author of *The Many Advantages*, an admirer of 'Honest Mr Lane, an ancient School-Master', although he is not always as sympathetic to the lot of the schoolteacher (1724: 26): 'That of the Toil and Labour of the Masters is considerable, but they deserve not to be pitied, because they make it their Choice, when they might have the Pleasure of doing otherwise'. No disadvantages accrue for foreign language learning if a vernacular is taught first, claims Lane, justifying his stance with an appeal to the force of rationality and language universals (1700: *Preface* x): 'the

true End and Use of Grammar is to teach us how to speak and write well and learnedly in a Language already known, according to the unalterable Rules of Right Reason, which are the same in all Languages how different soever they be'. Brightland and Gildon<sup>2</sup> take a very similar position (1711: *Preface* vi): 'The difference, the Living and Dead Languages especially, is so great, that the former has very little to do with the latter, and so vice versa ... I believe it is pretty plain, that the Rules of our Tongue are only to be drawn from our Tongue itself, and as it is already in Use.' They commend the efforts of Wallis, whose terminology is 'Entirely English', but even the anti-Latin Lane whom (1711: *Preface* viii):

we have read over more than once ... has done as Ben Johnson [*sic*], and most others who have attempted English Grammars, that is he has extended and tortur'd our Tongue to confess the Latin Declensions, Conjugations and ev'n Construction ... and this has involved him in so many Latin Terms, that he is not to be understood without a Dictionary by those, whom he should instruct; that I, such who know nothing of Latin, Greek, or any but their Mother Tongue.

Still, they concede: 'yet it must be allow'd that his [grammar] is the best'.

### 1.1.2 Grammar and female education

Commentators throughout the eighteenth century<sup>3</sup> often claim that among the benefits to be gained from an education which includes the study of grammar is one which might enhance the abilities and status of female members of society. Only occasionally are claims of this kind expressed in terms which nowadays might be regarded as patronizing or condescending. In his *Approbation* to Brightland and Gildon's *A Grammar of the English Tongue* (1711), Isaac Bickerstaff recommends the work in the following terms: 'I therefore enjoin all my Female Correspondents to Buy, Read and Study this Grammar, that their Letters may be something less Enigmatic'. Yet he is not entirely prejudiced against the female writer, and his strictures are directed as much at male as they are against female written usage (1700: *Preface* vi): 'We need not here discourse of the Usefulness of Grammar, since every days experience shows the Effects of the Ignorance of it; as the Letters and writings not only of the Fair Sex, but of much of the greater part of the Men, to their Scandal, discover.' Worthy of notice in this early part of the eighteenth century is the liberal attitude taken towards female education and the important part played in it by the teaching of grammar (in particular, vernacular grammar). The author of *The Many Advantages*, while beginning in a vein not unlike that of Bickerstaff ('many a pretty Lady by the Silliness of her Words, hath lost the Admiration which her face hath gained'), proceeds to see such 'failings', not as some inherent lack of intelligence, but as the result of poor educational opportunities (1724: 37): 'Nature hath doubtless been as bountiful to that Sex as our own, those Improperities in Words, Spelling and by Writing, for which they are usually laugh'd at, are not owing to any Defect in their Minds, but the Carelessness, if not Injustice to them in their Education.'

Rejecting too Martial's principle of *Sit non doctissima conjunx*, he goes on to make an impassioned plea, not just for female education but for something approaching a universal right to it across the social divide (1724: 74):

You may write an Essay upon this Question, which historical Examples of Illustrious Women, who have not only been Encouragers, but Instruments in promoting Learning, and restoring many wasted Estates by their Conduct. And in the same Essay you may take notice, that these Instructions, at least as far as the Foundation of an English Grammar, should not only be communcated to the Female Sex, but extended to the inferior Schools of common People. For Language, as well as Religion, Liberty and Civility, is of that Sort, that it cannot be enjoyed as a National Benefit without leting [*sic*] the Common people have their Share in it.

Lane too, although in our eyes perhaps somewhat patronising ('the more nice and Tender Constitutions of [young Gentlewomen] not being able to those rugged and thorny Difficulties in the Methods hithertoo practised'), seems to be genuinely offended by the fact that women 'have generally been discouraged from good Learning', the provision of which will 'contribute much more to the good of their Children and Families afterward, than all those inferior Attainments which take up so much of their best time, and which are generally useless to them in the remaining part of their lives'. Such sentiments are repeated by Buchanan later in the century (1762: *Preface* xxix): 'It is greatly to be lamented that the Fair Sex have been in general so neglected with regard to a proper English education. Many of them, by the unthinking Part of the Males, are considered and treated rather as Dolls, than as intelligent social beings'. Lane, indeed, is happy to have his work judged against its value as an educational and social asset for women: 'And if the Author has found out the true Secret of an early and rational Education, that may prove to the Advantage of the Fair Sex, who have so many Sights and Affronts put upon them for Want of Learning, he thinks all his Pains and Labour happily bestow'd' (1711: *Preface* xvi–xvii).

## 1.2 Usage versus prescription

In comparison with the situation in the second half of the eighteenth century and much of the nineteenth, commentators in the 1700–1750 period show little by way of interest in language planning and, in particular, in proposing recommendations for linguistic propriety. There is little of a prescriptivist 'feel' about whatever comments that are made on usage, and those that are put forward are often balanced by a strong support for whatever is meant by Custom and Usage (Dunlap 1940). The author of *The Many Advantages* seems to be one of the few writers making language-evaluative judgements and recommending the establishment of institutional means for language purification. He criticizes the use of language which is 'uncouth', 'ambiguous' and 'imperfect', a 'sure Sign of a slothful or low Genius in the People', and makes a formal proposal for linguistic regulation

(1724: 4–5) couched in language very reminiscent of that used by John Dryden (1679) (whom he cites) or Swift in his *A Modest Proposal* some twelve years previously:

There are several of us, not altogether Strangers to your Lordship [the Earl of Macclesfield], who have agreed to spend upon this Subject as many spare Hours as our several Professions will allow; and as perfecting this Work will require both Time, and a general Inclination of Men's Studies that way, we hope we shall hear of others in other Places, both Single and in Societies, who will help to carry it forward.

That which we propose to ourselves, is, to examine the present State of the Language, to fix what is right by Grammars and Dictionaries, to fill up what is wanting, straighten what is crooked, and make it easy to be learnt by Youth and Strangers.

We recall too Swift's 'our language is extremely imperfect; that its daily Improvements are by no means in proportion to its daily Corruptions; that the Pretenders to polish and refine it, have chiefly multiplied Abuses and Absurdities' (Swift 1712). Like Swift, the author of *The Many Advantages* attributes this to the fact that language 'is in a perpetual Motion', a process which can only be stopped or at best retarded by the use of Grammars and Dictionaries; he criticizes those who feel language development and advancement can be left to their own devices: 'many of them tell us, There is no need of it: Living languages do best for themselves; Help spoils them' (1724: 6). While he is happy to concede that current English usage 'is better than the Welsh and Scotch; It is to be preferred before the Dutch, and better than it was two Hundred Years ago' (1724: 25), he takes pains to point out that had the Ancients neglected 'their speech as a low Thing, not worth their study ... we may say, it would be narrow, and confused, and base as that of the West-Indies is now, even to this Day; for it is not Time, but Care that brings forth Things that are excellent' (1724: 14–15). The *Project* envisaged by the author of *The Many Advantages* (1724: 42–3) was to be ongoing, one which

might encourage ingenious Men to turn their Thoughts this way, and join their Assistance to carrying the Work forward, the Project may be enlarged, and the Work divided as shall be thought convenient for the hastning and perfecting of it. For as the Subject thoroughly executed will afford great variety of critical and very curious Questions, the Difficulties as they gradually arise, will naturally lead to the discussing of them; and either Monthly or Weekly Essays may be put out in way of Dialogue.

In this year, too, the same author proposes that the educational establishment should undertake an 'Abridgement of the History of the French Academy, and of the Methods which they took to refine their Language' (1724: 79). However, he is not at all convinced of the efficacy of the French institution, questioning its conservatism, and urging caution since 'Under this may be considered, how far it is

true that they have been so far from making their Language better, that they have spoiled it. Let it be considered whether the Judgment of these good Men, be not a little like that of some of our own, who from an over Fondness for old Things think we have spoiled ours by leaving out our deep Gutterals, and calling a *Plough* a *Plow*' (1724: 79–80). Nevertheless, he still argues for the setting up of 'an Enquiry by what means the Grecians fixed their Language so steadily ... And as we know no Means that can be used but good Grammars and Dictionaries, and Encouragement of it from the Government, and Use of it in our Schools and Universities; you may easily demonstrate that those, like Anchors, would most certainly keep it stedfast, if it was but once brought to a just Standard' (1724: 80–1). All this because, as he vehemently asserts, the study of language, in particular the vernacular, is so neglected (1724: 6):

The Instructors of our Youth care not to trouble themselves with it: our Clergy think it doth not belong to their Care, though it be the true Key to Knowledge: our Universities suffer it not to be spoken in their Schools and Theatres; nor hath any Patron of Learning provided one single Professor, who should turn his Thoughts and Care towards that.

Oldmixton (1712: *Preface*) has little confidence in any 'Society that shall make us as Polite as that of Reformation has made us Godly', and his views of Swift's proposal are unflattering:

'Tis probable, our late Correspondence with France put such a Whim into some Folks Heads, and because they have an Academy for the Use at Paris, we forsooth must have one in London. The Foreign News, which sometimes tells us more Truth of our doings here than our own, has the very Names of the Members of the Academy which the Doctor speaks of. I do not find that it is come to any thing more yet than meeting over a Bottle once a Week, and being Merry: At which Times People mind talking much more than talking well.

There is little in the grammatical treatises of this half-century to suggest what any model of propriety for current English might be, or against what set of principles it ought to be 'fixed'. One of the few explicit (albeit conventional) statements regarding pronunciation exemplars is made by John Jones (1700: *Chapter One* i): 'English Speech is the Art of signifying the Mind by humane Voice, as it is commonly used in England, (particularly in London, the Universities, or at Court)'.

In sharp contrast to comments appearing in grammars, pronouncing dictionaries and the like composed in the later part of the century, between 1700 and 1750 we find very little reference to social class as a determining factor in linguistic usage. Only rarely do we find statements like: 'Lastly, I have added a Short and Compendious Grammar of the English Tongue, for the help of the lower class of our Youth, that they may attain to a competent Knowledge in the Propriety of Speech, without Assistance of the Learned Languages' (Owen 1732: *Preface* iv).

James Greenwood's *An Essay Towards a Practical English Grammar* (1711) appears just about as prescriptive and judgemental as writers get in this early period. A major concern of his *Essay* lies, of course, with syntactical and morphological description and some of his concerns about correct usage are specifically aimed at these areas (*Preface* i): 'I do not see how [a Young Gentleman and Lady] should write anything with a tolerable Correctness, unless they have some taste of Grammar, or express themselves clearly, and deliver their Thoughts by Letter or otherwise, so as not to lay themselves open to the Censure of their Friends for their blameable Spelling and false Syntax.' For Greenwood, a grammar is 'the Art of Speaking rightly' (1711: 34): 'those persons who are desirous to speak and write clearly and correctly in any Language, ought to study Grammar'. He defines *Orthoepy* as 'the Art of true Speaking', giving rules for the 'right pronouncing of Letters' (1711: 38) and even sets out 'non-standard' samples: 'we must not pronounce *stomp, shet, sarvice, tunder, gove, eend, ommost*; but *stamp, shut, service, tinder, gave, end, almost*'. Even his strictures against false spelling reveal a concern for pronunciation standards (1711: 38): 'we must write, *Bishop*, not *Bushop*; so *did, foot, might, neither, frumenty*; not *dud, fur, mought, or med, nother, furmity*'. His attachment to pronunciation norms based upon the habits of 'the best Speakers' perhaps more than anything else reflects his adherence to the views of that 'judicious Roman Author' Quintillian whom he quotes at some length regarding his view of the 'Custom of Speech' as 'the Agreement of the Learned' and not that which has 'corruptly prevail'd among the Multitude' (1711: 37).

Throughout the *Essay* we come across Greenwood's prejudices against what he sees as 'bad' pronunciation. Recommending a 'small and slender' realization for the sound of the vowel *A*, he stipulates that (1711: 236): 'we must not pronounce it like the fat or gross *A* of the Germans', so that '*walk, talk, &* are more rightly pronounced by the English (*A*); which words are very carelessly sounded by some *wauk, tauk, &*. In which sound we imitate the French ... and so do the Scotch'. Likewise, he points to unacceptable pronunciations of his (*O*) vowel: 'it is sometimes sounded like obscure *U*, as when we carelessly pronounce *Condition, London, Compasse*, as if they were written *Cundition, Lundon, Cumpasse, &*. And so likewise some pronounce *come, done, some, Son, Love, Dove*, as if written *cume, dune, sume, &c.*' (1711: 241). His *Essay* is peppered with prescriptive, recomendatory comments like this, as: '*Eu, ew, eau*, are sounded by clear *e* and *w* ... as in *Neuter, few, Beauty* ... But some pronounce them more sharp, as of they were to be written *Niewter* ... But the first way of pronouncing them is the better' (1711: 246), while 'in *Could, would, should, course, court, ou* is negligently pronounc'd as *oo*' (1711: 247). In much the same way we find Brightland and Gildon in their *Grammar of the English Tongue* (1711) inserting at various points in their discussion observations of a negative evaluative kind concerning pronunciation. In their treatment of the (*ai*) 'double vowel' in words like *again* and *villain*, they observe (1711: 28): 'The finical Pronunciation of some Part of this Town of London has almost confounded the sound of (*ai*) with (*a*), the Master and Scholar must therefore take a peculiar Care to avoid this Error.' Again, in their discussion of the 'obscure' (*o*) and (*u*) sounds, which they claim to be close in articulation to the French '*e* feminine'

in the final syllable of words like *serviteur*, they point to the fact that: ‘The English express this sound by short (*u*) in *turn, burn, dull, cut* &c. and sometimes by a Negligence of Pronunciation, they express the same Sound by (*o*) and (*ou*), as in *come, some, company, country, couple, covet, love*, &c. and some others, which they ought more justly to give another sound to’ (1711: 22). Likewise, the use of an (*a*) long pronunciation [possibly [ɛɛ]: CJ] in words like *there, were* and *where*, although ‘different’ is ‘yet Wrong’ (1711: 7). But a more typical approach is taken by Bailey who claims – in the advertisement for his *An Introduction to the English Tongue* (1726) – that his lists of words of various syllable length are presented in such a way as ‘to prevent false Pronunciation’; yet the body of his work contains little reference to pronunciation evaluation, save for a few statements like ‘according to the vulgar pronunciation ... the words *perfect, perfected, perfection* [are] pronounced *perfit, perfited, perfitness*’ (1726: 98).

Indeed one has to trawl through the many and various spelling books, grammars and treatises of the period to find statements which can be interpreted as commenting upon the social value of pronunciation.<sup>4</sup> The density of such statements is, as a whole, extremely low, and there is no suggestion that the principal aim of the works in question was the achievement of any kind of wholesale change to national pronunciation habits in the direction of some socially accepted norm. Yet it is important to stress too that on those occasions when recommended pronunciations are put forward, there is also significant recognition of the need and advantage of considering ‘custom’. That such ‘custom’ may even be stigmatized presents no barrier for Brown as a tool to promote ‘real spelling’ (1700: 78):

There being such Variety of irregular Pronunciations in our English-Tongue, perhaps what I have hitherto done may be insufficient for the completing of a young Scholar in true Spelling; wherefore, I have annex’d an Alphabetical Collection of Words that are not sounded (exactly) according to their manner of writing; which is done in two Columns, the first shewing how they are writ, and the other how they are ordinarily pronounced; So that the teaching thereof may be of very great use, provided, the Learner be discreetly managed; and the best way (in my Judgment) is, to propose every particular word, in the subsequent Table, not as they are writ, but as they are commonly spoke: By which means, a young Scholar will the better understand how to spell from vulgar and erroneous Sounds.

Likewise, while the author of *The Many Advantages* unequivocally states that ‘an uncouth, ambiguous, imperfect Language, is a sure Sign of a slothful or low Genius of the People’ (1724: 4), his admiration for the educational stance taken by Martial and Quintillian still predisposes him to take seriously the language of the common people (1724: 74):

For Language, as well as Religion, Liberty and Civility, is of the Sort, that it cannot be enjoyed as a National Benefit without letting [*sic*] the Common People have their Share in it. The Language of a Nation is the *Vox Populi*, the Speech of

the People; and in spite both of the Great and Learned, it will be very much what they make it.

Nevertheless, although he professes that ‘that Custom which is the true Law of Language, is the Practice of Learned Men’ and that this ‘True Maxim’ should make Learned Men ‘not suffer themselves to be too easily drawn after, either the vitious Spellings or Pronunciation of ignorant or affected People’, he seems to be almost resigned to the inevitability of ‘change from below’ (1724: 74–5): ‘But for all that, the Custom of the People will have a large Share of Power in this Case. The Children of both the Great and the Learned take their Speech from their Servants and Companions; and in this Matter, the Instructions in the lowest Schools are the great Influence.’

It is Watts’ *Art of Reading and Writing* (1721) which perhaps goes furthest in this early period in promoting ‘Custom’ as a factor in both pronunciation and spelling habits. This is perhaps unexpected, given his recommendation to his readers of Greenwood’s *A Practical English Grammar* (‘I know none equal to that’ (1721: xx)), a work not known for its adherence to custom over authority, since it is aimed at the improvement of the language of ‘those Persons, who talk for the most Part just as they have heard their Parents, Nurses, or Teachers (who likewise may happen to be none of the best speakers) talk’ (1711: *Preface*). Watts’ admiration for Greenwood may stem, however, not from the latter’s views on language propriety, but more likely from the shared passion of both writers for the primacy of English over Latin grammar education – a prejudice which also explains Brightland and Gildon’s rejection of contemporary concerns for the correct forms of Latin pronunciation. Although one should ‘proceed from having a regard to them’, one should rather direct one’s attention to ‘the Inviolable Laws of the Custom and Usage or our own people’ (1711: *Preface* vi–vii). Begging the pardon of critics, Watts apologizes for the fact that ‘I have allowed my Readers to spell several English Words rather according to Custom, and the present Pronunciation than in the Etymological and Learned way; and that I have advised them sometimes to spell words of the same Sound, and the same Derivation, two different ways, as if they have a different Meaning, as *Practise*, when it is a Verb, with an *s*; and when it is a Noun, with a *c*,’ an example of that customary eighteenth-century mantra: ‘For ’tis the Happiness of any Language to distinguish the Writing, and (if possible) the Sound also of every Word which has two distinct Senses’ (1721: xviii).<sup>5</sup> He goes on to assert how ‘Custom, which is, and will be, Sovereign over all the Forms of Writing and Speaking, gives me Licence to indulge my Unlearned Readers in this easy Practice’ (1721: xviii–xix). Part of the attractiveness of the ‘Custom’ argument for Watts seems to rest in his feeling that some of the rules set out for both pronunciation and spelling in treatises of the period are too complicated to remember, and too full of exceptions to be useful to the learner (1721: xix):

The English Tongue being composed out of many Languages, enjoys indeed a Variety of their Beauties; but by this means it becomes also exceedingly irregular, that no perfect Account of it can be given in certain Rules, without such

long Catalogues of perpetual Exceptions as would much exceed the Rules themselves. And after all, too curious and exquisite a Nicety in these minute Affairs is not worth the tedious Attendance of a reasonable Mind, nor the Labours of a short Life.

His *Chapter xxiii* is devoted to ‘Observations concerning the various ways of Spelling the same Word’, ways which he admits are not necessarily ‘right or critically true’, but – despite the consequence of the loss to the user of an ability to reconstruct derivations – he sees no great advantage in dictating a standard system of spelling. Yet, and this is perhaps where Watts is most atypical of his period, he places only a limited value on rule-governed systems for the acquisition of spelling and pronunciation habits: ‘In learning to read and write English, we shall find several Words, whose Accent, Pronunciation, and Spelling, are not easy to be brought under certain Rules; and these can only be learnt by long Observation, or by Tables or Catalogues drawn up for this End’ (1721: 99–100). His own *Table of Words accented on different Syllables according to the Custom of the Speaker, even when they are used to signify the same Thing* has a footnote which would look somewhat out of place in the usually prescriptive academy of speech description in the later part of the century (1721: 101–2):<sup>6</sup>

I do not suppose both these Ways of Pronunciation to be equally proper; but both are used, and that among Persons of Education and Learning in different Parts of the Nation; and Custom is the great Rule of Pronouncing, as well as Spelling, so that everyone should usually speak according to Custom.

It is in respect of the rules governing stress assignment (or, perhaps more especially, the rules of Latin stress placement) that we probably find most appeals made to custom against the dictates of authority. Lane (1700: 16) is particularly emphatic on the issue:

Q. What is the principle thing in learning any Language?

A. The first and principle thing in learning of any Language, is to get the true Pronunciation of the words; for he that accents a word contrary to the Custom of the Language, speaks barbarously, and makes himself ridiculous to the Hearers.

But we should perhaps not put too liberal an interpretation upon Watts’ acceptance of alternative spelling forms. While he suggests that non-conformity and variety in spelling might be acceptable and become ‘common and tolerable’, such variety has nevertheless undoubtedly arisen through the ‘Negligence of the Learned, and through the Prevalence of Custom’. He quite clearly stops well short of accepting pronunciation characteristics associated with the ‘non-standard’ orthography (1700: 137):

Here I would have it observed also that all three foregoing Tables ... were not written so much with a design to teach how to *read*, as how to *write*: not to tell

how such Words ought to be *pronounced*, because some of those Pronunciations are corrupt and too vulgar; but the Design is rather to show how those Words ought to be *spell'd*, which have obtained by Custom so different a Pronunciation.

A quarter of a century later, the author of *The Many Advantages* takes a similarly liberal line as regards alternative spelling (and, to some extent at least, pronunciation) forms. In a discussion of the two or three syllable alternants in words such as *dexterous/dextrous* and *blustering/blustring*, he comments: 'different Ways of spelling and using Words, provided they are natural, are not to be esteemed Faults, but are rather desirable: they please with their Variety; and either in Poetry or Oratory, they help the Measure by their different Number of Syllables'. He even goes as far as to assert that (1724: 55): 'wherever any Town or Country hath particular Way of Speaking that is more natural and grammatical than others, they ought to keep it, as an Ornament and Proof of their good Judgement'. But what does he intend by 'natural' – is it usage, or phonetic naturalness, or both?

Still, we should bear in mind Greenwood's cautions – so eagerly taken up by Watts – concerning the wisdom of attempting to produce a system of acceptable pronunciation through the medium of grammars and spelling books utilizing complex rule systems. The *Introduction* to his treatment of *Orthography and Orthoepy* shows none of the certainty and confidence of writers on such subjects later in the eighteenth century, a reticence partly the result of his recognition of the effects of usage upon regulation (1711: 231):

I cannot dissemble my unwillingness to say anything at all on this Head; *Firstly*, because of the irregular and wrong Pronunciation of the *Letters* and *Words*, which if one should go about to mend, would be a Business of great Labour and Trouble, as well as Fruitless and Unsuccessful. Many have been the Endeavours of this kind, but it has been found impossible to stem the Tide of prevailing Custom.

He goes as far as to say that 'Pronunciation [is] such a Thing ... which can neither be written nor painted, but must be learnt by use, and the hearing of others pronounce', recommending that the student acquire due pronunciation through a process of osmosis, the correct sounds 'first read by the Master to the Scholar, and then repeated by him' (1711: 232). It is, of course, only his contemporary, the author of *The Needful Attempt*, who seems prepared to reinforce rule-governed attempts to achieve spelling to sound correspondence, by means of the 'painting' of sounds themselves through the medium of a specialized phonetic alphabet: 'Whaut Rûl kan bee given faur pronouncing *th*? When, az in, *then* and *the*, *thee* and *thou*? And when, az in, *thank* and *theft*, *three* and *thousand*?' (1711: 11). Indeed, this writer's sympathy for the plight of the foreign learner of English shows his open-mindedness as regards the role of custom and usage in the acquisition of 'right' pronunciation, in arguing that Foreigners (1711: 2–3):

Are moreover so often confounded ... at seeing the written or printed Words so vastly differing from those (accounted the same) which they hear and speak,

that they can scarce ever learn, either to speak rightly the printed Words, or to spell rightly the spoken ones, but are apt both to spell too much according to the usual way of speaking (which has hitherto been accounted, tho indeed unreasonably, wrong spelling) and to speak too much according to the present usual way of spelling, which is very foppish and ridiculous.

No surprise from an author whose goal is to compose an English grammar 'With the spelling agreeable to our speaking' (1711: 8), and not too far removed from the position held by the author of *The Many Advantages*, who claims that 'Speaking and Writing, as far as can well be, should go together; yet both affected and clownish Pronunciations are to be disregarded' (1724: 50).

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