

## Author(itie)s and Sources in the Prefatory Matter to Eighteenth-Century English Grammars for Children

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During the eighteenth century, language-experts were increasingly concerned with correctness and appropriate social expression. As a result, English grammar went through several attempts to codify and prescribe rules for correct usage, so that the number of these works increased rapidly from the 1760s onwards and reached a notable peak in the 1790s. In order to find a place in an increasingly saturated marketplace, authors, editors and publishers variously resorted to selling strategies that included, for instance, adding value to the English grammar by incorporating rich prefatory or post-main-text matter. This paper deals with author(itie)s and sources explicitly mentioned in the prefatory matter of eighteenth-century English grammars for children, with a focus on metacomments aimed at endorsing the book with reliability and validity for teachers and young learners. The study is based on acknowledged author(itie)s and sources so as to identify which were most commonly cited in the material examined, on the one hand, and to discuss the different reasons articulating this practice, on the other.

Keywords: English grammars; eighteenth century; paratext; prefatory matter; metacomments

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## Autor(idad)es y fuentes en el material preliminar de las gramáticas inglesas del siglo XVIII para niños

Durante el siglo XVIII los expertos en la lengua inglesa mostraron un creciente interés por la corrección lingüística y la expresión adecuada socialmente. En consecuencia, hubo varios intentos de codificar y prescribir reglas gramaticales para el uso correcto de la lengua. El número de gramáticas inglesas publicadas en este periodo histórico aumentó considerablemente, sobre todo a partir de la década de 1760, alcanzando su apogeo en la década de 1790. Para hacerse con un hueco en un mercado cada vez más saturado de este tipo de obras, los autores y editores solían recurrir a diferentes estrategias de marketing que

incluían, por ejemplo, revalorizar la obra mediante apéndices insertados antes o después del texto principal. Este artículo se centra en los autores y las autoridades y fuentes citadas en los elementos textuales que se hallan prefijados como material preliminar a una selección de gramáticas inglesas para niños publicadas en el siglo XVIII. Se analizará cómo los autores utilizan metacomentarios para avalar la fiabilidad y validez necesarias tanto para los maestros como para los jóvenes aprendientes. El trabajo se centra en los autores, las autoridades y las fuentes que los propios autores mencionan explícitamente, a fin de identificar cuáles fueron los más citados en las gramáticas seleccionadas, por un lado, y determinar qué razones pudieron justificar esta práctica, por otro.

Palabras clave: gramáticas inglesas; siglo XVIII; paratexto; material preliminar; metacomentarios

## 1. INTRODUCTION

Although the first English grammars—that is, grammars about the English language written in English—date back to the late sixteenth century (Michael [1970] 2010; Vorlat 1975), it was during the eighteenth century—the so-called “Age of Correctness” (Leonard 1929; Baugh and Cable [1951] 1993)—that the English language went through serious attempts at grammar codification and prescription (Tieken-Boon van Ostade 2012; Curzan 2014, 64–92). Among these, Robert Lowth’s *A Short Introduction to English Grammar* (1762) definitely stands out and it has been object of extensive scholarly debate recently (Pullum 1974; Beal 2009; Tieken-Boon van Ostade 2010).<sup>1</sup> Even though eighteenth-century language-experts were not scholars in the modern sense of the term—but rather a group of clergymen, schoolmasters and -mistresses, editors, booksellers and even scientists like Joseph Priestly (1733–1804) (Chapman 2008; Yáñez-Bouza 2015)—all of them were moved by a common concern: the imperative need to set grammar rules for correct language usage. Their interest was likely determined by two extra-linguistic forces: (a) the rise of English nationalism, where language was an invaluable asset for cohesion and unity (Newman 1997; Sorensen 2000); and (b) an increasingly polite English society that, by the end of the eighteenth century, demanded more formal education as a means to refine their linguistic style (Beal 2004, 1–12; Vorlat 2007), and in this way “to construct a social identity meaningful to themselves and others” (Meyerhoff 2002, 534).

Diachronically speaking, the number of English grammars published between 1700 and 1759 was discrete compared to those appearing from the 1760s onwards. The peak of production is attested in the 1790s, a decade with a production “nearly reaching 100 grammars” alone (Yáñez-Bouza and Rodríguez-Gil 2013, 146; Alston 1965). That is, the production of English grammars more than doubled during the third quarter of the 1700s, to the point that “a veritable battle for the market [arose], in the process of which publishers drew upon the kind of marketing devices that are still applied today” (Tieken-Boon van Ostade 2008a, 12). Among the most popular marketing strategies of the time was the writing of powerful prefaces, generally “designed to both seduce and control the reader [...] who, [however,] would have been disappointed by a book without them” (Jones 2011, 42). In fact, the prefaces to eighteenth-century English grammars soon became platforms to (a) voice the authors’ language premises, (b) express their stance towards the standardization and codification processes, (c) evaluate English grammars hitherto published, (d) confer authority on the book or (e) showcase the excellence and strengths of their work compared to others of the same kind (Rodríguez-

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<sup>1</sup> Full bibliographical information on the eighteenth-century works mentioned in this essay can be found in volume one of Robin Alston’s *A Bibliography of the English Language from the Invention of Printing to the Year 1800* (1965) or in the database *Eighteenth Century Collections Online* (ECCO, 2007–2016). See also table 1 for a list of the grammars selected for this study.

Álvarez and Rodríguez-Gil 2013). To convey this information properly, eighteenth-century grammar writers often intervened in the text through metacomments, which allowed them to go beyond the factual presentation of contents and variously *interact* with the reader (Taavitsainen 2008, 436-437; Hyland 2011; Domínguez-Rodríguez and Rodríguez-Álvarez 2015).<sup>2</sup>

In the light of the above, this paper explores author(itie)s<sup>3</sup> and sources explicitly named in the prefatory matter of eighteenth-century English grammars for children, with a special focus on how authors used metacomments to endorse the book with authority. Even though English grammars for children held considerable interest for language-experts from the mid-eighteenth century onwards (Navest 2011), this type of English grammar has been less studied than those aimed at a more general audience (Smith 1998; Tieken-Boon van Ostade 2010), or those written by women (Cajka 2003; Percy 2010), for instance. The field of (historical) metapragmatics—a “fairly new term which still allows for a number of variant readings” (Hübler and Bublitz 2007, 1)—may offer a practical framework within which to gain some insight into the textual and interpersonal metacomments inserted in the prefatory material of eighteenth-century English grammars for children. Not in vain, this discipline pays special attention to clarifying “how interactants actually employ meta-utterances to intervene in discourse” (Hübler and Bublitz 2007, 1).

To this end, first I will define the concept of “prefatory matter” and its relevance in eighteenth-century English grammars. Then I will describe the data examined, including the selection criteria applied and the works under study. Thirdly, I will present the results of a qualitative analysis of the material, which may provide evidence as to the rationale behind explicitly mentioning author(itie)s and sources in the prefaces to English grammars for children. Here, the focus is on acknowledged author(itie)s and sources, as a way of identifying the web of influence and tradition that might have been important for the authors selected. Sources vaguely cited—like “as the Poet rightly observes” (Saxon 1737<sup>[2]</sup>, vii), “the authors from whom I have

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<sup>2</sup> Metacomments can be either textual or interpersonal. The first type is used to “organise what [the sender] is saying in such a way that it makes sense in the context and fulfills its functions as a message” (Halliday 1970, 66). The second—interpersonal metacomments—encompasses “all that may be understood by the expression of our own personalities and personal feelings on the one hand, and forms of interaction and social interplay with other participants in the communication situation, on the other hand” (66). That is, interpersonal metacomments help authors express their stance and engagement with the reading public, “stance” being conceptualized as “an attitudinal dimension which [...] refers to the ways writers present themselves and convey their judgements, opinions and commitments, either intruding to stamp their personal authority onto their arguments or stepping back to disguise their involvement” (Hyland 2011, 182). By contrast, “engagement” is seen as “an alignment dimension where writers acknowledge and connect to others, recognizing the presence of their readers by focusing their attention, acknowledging their uncertainties and including them as discourse participants” (182).

<sup>3</sup> This designation involves both “authorities” (in the strict sense) and “authors” that were relevant for each grammar writer for any reason, regardless of whether they were actually considered an authority in the domain or not by his/her contemporaries.

transcribed observations” (Bell 1769, 3), or “extracted from the works of our first grammarians” (Hornsey 1793, 4)—are not considered in this paper since attempts at tracking them back are often hampered by lack of proper referencing and credits to previous works.<sup>4</sup>

## 2. PREFATORY MATTER: DEFINITION AND RELEVANCE

According to the French literary critic Gérard Genette ([1987] 1997, 1-4; 1991), the paratextual apparatus of a work is formed of the different pre- and post-main-text verbal constituents that complement the main book contents. The prefatory (or front) matter of a work—alongside title pages, appendices, tables or illustrations—is part of the so-called “paratext,” or the set of supplementary book constituents. While this definition may suggest that paratextual elements are ancillary in nature, Genette claims they are indeed important since a text “rarely appears in its naked state,” but is rather surrounded by an ad hoc paratext that enables authors to “*present* it [the work itself], in the usual sense of this verb, but also in its strongest meaning: to *make it present*, to assure its presence in the world, its ‘reception’ and its consumption in the form, nowadays at least, of a book” (Genette [1987] 1997, 1-2; emphasis in the original). More specifically, he defines the prefatory matter as a valuable *threshold* to the book, that is, as “a ‘vestibule’ that offers to anyone and everyone the possibility of either entering or turning back” (Genette 1991, 261).

The use of prefatory matter was already commonplace in early modern English books (ca. 1500-1700), which “came accompanied almost invariably by introductory dedications, verses praising the author, epistles to a patron or esteemed colleague, to the readers themselves and sometimes by printed marginal notations that guided reading of the text” (Jones 2011, 42). In this respect, a substantial prefatory matter—in the form of prefaces, prologues, introductions, dedications, etc.—usually served rhetorical purposes and may have enhanced the book’s success in the market, especially if the writer implemented suitable formulas and discourse strategies with which to gain the reader’s goodwill (Arrington and Rose 1987, 306).

In the case of eighteenth-century English grammars, authors, editors and publishers alike knew how persuasive the prefatory matter, notably prefaces, could be for the end-user (Watts 1995, 147-150), an influential (socio-)pragmatic aspect that has been studied recently (Fernández-Martínez 2012; Domínguez-Rodríguez and Rodríguez-Álvarez 2015; Yáñez-Bouza 2016). However, it also seems that the prefaces to the readers of eighteenth-century English grammars were sometimes more

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<sup>4</sup> This unsystematic citation pattern is a handicap to the modern reader, especially in accessing and retrieving information to study the reception of grammar tradition and other language-related works in eighteenth-century English grammars. It would be interesting to cover this aspect of the prefatory material in a future work. See section 4.2 below.

a marketing strategy to boost sales than a matter of the personal choice of authors, as attested in John Fell's preface to *An Essay Towards English Grammar* (1787): "The following pages having, in the first instance been written, and being now published at the Editor's earnest request, he thinks himself under the necessity of introducing them to the Public, and of explaining the particular intention with which they were composed" (v).

All in all, the material examined for this paper suggests that the authors of eighteenth-century English grammars for children exploited the highly persuasive potential of the prefatory matter, here comprising prefaces, dedications, introductions and the address to the public. By means of textual and interpersonal metacomments—see section one, above—grammar writers may have communicated with the public in several ways since the metadiscourse interspersed in a text is "more than just the exchange of information, goods or services, but also involves the personalities, attitudes and assumptions of those who are communicating" (Hyland 2005, 3). In the case of author(itie)s and sources in the works selected, the authors skillfully introduced metacomments in the different prefatory items in order to confer the book with credibility, or to highlight the quality of the content, amongst other purposes that will be discussed below.

### 3. DATA

To extract a relevant set of English grammars specifically designed for children, a simple search on the *Eighteenth-Century English Grammars* (ECEG) database (2010) was performed. Forty-eight records by forty-seven different authors were retrieved initially: forty known by name, and seven anonymous, from British and American grammar traditions. Twenty-five of these (52.1%, roughly half of the total) were available in full-text at the *Eighteenth Century Collections Online* (ECCO), and one (2.1%)—namely, J. Bell's *A Concise and Comprehensive System of English Grammar* (1769)—was consulted in-house in London, at the British Library.

Of these twenty-six English grammars for children, twenty-one (80.8%) included prefaces. Three (11.5%) were preceded by other kinds of prefatory items—"Dedication," "Introduction" or "Address to the Public"—while two (7.7%) had no prefixed material. However, a closer look at the prefatory matter of these twenty-four English grammars for children revealed that only twenty of the writers overtly mentioned the author(itie)s—here comprising language-experts and other individuals—and sources—manuscript or printed material, from literary works to newspapers, journals or pamphlets—inspiring them. All author(itie)s and sources are mentioned by name, surname, work title or by using duly referenced quotations. Consequently, my study concentrates on these twenty works, which are itemized in table 1 below:

TABLE 1. Eighteenth-century English grammars for children selected for analysis<sup>5</sup>

Author	Abridged title	Year (place; #edition)
Saxon, Samuel	<i>The English Schollar's Assistant</i>	[1735] 1737 (Reading; 2)
Corbet, James	<i>An Introduction to the English Grammar</i>	1743 (Glasgow; 1)
Fisher, A[nn(e)]	<i>A New Grammar</i>	[1745?] 1753 (Newcastle; 3)
Blacklock, Thomas	<i>An Essay on Universal Etymology</i>	1756 (Edinburgh; 1)
Ward, William	<i>A Practical Grammar of the English Language</i>	1765? (York; 1)
Bell, J.	<i>A Concise and Comprehensive System of English Grammar</i>	1769 (Glasgow; 1)
Smetham, Thomas	<i>The Practical Grammar</i>	1774 (London; 1)
Wood, James	<i>Grammatical Institutions</i>	1777 (Newcastle; 1)
Murray, A[lexander]	<i>An Easy English Grammar</i>	[1785] 1787 (London; 2)
Anon.	<i>Rudiments of English Grammar</i>	1788 (Falmouth; 1)
Webster, Noah (**)	<i>Rudiments of English Grammar</i>	1790 (Hartford; 1)
Wilson, J.	<i>Fisher's Grammar Improved</i>	1792 (Congleton; 1)
Hornsey, John	<i>A Short English Grammar in Two Parts</i>	1793 (York; 1)
Nicholson, James	<i>The Rudiments or First Principles of English Grammar</i>	1793 (Newcastle; 1)
Anon.	<i>A Short English Grammar</i>	1794 (London; 1)
Anon.	<i>Rudiments of Constructive Etymology</i>	1795 (London; 1)
Edwards, Mrs.	<i>A Short Compendium of English Grammar</i>	1796 (Brentford; 1)
Murray, Lindley (**)	<i>An Abridgment of L. Murray's English Grammar</i>	1797 (York; 1)
G[uy], J[oseph]	<i>An Easy Introduction to the English Language</i>	1796 (Bristol; 2)
Eves, Mrs.	<i>The Grammatical Play-Thing</i>	1800 (Birmingham; 1)

#### 4. DATA ANALYSIS

##### 4.1. Target audience

The title pages of the works selected point to grammar writers' efforts to elaborate useful, easily accessible and user-friendly material for children. The works are variously titled "assistant," "introduction," "essay," "institutions," "rudiments," "principles," "compendium" or "abridgment," all nouns denoting simplicity and brevity. Similarly, some titles have adjectives which emphasize certain distinguishing features of the book, such as "new," "practical," "concise," "comprehensive," "practical," "easy," "first" or "short." By choosing these (key)words, grammar writers were issuing a declaration

<sup>5</sup> Names marked (\*\*) indicate grammar writers of American origin.

of intent: namely, that children needed grammar books adapted to their capacities and useful in satisfying their real learning needs. In fact, this idea appears in James Nicholson's preface when he is justifying the introductory nature of his *Rudiments*: "Children, whose memories are in general very weak, should not be loaded with a multiplicity of words when they enter upon any new science. The shorter the definitions can be made, the better for them" (1793, 3).

But while grammar contents were thought out in terms of children's capacities, the titles allocated to the prefatory material examined in this study had very different target audiences in mind: educators, parents and other adult groups interested in learning the basics of the English language. By way of illustration, note Samuel Saxon's inclusive title: "The Preface to the Masters of English, Mistresses, Parents, Young Ladies, and Foreigners" (Saxon 1737<sup>[2]</sup>, iii), where "Mistresses" refers to "gentlewo[m]en employ'd in teaching the Fair Sex" (iv). Beyond titles, the information included in the prefatory material itself also seems to be aimed at adults, as it covers arguments connecting English grammar to successful professional careers (Blacklock 1756; 1765<sup>2</sup>), short disquisitions on methodology for English grammar teaching (Bell 1769; Ward 1765<sup>2</sup>; Murray 1787<sup>[2]</sup>), descriptions of the actual utility of the book in practical terms (Webster 1790; Murray 1797) or instructions on how to use the book properly (Anon. 1788; Smetham 1774). Therefore, it is reasonable to assume that the references to author(itie)s and sources in the prefatory material under consideration were likewise intended for an adult audience who could appreciate their value appropriately.

#### 4.2. An overview of author(itie)s and sources

The boundaries between originality and plagiarism are often blurred with respect to the contents of eighteenth-century English grammars (Smith 1996; Tiekens-Boon van Ostade 1996; Hickey 2010; Navest 2011). Robin Smith notes that "in [these] grammars, plagiarism is far from being a matter of censure" and, consequently, "copying is the rule rather than the exception" (1998, 435). In fact, the material examined contains self-incriminating metacommentary like this by A[lexander] Murray, a Newcastle-Upon-Tyne schoolmaster: "I have without reserve taken from other books what ever I thought would suit my plan, a freedom which all my predecessors have indulged" (1787<sup>[2]</sup>, vi). To justify his liberal taking of passages from other authors, he argued that English grammar—as a discipline—was so widely treated by that time that it would be "in vain to pretend, and impossible to avoid saying many things which have been said before" (vi).

Regarding this kind of authorial stance—shared by many other of the grammar writers under study—Smith explains that unacknowledged copying and plagiarism were not much condemned at the time because the aim of school grammars was designing "rather new, better, and simpler methods of teaching the grammatical principles of the vernacular: the rules of grammar were a given factor" (1998, 435).



Murray himself observes that many eighteenth-century grammar writers knew that “something is still necessary, though perhaps, not so much with respect to the *matter* as the *manner* of forming the most useful school-book, by which grammar may be taught with the least loss of time” (1787<sup>[2]</sup>, v; emphasis in the original). Other authors, like Bell, even justified the free use of contents from previous English grammars on philanthropic grounds:

The authors from whom I have transcribed observations, &c. will, I hope, pardon my freedom, not only as they used the like freedom with others before them, but as the English language has never yet been at its height of propriety and elegance. If, therefore, my endeavours, in prescribing rules, either according to my own judgment, or that of others, be conducive to regulate and methodize the language [...] they will own it was not only doing them justice, but doing a service to the public. (1769, 3-4)

For the reasons above, then, it is often difficult to determine which author(itie)s and sources grammar writers used to compose their works. As J. Wilson frankly states, “many very learned Men have written Treatises on different Parts of the English Grammar [...] from which it was very easy for the Editor to borrow” (1792, viii). In fact, the use of vague or unsystematic citations is commonplace in the material selected here, and this prevents the precise identification of author(itie)s and sources on occasions. This is why the following sections only deal with authors and works explicitly identified by grammar writers in their texts.<sup>6</sup>

#### 4.2.1. Author as actual authority

Metacomments involving self-promotion are very common in the prefatory material selected. Through these, grammar writers step into the text to present themselves as “authorities” in the practical side of English grammar, inasmuch as some of them are long-experienced teachers who have been working in real educative contexts for many years. Saxon, for instance, was a charity-school master at Reading (Berkshire) when the second edition of his English grammar was published. By that time he was “confin’d to teaching only the English tongue, writing, and accompts” (Saxon 1737<sup>[2]</sup>, iv), yet his work came from his devoting of his “vacant hours” to methodizing all his teaching knowledge, spanning more than two decades: “The following Pages [...] are what I have, for more than Twenty Years, used in my own School; and found by Experience their Usefulness, not only to my English Schollars; but to those, likewise, when I taught the Rudiments of the Latin Tongue” (iii-iv). Later in the preface, Saxon claims that his methodology is truly effective, as the positive comments of skilled educators

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<sup>6</sup> Due to space constraints, only certain selected excerpts from the prefatory material examined are provided for illustration purposes.

attest—“[a]nd having met with great encouragement by the subscription of more than two hundred divines”—and this is why he “ventur’d to make publick” the materials which “hitherto have been for my own private use” (iv, vii).

To finish off his commendatory discourse, Saxon resorts to the topos of affected modesty to concede that he may not be the most appropriate grammar writer, but will be nonetheless proud to serve as a model for his coevals: “If my labours [...] prove of any service to the publick, I shall rejoice that I have been the instrument of doing any good in my generation” (vii). According to Floris Bernard (2014), introducing this kind of topos in the discourse had, since Middle Byzantine times, usually served two main purposes: “to express a genuine or feigned concern about the authors’ ability to deal adequately with the subject, and to thwart criticism for shortcomings in their work” (2). Taking into account Saxon’s metacomment, he may be trying to disguise his self-proclaimed authority on the matter, on the one hand, and to prevent any criticism of the grammar plan (let’s say, the microstructure) or methodology proposed, on the other.

Self-promotion metacomments are also found in James Corbet’s “Dedication,” in which he is looking for “countenance and patronage” from the “Honourable Magistrates” of Glasgow city. Corbet first mentions his most outstanding professional merits, using the rhetoric strategy of *captatio benevolentiae*, meant to secure the addressees’ goodwill towards his endeavor: “Having the Care of the Education of a good many Children of the City, in the English Language, in the Management of which Province, I flatter my self, that I have been given general Satisfaction to such as have employed me both as to my Diligence and my Method” (1743, iv). On account of his teaching skills and results, he explains that, after reviewing the “Performances of others, who have written in this subject,” he certainly prefers his own methodological approach and, therefore, has decided to publish it “to render my Labours still more beneficial to my Scholars and more agreeable to my self” (iv).

Another, perhaps less flattering, case is observed in William Ward’s preface. In it he states that his English grammar is richer than other similar ones thanks to his long teaching experience and current leading position in an educational institution:

The following Grammar is not meerly the product of Reflection in the Study; but much Trial, and Practice, and Experience have likewise contributed to bring it to its present Form. As I have now been the head of a public School above thirty Years, I have, from daily Experience, had too much Occasion to observe, that the Understanding of Children is not improved so much as might be wished by the usual Methods of teaching Grammar. (1765?, iii)

Also on practical grounds, other authors enhance their own authority in the field and present themselves as qualified critics of previous English grammars. In James Nicholson’s preface, for instance, we read that he has been “employed in the education of youth above twenty years [and] has found, by long experience, that the generality of English Grammars are but ill adapted to the capacities of children” (1793, 3). This

same argument is found in Mrs. Edwards's "Address to the Public," where it is stated that "[f]rom her long and close Attention to the Education of Youth, the Authoress has had frequent occasion to observe that the progress of Children is too generally impeded by the extreme Prolixity and Difficulties of their Grammars" (1796, vi-vii). To remedy this situation, Edwards took proactive steps "to simplify the Elements, without being tedious; and to render them compendious, without being obscure" (vii). With these statements, Edwards shows she has knowledge and experience enough to facilitate the teaching of English grammar to young learners, even to the extent of digesting the contents according to their language level.

But not all grammar writers approved of self-promotional maneuvers. Ann(e) Fisher, for example, reported that these were too frequent in the prefatory matter of eighteenth-century English grammars. In her preface, she rebuked those who discredited other colleagues for the sake of promotion: "For I shall not run into that ungenerous, tho' common Fashion, of raising the reputation of my own Book, at the Expence of my Brethren of the Subject; or start Objections to others for my own Advantage" (1753<sup>[3]</sup>, i). Similarly, Alexander Murray also criticized this practice by echoing the widespread use of prefaces as an instrument by which to underrate other English grammars.<sup>7</sup> He even speaks of extra-linguistic factors intervening in the (un-)acceptance and (un-)popularity of the books: "I do not write a preface for the purpose of introducing particular commendations of my own work, nor for the still worse purpose of depreciating the works of others. All I crave is an impartial perusal, and an unbiass'd determination, not founded on private or personal prejudices for or against particulars of any kind, but on what is most for the public advantage in teaching this necessary part of an English Education" (1787<sup>[2]</sup>, viii).

One last example is taken from Bell's preface. Just as Nicholson (1793) and Edwards (1796) above, Bell also felt able to judge the other English grammars on sale but, at the same time, he stated that he did not want to promote his own to the detriment of others:

I am sensible by experience in teaching, and by Inspection into works of a grammatical nature, that there is no one grammar extant sufficient to give either a tutor, or a pupil, a competent knowledge of all the proprieties, elegancies, peculiarities and beauties, of which the English language is susceptible. Yet, as I have no view of depreciating the real value of others works, it must be acknowledged, that there are several both high and low priced books of a grammatical nature, of great utility. (Bell 1769, 5-6)

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<sup>7</sup> The anonymous author of *Rudiments of English Grammar* (1788), for example, inserts a footnote on the first page of his/her preface to indicate that "Dr. Lowth (it is apprehended) is not accurate in his second Persons Singular of the proper Subjunctive Mood" (i). In the anonymous *A Short English Grammar* (1794) we read that practical exercises on bad English, like those proposed in John Ash's *Grammatical Institutes* (1760) "have been, by discerning teachers, generally disapproved; for they have seldom, if ever, communicated any valuable knowledge of the Syntax" (iv-vi).

#### 4.2.2. Cross-reference to other author(itie)s and sources

Explicit reference to author(itie)s and sources in the prefatory matter examined is less habitual than authors' self-characterization as an authority in the discipline. This is probably due to that general, non-reproved tendency to take material from other works rather freely. But although most grammar writers deemed it unnecessary to acknowledge the author(itie)s and sources consulted, a few did reference them in the prefatory matter for a variety of reasons. These are discussed below in order of their frequency.

##### 4.2.2.1. Explaining the rationale behind a new English grammar

Quite often, the reasons behind an author being moved to publish another English grammar—despite the oversaturated market of the day (Tieken-Boon van Ostade 2008b, 104-107)—are revealed to the reader in the prefatory discourse. One such reason was that previous grammar writers had been unable to adapt the contents of adult grammars to children's capacities, as anticipated in 4.2.1. above. The discussion on the (un-)suitability of English grammars aimed at young learners is sometimes illustrated by citing, or quoting from, a specific author(ity) or source. In the preface to his English grammar, Thomas Blacklock admits being “greatly indebted to a late philosophical inquiry into the principles of language, by John Harris, Gent” (1756, vi).<sup>8</sup> However, he also believes that Harris's book is not age-appropriate due to its format and theoretical density; as a result, Blacklock's work is an attempt at making it more widely accessible: “And had that treatise been less voluminous, or more generally known, the public would probably have never seen the following essay” (vi).

Likewise, in the anonymous *A Short English Grammar* (1794) Lowth's grammar is described as a “very elegant Treatise [...] But that, though an admirable composition, is rather calculated to gratify the critical curiosity of one who has already perfected his Education, than to be useful to a Child who is just beginning it; and does not seem to possess either the perspicuity or conciseness necessary for a student scarcely emerged from the nursery” (Anom. 1794, iii). If what is nowadays considered a seminal work in grammatical prescriptivism was not considered suitable for children, we can interpret that the author of *A Short English Grammar* wanted to design a more finely-tuned English grammar for children:

It may be proper therefore, to hint the reasons which I have occasioned the compilation of this little manual [...] This being designed solely for the junior classes, every thing apparently

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<sup>8</sup> The identification of this reference is troublesome. There is a philosophical inquiry into the principles of language by James Harris, Esq., titled *Hermes; or a Philosophical Enquiry concerning Universal Grammar* (London, 1751), but no trace of a work of this nature by John Harris, D. D. (1666-1719), otherwise known for his theological and lexicographic contributions. In fact, the work by James Harris seems more aligned with Blacklock's proposal.

above their comprehension is entirely omitted. While that, though called an Introduction, suggests various critical observations totally useless to those for whom it professes to be designed. (Anon. 1794, iii)

This idea is also present in Noah Webster's preface where he acknowledges that his 1790 English grammar for children is just a compendium of a longer and more complex work by himself: *A Grammatical Institute of the English Language* (1784). Knowing that it was necessary to reduce and simplify its contents for teaching purposes, Webster decided to publish an abridged version more adapted to a younger audience:

There has been a general complaint among the teachers of schools, that the Second Part of the Grammatical Institute is a work too complex and difficult for young beginners in Grammar. The author is sensible of the justness of this complaint [...] The object of this little compendium is to bring the general principles of our language into as small a compass, and to express them in as familiar a manner, as possible. (1790, ii)

Lindley Murray's English grammar for children follows in the footsteps of Webster's decision to summarize a previous larger work for the benefit of young learners. The preface starts by explaining why Murray abridged his own grammar, not missing the opportunity to mention the popularity the first text had among his peers: "The Compiler of 'English Grammar, adapted to the different Classes of Learners,' having been frequently solicited to publish an Abridgement of that work, for the use of children commencing their grammatical studies, he hopes that the epitome which he now offers to the public, will be found useful and satisfactory" (1797, a2r).

A variant of this argument is observed in J. Wilson's proposal, an improvement of Ann(e) Fisher's *A New Grammar* (1745?)—a very popular work still being published in the 1790s (Cajka 2003, 247)—by correcting typographical errors, replacing old terminology and introducing the latest contributions to English grammar. For Wilson considered that "it is better to correct an old Grammar than to attempt to introduce a new one" because "the Number of Grammars is already sufficiently large; and an old one properly corrected and received, wou'd be diminishing the propagation of Errors, at the same Time that it was disseminating Truths" (1792, vii). As a result, he edited Fisher's grammar—seemingly an authority herself in her day—but making it clear that he was not motivated by "any Wish to detract from the Merits of his fair Country Woman (her Performance for the Time and Place was no Doubt an admirable one)" (viii).

Finally, two cases which set themselves apart are those of Thomas Smetham (1774) and Mrs. Eves (1800). In his preface, Smetham disagrees with the widespread fashion of learning French in eighteenth-century England: "The passion for studying French as, for many years past, raged almost to madness; though I will be bold to say that our native language is far superior, both with respect to the learned and elegant Works

written in it, and its own peculiar excellencies” (1774, iv). In his opinion, children must learn and master their own native language first, and only then be introduced to foreign languages. Proficiency in English could be helpful to the acquisition of a second language, he believes, in his role as experienced “Master of the Academy at Southgate, and late Master of the Boarding School at Ponder’s End” (title page). Therefore, and to support his defense of the native language and the “quite new and amusing” grammar plan he proposes, Smetham quotes from polymath John Dryden (1631-1700) and the 4th Earl of Roscommon—Wentworth Dillon (1633-1684)—both of whom compare English and French:

The Great Dryden [...] says, “that the French language has all the swiftness of a greyhound; but the English, all the strengths of a mastiff.” And the Earl of Roscommon, whose authority and judgment have never been doubted, exclaims;

“Vain are our neighbours hopes, and vain their cares;  
 The fault is more their language’s than theirs:  
 ‘Tis *courtly, florid*, and abounds in *words*  
*Of softer sound* that ours perhaps affords;  
 But who did ever, in *French authors*, see  
 The Comprehensive English energy?” (Smetham 1774, iv-v; emphasis in the original)

Regarding Mrs. Eves’s *The Grammatical Play-Thing* (1800), it is a proposal for learning English grammar through role-playing and language games. The book contains a thirteen-line “Advertisement” that reproduces an excerpt from John Locke’s (1632-1704) essay *Some Thoughts Concerning Education* (1693), a book considered “the product of a long tradition of pedagogical humanism, the roots of which went back to the thought of Quintilian; Montaigne and Comenius were its modern representatives” (Kitromilides 1992, 154).<sup>9</sup> The purpose is to draw on Locke’s educational philosophy in order to justify her play-thing approach to English grammar; thus, the excerpt selected deals with the importance of engagement in the learning process—“[g]reat care is to be taken that learning be never made as a business to children, nor should they look on it as a task” (Eves 1800, A2)—and how playing and recreation can imply an extra dose of motivation for children, “suitable to their particular tempers, to make learning a sport to them” (iv). She lets the quotation speak for itself, through Locke’s own words, as a means to support her method, specifically designed “for Young Ladies from four to twelwe years old” (title page).

<sup>9</sup> Close collation with *The Works of John Locke, Esq.* (1714, vol. III) reveals some minor wording differences between the original text and Eves’s “Advertisement”—see her chapter on “Reading” (Eves 1800, §148).

4.2.2.2. Naming authors and sources for the contents included in the English grammar  
Some grammar writers report they have consulted noteworthy author(ities) and sources in the field in order to validate the contents of their English grammars, on the one hand, and to assure the public that these are consistent and age-appropriate, on the other. By explicitly naming individuals and works, grammar writers try to ensure the credibility of the grammatical knowledge and other linguistic aspects included in their books. In this way, the English grammar is backed up in some way and grammar writers are able to introduce a certain degree of objectivity to convince the audience of the excellence of the work.

In the preface to his English grammar, Thomas Blacklock explains that he follows a tripartite distinction between substantives, adjectives and particles, which is not original at all in the discipline. As a reference source, he mentions a work that had already presented word categories in simple terms: “for it [the method] is used in a very elegant manner and sensible performance, *intituled, An English education*; and recommended by Sir Richard” (Blacklock 1756, v; emphasis in the original). Quite probably, this work is John Brightland’s (d. 1717) *Reasons for An English Education* (1711), which Richard Steele (1672-1729), under the pseudonym Isaac Bickerstaff, discussed in the *Tatler* (Bickerstaff 1710, vol. IV, no. 284). However, Blacklock also claims some credit for his presentation of grammar contents insofar as the book was organized according to “the current of his own ideas, more than [...] any other grammar extant” (1756, vi).

For his part, the author of *A Short English Grammar* (1794) comments that his grammar plan results from detailed consideration of what he considers reliable authorities in the field. However, the distribution and presentation of contents follows an identified Latin grammar since it is better adapted to children’s learning needs:

He has consulted Dr. Lowth, Dr. Johnson and other authorities, at every step; but has chosen to adopt the method and plan of the Eton Latin Grammar as much as possible, for this reason, That if it shuld be thought proper to follow Dr. Lowth’s advice, and teach a boy English Grammar before he enters upon Latin, the Latin Grammar (being similar to this) will then be much easier for him to learn [...] For this reason the Author has adopted the mode of declining Substantives, and conjugating Verbs, made use in the Latin Grammar. (Anon. 1794, iv-vi)

In the quotation above, two explicit references are made to Lowth’s English grammar (1762) and to Dr Samuel Johnson’s (1709-1784) contribution to the field; in the latter he may be referring to *A Dictionary of the English Language* (1755), which incorporated a thirteen-page English grammar prefixed to the first volume.

Finally, Joseph Guy’s information on author(itie)s and sources is more concrete, although in the preface he only includes the title addressed plus the authors’ surnames: “The Etymology resembles a part of Dr. Ash’s Introduction. In the Orthography Mr.



Hewlett's excellent collection of words has been followed. Some of the examples of the parts of speech are taken from Mrs. Teachwell" (Guy 1796<sup>[2]</sup>, iv). In this case, the relevant works are (a) *Grammatical Institutes* (1760), by Minister John Ash (1724-1779), (b) the spelling-book entitled *An Introduction to Reading and Spelling* (1786), by the biblical scholar John Hewlett (1762-1844), and, possibly, (c) *The Child's Grammar* by Lady Ellenor Fenn (1744-1813), a prolific writer of children books often under the pseudonyms of Mrs. Teachwell or Mrs. Lovechild (Cajka 2003, 124-127). Guy also explains that drawing on such authorities looks for "practical excellencies, rather wishing to present youth with a valuable assemblage of information, than assume himself any claim of entire originality" (Guy 1796<sup>[2]</sup>, vi). In this sense, he aligns himself with those eighteenth-century grammar writers who knew that little innovation could be introduced in English grammar itself, yet the approaches and methodology to teach it were the key to improving the learning process.

#### 4.2.2.3. Recommending reference works for specific themes

On occasions, the prefatory matter contains bibliographical references that (adult) users might consult to broaden their knowledge on the topic. This time, grammar writers intend to provide the reader with further material to systematize the knowledge being acquired, on the one hand, and to guide self-study, on the other. An instance is found in William Ward's preface to *A Practical Grammar of the English Language* (1765?), where he names Kentish mathematician John Wallis's (1616-1703) *Grammatica Linguae Anglicanae* (1653). In Ward's opinion, Wallis's grammar is especially useful for a target audience already versed in Latin grammar: "And if you take for granted that every Learner is previously acquainted with the Latin Grammar, much of the English Grammar may be omitted. Dr. Wallis wrote his short Account of the English Grammar for those who were in the latter Situation" (1765?, vii). However, later in the preface Ward notes that, although Wallis's presentation of grammatical phenomena is concise and simple enough, the book is aimed at foreign learners of English and, therefore, fails at instructing on certain language features that would be basic for British children: "Dr. Wallis [...] has omitted, or at least touched very slightly, many Parts of his Subject [...] As for instance, the Formation of the Irregular Verbs; Rules of the Order of Position in the English Construction; and indeed almost the whole Syntax of the Language" (viii).

Another bibliographical recommendation is found in James Wood's preface: "To bestow any attention on spelling and punctuation was also judged foreign to this performance; the former belongs properly to spelling-books, in which directions concerning the latter are always inserted." A footnote is added suggesting "Maclaurin's Spelling-book, and Metcalf's English Rudiments" as further reading (1777, i). He is possibly referring to Peter Maclaurin's (?) *An Easy and Complete Introduction to Reading* (1775), which "adopted a new method of dividing syllables which, in some instances, appears more eligible than that in common use" (Griffiths and Griffiths 1775-1776,



366) and to Reverend Lister Metcalf[e]’s (?) *Rudiments of English Grammar* (1771). Similarly, John Hornsey talks of which English grammar is of particular interest for more advanced levels: “If the learner should wish to prosecute the study of English Grammar any farther, he may, with great propriety, after this, peruse Dr. Lowth’s learned treatise on the same subject” (1793, 4).

To close this section, note the anonymous author of *Rudiments of Constructive Etymology* (1795) praising and recommending the works of those s/he considers key author(itie)s in the field of English grammar: “What has hitherto been done in this science, by the late Bishop of London, Dr. Priestley, &c. does honour to their literary and critical abilities. A single glimpse to the present epitome will not convey an idea of superceding those useful and valuable tracts” (Anon. 1795, x).<sup>10</sup> In this case, s/he refers to *The Rudiments of English Grammar; Adapted to the Use of Schools* (1761) written by Joseph Priestley (1733-1804), theologian and natural philosopher.

## 5. CONCLUDING REMARKS

The material examined for this paper reveals that citing or quoting author(ities) and sources in the prefatory matter of eighteenth-century English grammars for children was not a well-established, consistent practice. However, excluding unidentifiable references, some preliminary conclusions can be drawn from the data considered.

First, grammar writers include names, work titles and excerpts from notable author(itie)s of the seventeenth- and eighteenth-century intellectual sphere either to endorse their arguments or to validate, highlight or complete the information given. All author(itie)s identified are of British origin, probably on the assumption that they were the best references possible to deal with the intricacies of the native language. Among the most notable names in the field, the most prominent place is given to grammar writers themselves. In fact, self-promotion is commonplace and grammar writers gave different arguments to justify why they should be part of the authoritative body that was contributing to building the grammatical basis of eighteenth-century English language. For this purpose, grammar writers insisted on putting on record their extensive teaching experience at schools, as well as their know-how and familiarity with the national education system. Other author(itie)s and sources appearing in the prefatory matter come from the British tradition of English grammar itself—notably figures such as Ash, Lowth and Priestley, from language-related essays and philosophical enquiries and from artistic disciplines like poetry, in which a confident mastery of the language was essential.

Second, the different kinds of prefatory texts examined incorporate textual and interpersonal metacomments that helped grammar writers to construct a convincing

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<sup>10</sup> This praising was not habitual in eighteenth-century English grammars, as Fisher (1753<sup>[3]</sup>) and Murray (1787<sup>[2]</sup>) pointed out in their respective prefaces—see section 4.2.1.

discourse that may have ensured the success and public acceptance of the work. By inserting elaborate metacomments that cross-refer to pertinent author(itie)s and sources by way of citations, paraphrases and quotations, grammar writers not only wanted to confer their work with reliability but also to gain the readers' favorable predisposition towards the contents presented. In fact, grammar writers' arguments are sometimes stronger if they frequently asserted—and demonstrated—they had consulted serious reference works and knew the latest advances in the debate on language correctness. At the same time, this bibliographical information could have defined the school of thought that influenced each grammar writer's approach to English grammar as a discipline, putting them on the map of eighteenth-century language-experts.

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