

Eighteenth-century Female English Grammar Writers: Their ‘Critical’ Voice in the Prefaces to Their Grammars¹

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Abstract

The eighteenth century was a crucial period in the history of English grammar writing. The purpose of this study is to carry out a critical discourse analysis on the prefaces of some English grammars written for schools by female English grammar-writers. In a male-dominated context of grammar production, prefaces turned into strategic instruments which allowed female grammarians to make their voices heard. By examining identification systems (Martin 1992) and transitivity structures (Halliday 2004), this study will illustrate the discourse patterns employed by female grammarians to exercise authority and to produce a persuasive effect on the reader.

Key words: critical discourse analysis, systemic functional grammar, English grammars, eighteenth century

1. Introduction²

The eighteenth century was a crucial period in the history of English grammar writing and in the process of codification of the English language. Growing interest, among the upper classes, in the vernaculars and in the proper use of the language led to a significant increase in the output of grammars (Tieken-Boon van Ostade 2008a). Eighteenth-century grammarians were mainly concerned with fixing the English language, trying to meet the demand of the reading public looking for a systematic representation of the language. “Grammar writers became ‘authorities’ on what was ‘proper’ and ‘correct’ in English. [...] We see the beginnings of the link between standard

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² The present study is based on a previous work by Fernández Martínez (in press), which illustrates a preliminary systematic codification of transitivity structures with a persuasive function in the prefaces which have also been selected for the present paper.

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language and the nation-state which was to dominate educational discourse until well into the twentieth-century” (Watts 1995: 173). The battle for the dominance of the editorial market led to a gradual increase in grammatical productivity, especially noticeable during the second half of the century. Publishers at that time employed particular strategies to make grammars appealing to prospective buyers (Tieken-Boon van Ostade 2008c: 121). The demanding conditions of publishing houses also influenced grammarians who turned the prefaces to their works into highly strategic introductory explanations of the content, audience, structure and methodology of the grammar.

Emphasis has been placed on the basic pragmatic function of prefaces as paratextual elements (Genette & Maclean 1991: 268).³ Rather than communicating pure information (e.g., the name of the author or the date of publication), they impart an authorial or editorial intention. As stated by Genette & Maclean (1991: 269), “the functions of the paratext constitute a very empirical and very diverse object, which must be derived in an inductive way, genre by genre and often species by species”. Thus, considering the editorial pressure at that time, prefaces must have gone beyond the common pragmatic role traditionally attached to them; they must have acted as powerful textual support conveying a high degree of authority over the reader. Therefore, these introductory sections should be assessed as symptomatic of the sense of grammar writers as a discourse community in itself. Grammar writers of English shared a commitment to the discursive practices in their joint enterprise to produce norms of linguistic correctness (Watts 2008: 45; Straaijer 2011: 233). From the beginning of the seventeenth to the end of the eighteenth century, English grammarians presented similarities in their discourse strategies, socio-communicative objectives and cognitive assumptions, which justified their being considered a discourse community (Watts 1995: 171). More specifically, within English grammars, prefaces are to be evaluated as the pragmatic focus of the strategies on the readers with several purposes at once. Indeed, they are indicative of the

³ The paratext is a basically heterogeneous and auxiliary discourse devoted to the service of something else, namely the text: “this text rarely appears in its naked state, without the reinforcement and accompaniment of a certain number of productions, themselves verbal or not, like an author’s name, a title, a preface, illustrations” (Genette & Maclean 1991: 261).

concept of a discourse community of grammar writers: “It is in these prefatory sections and lengthy titles that the common core of discourse strategies can be identified [...]” (Watts 1995: 147).

This paper aims to examine a selection of prefaces to eighteenth-century English grammars from a critical discourse analysis (CDA) perspective. CDA is an approach to discourse analysis which focuses on the ways in which texts are used to realize ideology and power (see, in particular, Fairclough 1995, 2001). CDA considers discourse as a tool for the social construction of reality, and also as an instrument of authority and control that “implies a dialectical relationship between a particular discursive event and the situation(s), institution(s) and social structure(s) which frame it” (Fairclough & Wodak 1997: 258). CDA has never attempted to provide either one specific theory or one specific methodology. Quite to the contrary, studies in CDA are quite eclectic, since they derive from different theoretical and methodological backgrounds. CDA has been closely associated to systemic functional linguistics, because of the multifunctional perspective of the latter and its focus on relating language to social contexts. In this sense, critical discourse analysts have traditionally preferred Halliday’s (2004) *Introduction to Functional Grammar*, ever since its first edition in 1985, as the most suitable tool for analysis (e.g. Fairclough 1995, 2001).⁴ CDA has also been quite multifarious in the kind of data used for analysis, being oriented to both socially dominant and non-dominant sets of discourse.⁵ The contribution of

⁴ Some examples of combined application of both CDA and systemic functional grammar are presented by Martin (2000) and Young & Harrison (2004). Martin (2000: 275) explains how both fields have been closely connected ever since the beginnings of critical linguistics: “For many, one of the real strengths of SFL in the context of CDA work is its ability to ground concerns with power and ideology in the detailed analysis of texts as they unfold, clause by clause, in real contexts of language use [...]”. Previous research has also given evidence of the flexibility of systemic functional grammar to be applied to earlier stages of the English language (e.g. Cummings 1995; Davies 1996). Likewise, CDA has been adaptable to the study of texts from earlier periods (e.g. Wood 2004; Fernández Martínez 2007).

⁵ Discourse analysts have examined critically various genres of institutional and professional discourse, namely educational discourse (e.g. Sinclair &

CDA has been the application of critical thought to any text or public space, unveiling hidden (or partially-hidden) strategies. The purpose of this work to study the prefaces to eighteenth-century English grammars fits in with the ‘critical’ perspective of penetrating into different fields of investigation of language use, with the further incentive of paying attention to a rather unexplored type of text. In the eighteenth century the competition of grammarians to control the reading market must have left its social imprint on the written text. As there were no established writing conventions, grammarians tended to display a persuasive authority of their own, especially perceptible in the prefaces to their grammars. Prefaces written since the Old English period have attracted the attention of scholars as textual exercise of authority (e.g. Discenza 2001; Harbus 2007). Research in the English grammatical tradition has thrived in recent years placing a major emphasis on the rules laid down in eighteenth-century grammars (e.g. Tieken-Boon van Ostade 2008b; Hickey 2010). And also, some references have been made to the upbeat tone of their prefaces and the traits of authority shown by the writers (Hodson 2008: 179-180; Tieken-Boon van Ostade 2009: 78; 2010: 2; Straaijer 2011: 174). However, the function of eighteenth-century prefaces to English grammars, as especially authoritative paratextual elements, merits further attention from a CDA point of view.

The prefaces analysed in this paper have been selected from the *Eighteenth-Century Collections Online* (ECEG), a new database of eighteenth-century grammars and grammar-writers compiled by Rodríguez-Gil & Yáñez-Bouza (2010). This electronic database provides scholars with a resource for interdisciplinary studies on the eighteenth century. It contains bibliographic information of eighteenth-century grammars of the English language, as well as biographical information of their grammar-writers. The prefaces under analysis correspond to English grammars written for schools by female English grammar-writers. They have been retrieved by selecting the following parameters: (i) ‘female’ for gender, (ii) ‘England’ for place of birth of the author, (iii) ‘English grammar’ for type of work, and

Coulthard 1975), politics (e.g. Wodak 1989), media communication (e.g. Teo 2000) and medical discourse (e.g. Fleischman 2001), among many others.

(iv) ‘institutional’ for target audience. Thus, the four grammars resulting from the search are as follows:⁶

Fisher, Ann (1750)⁷
Devis, Ellin (1775)
Gardiner, Jane (1799)
Mercy, Blanch (1799)⁸

Six grammar books were published by women in the late eighteenth century (Ellin Devis, Mrs. M.C. Edwards, Mrs. Eves, Jane Gardiner, Mrs. Taylor and Blanch Mercy). They “form an important link between earlier female grammatical pioneers and innovators like Ann Fisher and Ellenor Fenn [...] and the fast-increasing number of women educators and grammarians who followed in the nineteenth century and on into the twentieth [...]” (Cajka 2008: 192). However, despite the chronological distance between Fisher, on the one hand, and Devis, Gardiner and Mercy, on the other hand, the results obtained from the search on ECEG allows us to unify these four grammars under the same parameters.⁹ In a men-dominated context of grammar

⁶ Devis’ and Gardiner’s editions consulted in this article have been taken from *Eighteenth Century Collections Online* (ECCO). Fisher’s and Mercy’s editions have been consulted in situ in the British Library.

⁷ The first edition of Fisher’s grammar is not known, but it appears to have been published by the middle of 1745. The earliest schoolbook known is the second edition of her grammar, which was published in 1750 in Newcastle.

⁸ References in this work are only to volume I. Volume II has been omitted since it deals with the specific instructions given by the author to the instructress, bearing no relationship to the other three prefaces in structure and content.

⁹ Fisher was a schoolmistress and a popular author of school texts for the education of children. She was a prolific and experienced educator who also understood the technical requirements of book production. The other three grammarians, all of them mistresses of their own schools, presented some differences between them. Ellin Devis spent her long career educating young successful women in the higher social classes of London. Jane Gardiner and Blanch Mercy ran schools in provincial cities and towns. Devis understood in a curious and successful way the interrelation of morality and social requirements in a proper female education. Gardiner’s method blended her religious and moral convictions, being her English grammar unique as she employed it as a preparation for French. Mercy laid out the most fully

production women also made their contribution. Cajka (2008) has studied the educational philosophies which emerge through the teaching methodologies and the illustrative examples included in their grammars. Their textbooks were initially designed for use in their own schools and secondarily offered for public sale. They “were explicitly concerned with instilling into their pupils the appropriate types and amounts of academic, moral and social knowledge; in other words, they all sought to teach girls to be proper young women” (Cajka 2008: 192). The educational goals embedded in their grammars advocate a new concept of female education in England at the end of the eighteenth century. In contrast to prevailing philosophies of female education “which encouraged women to develop their sentiments and beauty to the detriment of their minds, the teacher-grammarians’ philosophies emphasized the primacy of intellectual development, particularly through the study of English grammar” (Cajka 2008: 221). The CDA approach used in this paper aims to gain insight into the way these female grammarians displayed authority through the prefaces to their grammars. More specifically, it focuses on the discursive patterns that contributed to advocate their methodologies and to influence on the readers as prospective buyers of the grammar.

Discourse analysis is basically an interpretative and deconstructing reading, with no specific guidelines to follow. Although CDA has been very eclectic in its methods of analysis, there has been a consensus on using Halliday’s (2004) functional instruments, especially his system of transitivity structure (e.g. Martin 2000), to study the relationships of authority and control established between different members in discourse. This paper aims to examine how the individuals involved in the text, specifically author and intended readership, are presented through Halliday’s (2004) transitivity structures and Martin’s (1992) identification systems. Halliday’s (2004: 168-305) transitivity arrangement supports the function of the clause as representation by depicting reality in terms of the three components of participants, processes and circumstances. They provide a valuable tool to study the role of individuals as a centre of action, illustrating their behaviour and social function, as well as the

elaborated pedagogy, advocating a form of cooperative learning between older and younger, and more and less advanced students.

network of relationships and influences enacted between them. As stated by Martin (2000: 276), the most critical variable in the English language has to do with processes being brought about, or not, by an impending agency. Distinction should be made between ongoing activities undertaken by someone, and activities undertaken by someone, but made possible by someone else. “Clearly this dimension of meaning is central to the analysis of inequality and power in discourse. It allows us to ask questions about who is acting, what kinds of action they undertake, and who or what if anything they act upon”. The two main types of processes in the English transitivity system proposed by Halliday (2004) illustrate the basic distinction between inner and outer experience. Material processes are the processes of the external world; mental processes are the processes of consciousness. Outer experience is that of actions and events; inner experience is partly a kind of replay of the former, reacting or reflecting on it. Meanwhile, relational processes are those of identifying and classifying.

The analysis of transitivity patterns in the present study will be systematized through the main identification systems operating in the prefaces. Dominance and control are determined by some linguistic means that convey information concerning the social relevance of each participant on a three-dimensional scale: The more central the participant, the more likely it is to be agent or medium, the more likely it is to provide a referent for a phoric item and to be Theme (Martin 1992: 107). Martin’s (1992) system of identification assesses the significance of individuals as a focus of structure in terms of the referential chains they produce.¹⁰ Relating to the second dimension, namely the more central the participant, the more likely it is to provide

¹⁰ Chiapello & Fairclough (2002: 193) explain the benefits of considering the two-fold role of individuals, both as a centre of structure and action, for the social analysis of the text: “Centring the concept of social practice allows an oscillation between the perspective of social structure and the perspective of social action and agency –both necessary perspectives in social research and analysis [...]”. Additionally, Martin (1992: 129) comments on the role of the participants as agents within Halliday’s transitivity structure: “The entry condition for the identification network [...] was participant, where this can be defined as a person, place or thing, abstract or concrete, capable of functioning as Agent or Medium in transitivity [...]”.

a referent for a phoric item, the system of identification enables us to value the importance attached to the participants by means of the referential chains representing them, of their extent and even their absence.

Prefaces manifest themselves as networks of authority between grammarians and a varied audience which includes children as well as adults. Bearing in mind the highly competitive character of the editorial market in the eighteenth century, special attention should be given to the role of prefaces as influential instruments addressing the readers as prospective users of the grammars.¹¹ “Before the reader is even introduced to the grammar, they have already been assimilated into it by the preface’s anticipation of how they will read the book” (Wicker 2006: 79). By considering the combination of identification systems and transitivity structures, this study will try to illustrate the discourse patterns followed by female grammarians to exercise authority and encourage the reader to use the grammar. Rather than being regarded as mere introductory explanations of the grammar, this study will illustrate how prefaces should be interpreted as a representation of functions attached to individuals that interact strategically in order to exert a persuasive effect on the reader.

2. Data analysis

The analysis of transitivity structures in this paper will be organized around the different identification systems which indicate the presence of both the author and the reader as agents. The first one dominates the

¹¹ The term ‘reader’ used in this paper embraces the different participants referred to by the authors as receivers of their message and potential beneficiaries of their grammar. Although some paratextual elements are addressed to the public in general, prefaces are addressed more specifically to the readers of the text (Genette & Maclean 1991: 267). The notion of ‘reader’ matches that of ‘audience’ as a concept internalized by the author in such a way that as he writes, he tackles the questions that may be of interest to his readers and that make the writer behave as his own reader (Berkenkotter 1981: 396). According to Watts (1995: 146), “all of the grammars during the period from the end of the sixteenth to the end of the eighteenth century [...] are explicitly addressed either to the learners or to the teachers (universally in this case ‘schoolmasters’)”.

text through the first and third person singular, and first person plural, in the active voice, and as an elided agent in some other passive structures. The presence of the readers as a centre of structure and action is scarce, being the transitivity structures where they perform subordinated to the author, who acts as a controlling entity on the role of the reader as agent.

First person singular

The identification system of the first person singular functioning as subject in transitivity structures dominates the prefaces by Gardiner, Fisher and Mercy. Considering that the more central the participant, the more likely he or she is to provide a referent for a phoric item (Martin 1992: 107), it can be noted how the author imposes her dominance in the preface as an individual entity in the first person. This identification system contrasts with the distance marked by the third person between these female grammarians, as personal entities, and their role as authors. By means of the first person singular as an agent of material and mental verbs, they claim a position of explicit personal recognition as the authors of the grammar. Material processes describe the physical actions carried out for the production of the grammar; mental processes depict an inner portrayal of the author which complements and reinforces the previous ones. By using both types of actions the author provides a two-sided description of the development of the grammar in order to underline its quality. But they also portray the author as embodying several functions in the text with a persuasive effect on the reader. These functions sometimes support each other, but others they contradict themselves.

Gardiner explains the process of construction of her grammar in a detailed way, using transitivity structures which emphasise her effort and assign to her the role of an experienced grammarian. Gardiner depicts herself as an expert and a guide in the learning process of the English language in order to gain the confidence of the reader as a prospective user of the grammar. Thus, these transitivity arrangements lead the reader to appreciate and trust the grammar on the basis of the quality method which underpins it, but also of the basis of its author as a good professional: *THE method I have pursued will obviate this difficulty [...]* (Gardiner 1799: iv); *THIS initiatory book may properly*

be termed an extract or rather a select compendium of the most approved English Grammars; from which **I have endeavoured to select what experience has taught are to be most useful**, to attain a thorough knowledge of the English Language (Gardiner 1799: A2). Gardiner gives the impression of having undertaken a very complex enterprise with determination. Additionally, her defiant attitude confronting the methodologies followed by previous grammarians increases the merits of her grammar and presents it as distinctive and innovative: *IT will necessary to inform the Reader, that, with a view to render these Rudiments still more useful, I have ventured to differ from the Grammarians I have consulted [...]* (Gardiner 1799: A2). The author makes use of mental actions both to assign different roles to herself and to reinforce the excellence of the method followed, as depicted by material processes. The self-confidence that emerges from the interaction of the previous structures is further confirmed by her concern with success and the reader's acceptance of her work. Indeed, by taking it implicitly for granted, the author is predisposing an attitude of approval on the reader: *how far I have succeeded, can only be discovered by the perusal of this Essay, which is humbly submitted to the judgment of the candid Reader* (Gardiner 1799: iv). Furthermore, verbal actions facilitate the control over the addressee, since they function as approaching strategies which accomplish a more direct way of communication and persuasion: *AS the knowledge of the English Language is universally esteemed a branch of polite education, I shall not detain the Reader by enlarging on the subject, but immediately proceed to give a succinct account of this small Performance [...]* (Gardiner 1799: A2). Approaching positions create a feeling of confidence on the reader. He is misled into a fake sense of familiarity and confidence with the writer which makes him more receptive, but also more prone to manipulation.

Similarly, in Mercy's grammar the transitivity patterns with the first person singular as agent describe her as performing different functions on the reader. Transitivity structures do not merely explain experiential reality, but take it as an implicit pretext to depict the writer strategically. Mercy uses verbal structures in order to achieve a more direct communication with the addressee. She plays the role of advisor in order to attract his confidence: **I recommend [...]** **I talk [...]** (Mercy 1799: A2). Yet, her two-fold role as an agent and receiver in

the verbal process *address* unveils a dominant position in the text. By performing the function of both participants within the same transitivity structure the author is depicted as a reflective entity and reference of criterion: *I wish it to be understood, that I do not pretend to dictate to those whose experience has already formed one [...] but to those who have not yet adopted any plan, I address myself*. (Mercy 1799: A2-iv). Mercy also uses relational intensive structures to present herself as a witness of past linguistic deficiencies, which in some way entitles her to act as a further guide for the grammatical amelioration of the reader: *I have frequently been witness to children's [...] (Mercy 1799: A2)*. Additionally, these roles support her portrayal as an expert and monitor of linguistic improvement: *to remedy the evil, by giving the pupil little to learn by heart, but much to put in practice [...] (Mercy 1799: A2); I have given but few examples, in order to prevent young people from learning by rote [...] (Mercy 1799: iv)*. The cognitive verb *thought* incorporates a further role presenting the author as a carefully thoughtful assistance, which confers a feeling of security on the reader: *I thought proper to begin with it (Mercy 1799: iv)*. Mercy also refers to her feelings (*I wish*) and intentions (*I do not pretend*). She describes herself inwardly, as an affective and cognitive entity, in order to transfer familiarity to the reader, a sense of shared feelings and impressions which apparently downgrades any commanding purpose. Accordingly, Mercy is portrayed as a close individual to the reader, showing an affective and meditative stance, and trying to guide his behaviour with judgement. She presents herself as a solid support and assistance in the learning process of the reader. She creates an emotional state of security and self-esteem on the addressee which leads him to believe in his learning possibilities as a likely fruitful reality.

Fisher uses material verbs to describe the skilful method employed for the construction of the grammar, but a rendering of the method turns into the excuse to embrace some other advertising goals. These transitivity structures convey the idea of a work of quality, and hence help transmit confidence on the reader: *How far I have followed these necessary Principles [...]* (Fisher 1750: A2). The next structure illustrates Fisher's self-assurance as a source of reflection in order to foreground the facts presented and to prompt the reader's approval of his message. Rather than allowing the reader to judge by himself, the

firm and somewhat reliable position of the author imposes implicitly a positive judgment on the part of the reader: ***I make no Doubt, but that his Examples of bad English will be universally approved of*** (Fisher 1750: ii). However, the presentation of her grammar as a reference of quality, which unveils the concept of the author as a good professional, confronts the modesty exhibited by Fisher through different types of transitivity schemes: *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 [...]*** (Fisher 1950: A2). The following relational attributive arrangement *ought I to be content* evinces how the author resigns herself to low acceptance of her work. The author is willing to accept a minimum of public recognition and any blame coming from the reader: *by so much **ought I to be content with the least Share of Publick Thanks, and the greatest of its Blame, if this Grammar, as she last, be not equal, or preferable, to the best yet publish'd*** (Fisher 1750: A2-ii). Verbal processes permit a straight and more persuasive effect on the reader, as well as including a further reference to the author's humbleness (*humbly*) which repeats once more through the elided relational structure *unwilling to rob him: I am obliged to an ingenious Friend for the following LETTER, which **I humbly recommend, and shall communicate it in his own Words; unwilling to rob him of any Applause that it may be thought to deserve*** (Fisher 1750: ii). Therefore, the most salient feature emerging from the role of the first person singular in Fisher's preface is the paradoxical mixture of transitivity structures grouped in two functional sides. The author tries to adopt a modest position which is contradicted by the pride and self-confidence displayed in the presentation of her grammar. Fisher lays emphasis on an unpretentious attitude and treats the reader from a more equalized position. Thus, the reader places trust in the author, who turns the former into a weaker individual, more compliant with the assertions of the latter. So, at some points, exerting control seems to rely on an oscillating strategy which moves from explicit manifestation of authority to graduated performances of seemingly lessened authority.

Third person singular

Devis employs the third person singular in order to mark the distance between her personal identity and her performance as the author of the preface. The *author* uses material verbs which describe the procedures followed for the development of the grammar and the difficulties met in that process. Once more, the description includes further strategic purposes. An account which combines attention to detail and overcoming troubles somehow increases the virtues of her work: *To obviate the Difficulties the Author herself has met with, she has drawn up this English Accidence [...]* (Devis 1775: vi). *The Author* is also the subject of intensive attributive relational structures which indicate her self-assurance when assessing the deficiencies of past grammars. By discrediting other grammars, the grammarian highlights the merits of her own grammar. Meanwhile her self-confidence implicitly encourages the reader to appreciate her grammar: *The Author is, however, convinced from Observation, that most of the Grammars, which have hitherto appeared, are neither too abstruse, and much above the Comprehension of Children [...]* (Devis 1775: v-vi). The third person also appears as a subject of psychological verbs indicating the author's self-satisfaction with her work: *the Perspicuity and Simplicity of which, she flatters herself, may render it of Use, particularly in Schools* (Devis 1775: vi). The material description of the methodology is supplemented with the inner depiction of the writer as a trustworthy agent. Devis provides an intended affective and cognitive account of herself in order to prompt the reader's endorsement. This binary representation, namely material and mental, highlights the excellence of the grammar. Accordingly, Devis adjusts the degree of authority displayed in the text alternating tactics of proximity to the reader, where she refers to her inner feelings and intellectual processes, with the material actions which justify the distinction of the method and content of the grammar.

First person plural

Fisher is the only grammarian among the four under analysis who employs the first person plural. This factor might be an indication of the chronological distance between her earlier work and the grammars published in the late eighteenth century by Devis, Gardiner and Mercy.

However, this theory does not seem to be valid taking into account that the third person singular only appears in Devis' preface. The first person plural is used by Fisher to make the reader share her opinion and certify it as a common sense assumption: *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: But, on the contrary, am ready to allow, that, by how much more foever **we are indebted** to the ingenious Contriver of any new Scheme for the Publick Advantage, than to him who only improves upon it [...]* (Fisher 1750: A2). Fisher employs the first person plural *we* as a subject with an inclusive meaning demanding public acknowledgment to any grammatical contribution for the study of the language, but ultimately as a means of providing public recognition to her own work. The inclusive *we* (see, e.g. Fairclough 2001: 106) allows the writer to exert authority in the text by unifying addresser and addressee under his own criterion. Therefore, this structure transforms a personal viewpoint into a logical supposition, although it somehow contradicts and downgrades the modesty evinced through the identification system in the first person singular.

Passive structures

Another of the most recurrent linguistic arrangements encoded in the four prefaces under study is the passive voice with an elided agent. These structures focus the attention of the text on the author as a centre of action, more importantly, on his function as a grammar pundit. As in the previous referential systems, material and mental processes are employed in order to describe the skilled and accurate method followed for the production of the grammars. The absence of an explicit agent lays emphasis on the actions performed by the author, which are to be taken as indicators of a work of high standard, rather than on her presence as a centre of structure: *The Accidence **are written** in as concise and plain a manner as possible, and the simplest mode of explaining the different moods and tenses of the verb **has been adopted*** (Mercy 1799: iv); *a particular regard **has been paid** to such arrangement, connection, and brevity, as might give a clear and easy conception of them [...]* (Gardiner 1799: iv).

Similarly, Fisher vindicates explicitly what is the implicit purpose of the transitivity patterns in the four prefaces, namely the justification of the significance and efficiency of the grammar on the grounds of the exceptional method embedded in it, more importantly on the grounds of the role of the author as a good professional: *A BOOK of this kind, when the Method is clear; the Plan **well laid, and duly executed**, needs no other Recommendation than its own general and extensive Use* (Fisher 1750: A2). Far from merely describing the method, the transitivity structures involved aim to present the writer as a specialist on teaching grammar. Transitivity arrangements of material actions with omitted agent recur in the four prefaces under study in order to describe a well-executed technique as the best guarantee of the good quality of the grammar. They focus the attention of the reader on the actions and omit any reference to the assumed author. More specifically, Devis seems to transfer to her own grammar the excellence of the grammars from which she has selected some rules and reflections: *The following Pages **are not offered** as entirely new; the greatest Part **is selected** from the Works of our best Grammarians* (Devis 1775: v); *For this Purpose **are added some** Sentences, Maxims, and Reflections, taken from different Authors* (Devis 1775: viii). In a similar manner, Gardiner validates the quality of her grammar by relating it to the most exclusive English grammars, namely sometimes making reference to authoritative grammars implies a transfer of authority to her own grammar. However, the passive with the elided third person plural as agent allows Gardiner to lessen her authority, as she dissociates herself from the praise she confers to her work: *THIS initiatory book **may properly be termed** an extract or rather a select compendium of the most approved English Grammars; from which I have endeavoured to select what experience has taught are to be most useful, to attain a thorough knowledge of the English Language* (Gardiner 1799: A2).

Another passive transitivity structures present the author's statements as generally accepted beliefs or actions. Devis claims for recognition from the reader on the actions undertaken in the production of her grammar and excuses missing aspects or flaws: *indeed, very few positive Rules **can be given**, either for Spelling, or Pronunciation [...]* (Devis 1775: vi-vii). By using the passive without an explicit reference to the agent, Devis detaches herself from the

mistakes made in her grammar. The passive in this case is used by the writer to justify deficiencies in her work and to discharge herself from any responsibility on the matter. On a more specific level, Devis marks some distance in her decision to exclude remarks on orthography and prosody: *There are so many Spelling Books and Dictionaries extant, that it did not seem necessary to add any particular Remarks on Orthography, and Prosody [...]* (Devis 1775: vi). Likewise, Mercy deliberately exonerates herself of likely faults in her grammar by appealing to the comprehension of the reader and, as stated by Cajka (2008: 214), trying carefully not to offend experienced teachers: *I wish it to be understood, that I do not pretend to dictate to those whose experience has already formed one [...] but to those who have not yet adopted any plan, I address myself* (Mercy 1799: A2-iv).

Gardiner uses a cognitive verb *esteemed* with an elided third person in order to make the reader aware of the importance of learning the English language. The preface endorses the grammar by connecting the relevance of learning the English language to the efficacy of the work presented. In addition, by using an implicit universal third person she presents it as a general assumption: *As the knowledge of the English Language is universally esteemed a branch of polite education, I shall not detain the Reader by enlarging on the subject, but immediately proceed to give a succinct account of this small Performance, which was drawn up at first for the use of my own School, and is now made public, in hopes of its proving useful to others* (Gardiner 1799: A2). Devis also employs a similar pattern of identification system and transitivity structure with cognitive verb with the same purpose. The author asserts the widely accepted importance of the grammatical study of the language and implicitly conveys the need for that specific grammar: *A Grammatical Study of our own Language, is at present thought so essential a Part of Education [...] it is presumed [...]* (Devis 1775: v).

Reader

In the four prefaces analysed in this work, not many identification systems refer to the reader, which evinces their minor significance as participants in the prefaces, as compared to the author. Readers are not described as autonomous individuals with the capacity to act by

themselves. Quite to the contrary, their function as agents, either in active or passive structures, is subtly supervised by the author. Although it has been claimed that grammars often included educational recommendations: “Time is spent indicating the target group of learners for whom the grammar has been constructed, and suggestions of a didactic kind are often made” (Watts 1995: 154), it can be argued that those suggestions are in fact understated instructions through which the author exerts authority.

Devis depicts herself not only as a specialist, but also as a facilitator of the learning practice of the reader: *Besides, the Intent of this little Book, is only to point out the Properties of the several Parts of Speech [...] so as to enable **the Learner to parse** an Exercise which will, perhaps, be found the easiest, and most effectual Method of teaching* (Devis 1775: vii). She employs transitivity structures with cognitive verbs (both in active and passive forms) not merely to describe the actions to be undertaken when learning the language, but to present the learner as subjected to the expertise of the author: *For, when **Children are thus accustomed to name** readily the Part of Speech of every Word, and the Nominative Case to every Verb, they more perfectly **comprehend and remember** those Rules, which when only **learned** by rote, make but a slight Impression on the Memory, and are, probably, seldom well **understood** by them* (Devis 1775: vii-viii). The author’s intention is to predispose the addressee to use her grammar. Thus, transitivity constructions with cognitive verbs portray the writer as a professional with capacity to guide the learning of the reader and to assess how learning should be carried out in order to be successful: *The former **will be learned** in the best Manner by verbal Instruction and Practice; the latter, by an Attention to the best Readers* (Devis 1775: vii); *The noun being the easiest part of speech to **comprehend** [...]* (Mercy 1799: iv).

The writer comments on misguided education attitudes of the past as a way to fix a new pattern of future actions for the grammatical development of the learner: *that after a great deal of time has been spent in **learning** one Grammar, that time may not be lost, **by the Learner’s being puzzled** with different names of cases [...]* and, in short, *by having entirely to **learn** a new Grammar* (Gardiner 1799:

iv).¹² The same function supports the following transitivity structures where the identity of the reader becomes more specific: *I have frequently been witness to **children's** [...] without even **knowing how to make the verb agree** [...]* (Mercy 1799: A2); *there are **few young ladies** (comparatively speaking) who **reap any advantage from them** [...]* (Mercy 1799: A2). But strategically, she takes the approval of the reader for granted: *it **will necessarily be discovered**, whether the rules **be perfectly to comprehend** or nor.* (Mercy 1799: iv). Generally considered, the reader is described as a non-self-sufficient entity, whose grammatical improvement is controlled by the grammarian. Rather than describing explicitly the steps needed for the accomplishment of the perfect knowledge of the English language, the writer implicitly imposes on the reader a line of action which subliminally incorporates the grammar presented.

The writer confers authority to the reader, since he is allowed the power to assess her work. Although she pretends not to interfere in his judgement, the dynamic of persuasion created by the network of transitivity structures in the text say the opposite, and the judgement of the reader turns into a guided judgement: *Thus wholly relying on the Merit of the Work, I refer it entirely to the impartial Judgment of the Publick* (Fisher 1750: ii); *How far I have followed these necessary Principles, is left to the Decision of all candid and judicious Readers [...]* (Fisher 1750: A2). The seemingly power conferred to the reader may be reckoned to be more convincing by maintaining an attitude of modesty. Once again, the writer downgrades her position of authority in the text in order to mislead the reader: *how far I have succeeded can only be discovered by the perusal of this Essay, which is humbly submitted to the judgment of the candid Reader* (Gardiner 1799: iv). Although momentarily, the authority of the writer is understated so as to make the reader notice his dominant position in the text. The writer attracts his confidence in a new version of approaching strategy which turns the reader into a weaker agent, more likely to receive the message of the author, but also to be influenced by him.

¹² According to Cajka (2008: 196), Gardiner earned some criticism for assuming that girls could best learn grammar by following the method which she outlined in her text. She described it as being logical and highly structured, and her aims as 'progressive' and 'rational'.

Summary of functions

The following charts summarise the functions attached to identification systems and transitivity structures in the four prefaces analysed. Although as stated by Watts (1995: 154), each grammar fulfilled an advertising function trying to offer something distinctive from the other grammars, it can be noted that uniqueness was somehow lessened by the similarity in the codification of transitivity patterns and the functions which underline them.¹³

FISHER

Identification system	Function
First person singular	skilful method, false modesty, verbal approach, self-confidence
First person plural	making the reader share the opinion of the writer and validating grammar demanding public acknowledgment to any grammatical contribution for the study of the language, providing public recognition to her work
Passive structures	authority from carefully crafted method
Reader	authority conferred to the reader, reader as a judge

¹³ Despite some differences in the form of the transitivity structures used, similar functions were obtained in a previous study focused on two relevant male eighteenth-century grammarians, namely Lowth and Priestley (Fernández Martínez 2013). Although further research remains to be carried out in order to extend the scope of male and female grammarians under analysis, divergent discursive patterns based on the sex of the authors may initially be rejected.

DEVIS

Identification system	Function
Third person singular	process of construction, self-confidence, satisfaction, conveying excellence to the grammar
Passive structures	authority coming from references to best grammarians exonerating the writer of possible mistakes
Reader	presenting writer as an expert to validate the grammar

GARDINER

Identification system	Function
First person singular	process of production, author as an expert and guide, effort, risky enterprise, defiant attitude, self-confidence, concern with success, conveying work of quality and predisposing its acceptance, approaching attitude
Passive structures	authority coming from carefully crafted method asserting the importance of learning a language to convey the need of the grammar undermining authority to get approval of the reader
Reader	writer depicting linguistic behaviour of the learner emphasis on wrong past actions in order to activate future linguistic conduct authority conferred to the reader, readers as judges

MERCY

Identification system	Function
First person singular	advisor, witness of linguistic deficiencies, guide of linguistic improvement, centre of reflection, affective and cognitive entity supporting method
Passive structures	authority coming from carefully crafted method trying to achieve comprehension on the part of the reader
Reader	writer depicting linguistic behaviour of the learner emphasis on wrong past actions to activate future linguistic behaviour

3. Conclusion

This paper has tried to take advantage of the challenge CDA offers to analyse structural relationships of dominance and control as these are realised in language. While CDA has been oriented towards different types of texts, there are still countless genres and public spaces, not only in present-day English, but also in previous stages of the English language, which merit further attention from a CDA point of view. Although prefaces to eighteenth-century English grammars manifest themselves as valuable paratextual elements to explore how the discourse community of English grammarians displayed authority, they remain an area hitherto unexplored.

As illustrated in the analysis carried out in this paper, rather than being regarded as mere introductory explanations of the content, structure or methodology of the grammar, prefaces represent strategic arrangements of discursive structures which take these features as a key pretext to exert authority in different ways. The study of the four prefaces selected has evinced a systematic codification of identification systems, transitivity structures and functions which merge between themselves in order to produce an overall persuasive effect on the reader. Sometimes these structures support each other;

sometimes they contradict themselves, in both cases uncovering hidden connotations of authority and control. Some linguistic constructions lay emphasis on unpretentious attitudes and depict the author as unwilling to discredit the works of other grammarians. However, these constructions conflict with many others whose function is to show the author's high self-esteem, as well as vindicate the excellence and recognition of her work.

A personal affective touch pervades the prefaces at some points, where the author supports material actions on an inner reality of feelings and reflections which exert a persuasive effect on the reader. On many occasions, authority in the four prefaces is based on a fluctuation of distance and closeness to the addressee, whereby the authors blend explicit exhibitions of control with attitudes of downgraded authority. The reader seems to be misled by the closeness and familiarity of the writer, which makes him feel more confident, receptive and eventually easier to be manipulated. But approaching strategies also include a transfer of authority to the reader, who is apparently bestowed the power to judge and decide by himself, although under the subtle control of the author. Authors perform different roles in such a way that they influence the reader's perception of the grammar and persuade him to feel the need for that specific grammar. They also construct a role for themselves as textual mediators for potential readers; they meddle in the text as a centre of reflection controlling the truthfulness of the message and anticipating the success of their work; and they also perform as monitors and linguistic assistants of the learner establishing the path for successful linguistic behaviour in the future. Thus, prefaces fulfil an advertising function not only of grammars, but ultimately of the authors of those grammars. In such a competitive context of editorial grammar production, eighteenth-century prefaces to English grammars developed into strategic instruments which allowed female grammarians to display authority and have a voice, as male grammarians also did. Nevertheless, further research remains to be carried out on a broader scope of both male and female grammarians in order to continue establishing the similarities or divergences in the discursive patterns of the prefaces to their grammars.

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