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# John Kirkby and *The Practice of Speaking and Writing English*: Identification of a Manuscript

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## 1. *The manuscript*

The Brotherton Library of the University of Leeds possesses an anonymous eighteenth-century manuscript bearing the title *The Practice of Speaking and Writing English*.<sup>1</sup> The manuscript is complete, with a beginning and an end, and it is written in a single, clear hand. The text of the manuscript was obviously intended for publication: as already noted, it has a title; moreover, its pages are numbered and the chapter headings have been indicated on top of each page. There is even a dedication, later obliterated, which reads: 'To the right Honourable the Earl of Rockingham' (see Plate 1). Furthermore, on page 149 of the manuscript, in the right-hand margin, a message may be found addressed to the printer: 'To the/Printer/Set these/accord/ing to the/Numbers/53<sup>rd</sup> before/54<sup>th</sup>.' (see Plate 2). There are, however, no marks in the manuscript itself to suggest that it was ever used as printer's copy. If the manuscript ever was printed, the printer must have had a copy made for the purpose.

Several questions arise relating to this manuscript, such as whether the text was ever printed, as appears to have been the author's intention, and, obviously, who wrote it and when. By first considering these last two questions, it will be possible to answer the initial question as well.

## 2. *Author and date of publication*

Ian Michael notes that the manuscript, after it was sold by Sotheby on 28-29 June 1865, was attributed to Captain John Stevens, author of works such as a

Spanish-English, English-Spanish dictionary (1706) and a Spanish grammar (1725).<sup>2</sup> Stevens's death in 1726 would provide a *terminus ad quem* for the *Practice*. However, Michael observes that there is an interesting similarity between the text of the *Practice* and John Kirkby's *New English Grammar*, published in 1746.<sup>3</sup> For one thing, both works use the same threefold system of parts of speech, which is otherwise unique in the English grammatical tradition.<sup>4</sup> In addition, there are many verbal parallels between the two works. On the strength of this, Michael concludes that the *Practice* must have been produced after Kirkby's grammar, and that it may provisionally be dated c. 1750.<sup>5</sup>

In arriving at this conclusion, however, important evidence has been overlooked by Michael. This evidence concerns the nature of the verbal parallels between the *Practice* and Kirkby's grammar. The text of the *Practice* – and this is particularly clear for its chapter on syntax – contains many additions, changes, obliterations and inversions. The author of the manuscript appears to have revised his text, making additions to the rules as they were originally composed, as on top of page 149 (reproduced as Plate 2), adding examples, as in Rules 52 and 53, changing the order of his rules (Rules 53 and 54), as well as generally changing the wording of his text, as with *thus* in Rule 56 which is substituted by *the same way*. All these changes show the *Practice* in the process of its composition. From the fact that most syntactic rules, albeit often in a different order, may be found in their final, revised form in Kirkby's *Grammar*, it can only be concluded that the *Grammar* must have been based on the *Practice* rather than the other way round, as Michael suggests. The *Practice* must therefore be dated some time before 1746.

This new date still leaves the possibility of the author being Captain John Stevens. However, there are a number of reasons why this possibility must be discarded. In his *New Spanish Grammar* (1725), Stevens acknowledges the following eight parts of speech: noun, pronoun, verb, particle, adverb, conjunction, preposition and interjection.<sup>6</sup> According to Michael, this system of parts of speech, System 1 in his classification, is 'the purest of the Latin systems', and when adopted by English grammarians it 'represents the direct application of Latin to English'.<sup>7</sup> It is one of the three most frequently used systems in the English grammatical tradition, the other two being Systems 9 and 10.<sup>8</sup> By contrast, the author of the *Practice* prefers a system of only three parts of speech, as does Kirkby: substantive (including the pronoun), adjunctive (comprising the adjective, including the article, and the verb, including the participle) and particle (comprising the adverb, the conjunction, the preposition, and the interjection).<sup>9</sup> As observed above, this system

was not used in any other grammar of English. The use of this particular system, according to Michael, reflects an attempt to gain control over the English language,<sup>10</sup> and it represents the other side of the then current conflict as to whether English grammar should be based on Latin grammar, or whether it should have its own distinctive system. Stevens was obviously an advocate of the Latin approach in the description of vernacular languages.

In the light of all this, the following confusion of terms in the *Practice* is significant. Michael observes that the author of the *Practice* occasionally uses the term *Explicit* in the sense of 'subject', adding that 'it seems to be sometimes a second thought', as generally the term *Person* is used.<sup>11</sup> In Kirkby's grammar, the term *Explicit* is used consistently. In the *Practice*, therefore, the occurrence of the term *Explicit* is indeed the result of a second thought, for what we witness is an author who, when revising his text, decides to change his terminology halfway through. In all likelihood the term would have been adopted throughout in the course of yet another revision of the text, such as would have been part of the process of preparing the manuscript for the printer. The same applies to the term *Adjunctive*, used by Kirkby for one of his three parts of speech (comprising the adjective including the article, and the verb including the participle), but for which the author of the *Practice* uses the term *Adjective*. This latter term is of course particularly confusing, in view of the same word being used for one of its subcategories. This subcategory is consequently referred to as 'adjectives properly so called' (see Chapter VI). When revising the text, the anonymous author appears to have decided to adopt the term *Adjunctive* as a means of avoiding confusion, though he occasionally uses the new term even in a context properly requiring the word *Adjective*.<sup>12</sup> A new terminology is clearly being developed as part of the process of revising the manuscript. It seems unlikely that Stevens, given his position in the Latin-English controversy, would have broken so radically with the Latin tradition as to have crossed over to the opposite side, constituted by what may be referred to as the vernacular movement.

If Stevens did not write the *Practice*, who did? One significant factor in the confusion of terms described here is that in Kirkby's grammar the terms *Explicit* and *Adjunctive* are used consistently throughout. The possibility therefore presents itself that Kirkby is the author of the *Practice*, and that the manuscript is perhaps an earlier version of his *New English Grammar*. There is one important clue to be followed up in all this: the handwriting of the manuscript. In my search for written evidence from the hand of Kirkby, I have come across two letters, both addressed by Kirkby

to the Royal Society.<sup>13</sup> The first letter is dated 6 January 1751/2 and evidently served to accompany two copies of Kirkby's book *The Doctrine of Ultimators* (1748), which he presented to the Royal Society Library; amongst other things, the letter contains a request that he be made Fellow of the Royal Society. The second letter, reproduced as Plate 3 below, is dated 15 February of the same year; in it, Kirkby inquires whether the presented books have arrived at the Royal Society – he had not received an acknowledgement of their arrival.<sup>14</sup> A comparison between the handwriting of the letters and that of the *Practice*, for which see Plate 2, proves beyond doubt that the manuscript was indeed written by Kirkby. Compare, for example, the upper-case letters *B*, *C*, *P*, *G* and *I* in both texts, as well as the lower-case *d* with its characteristic flourish; and also words such as *the*, *of* and *never*. The author of *The Practice of Speaking and Writing English* may therefore be identified as Kirkby, and the manuscript must have been produced some time prior to the appearance of the *New English Grammar* in 1746.

### 3. *The obliterated dedication*

There is yet another somewhat puzzling question concerning the manuscript, namely why the dedication was obliterated. Apparently, Kirkby had intended to dedicate his *Practice of Speaking and Writing English* to the Earl of Rockingham; it remains to be seen why he changed his mind. *The Complete Peerage* is particularly helpful here.<sup>15</sup> Only three Earls of Rockingham are recorded. The third of them, Thomas Watson, a bachelor, died of smallpox on 26 February 1746 (N.S.) and upon his death, the Earldom of Rockingham became extinct. Could this third Earl of Rockingham have been Kirkby's patron? If so, his sudden death would explain why Kirkby had second thoughts about the dedication of his grammar, as it would have been, to say the least, inappropriate for a book to be dedicated to a dead man. But as Thomas Watson had inherited his title only the previous year, another candidate must be considered: Lewis Watson, the second Earl of Rockingham. However, according to *The Complete Peerage*, this Earl was known by another of his titles, Viscount Sondes, thus ruling him out as Kirkby's possible patron.

Kirkby's intended patron, then, appears to have been Thomas Watson, third Earl of Rockingham, though the latter's untimely death forced the author to find an alternative dedicatee for the book. The obliterated dedication tells us even more: since Thomas Watson had inherited his title only upon Lewis Watson's death on 4

December 1745, it seems probable that the completion of the *Practice* may be dated some time between 4 December 1745 and 26 February of the following year, when Thomas Watson died. It is only to be expected that Kirkby had begun the writing of his grammar some time earlier.

But not much earlier. Though little is known about Kirkby, we do have some information about the period preceding the one under discussion here, for Kirkby spent some time as tutor to Edward Gibbon. As Gibbon writes in his *Memoirs*, 'I was delivered at the age of seven (April 1744) into the hands of Mr John Kirkby who exercised about eighteen months the office of my domestic Tutor'.<sup>16</sup> Kirkby taught Gibbon arithmetic, English and Latin. In addition, he may well have served as the family's chaplain, a function which eventually led to his dismissal from the Gibbons' service. This unhappy event is described by Bergström: 'An unfortunate incident in the parish church – he [Kirkby] omitted the name of King George in the prayers – meant the loss of Gibbon's patronage and he was dismissed "with some reluctance and a decent reward"'.<sup>17</sup> It is not unlikely that Kirkby's interest in the English language dates from the time of his service with the Gibbon family, as this appears to have been his first time as a tutor.<sup>18</sup> It seems to me that the manuscript may therefore be dated either 1744 or 1745, the *Grammar* being completed late in 1745 or in the beginning of 1746.

However, it is possible to date the *Practice* even more accurately. By chance, the page opposite the title page of the manuscript contains a list headed 'Errata in Automathes', also in Kirkby's hand. *Automathes* is the title of Kirkby's not very successful attempt at novel writing. The book was published in 1745, and an advertisement for it appears at the back of Kirkby's *New English Grammar*. However 'Useful and Entertaining' the book may have been, Gibbon, who possessed a copy, did not have a very high opinion of it.<sup>19</sup> It was not a very original work either, as Bergström notes: it 'has been characterized as a downright plagiarism of a book of almost the same title published nine years earlier' (p. 66n). The list of errata for this book appearing in the *Practice* suggests that Kirkby must have been working on his grammar after *Automathes* was published. As noted in the *Dictionary of National Biography*, a second edition of the novel came out in Dublin only a year later, in 1746; presumably the list of errata was intended to be incorporated in this new edition. For much if not all the composition of the manuscript I would therefore suggest the year 1745.

#### 4. *Publication of the Practice*

The manuscript grammar is thus clearly an earlier version of the printed grammar. The terminology used in the *New English Grammar*, which was still undergoing some modification in the *Practice*, is particularly indicative of this, but so are the differences between the two sections on syntax which are for the most part very similar. For his final version Kirkby appears to have tried to present his syntax in a more systematic way, and it is this assumption which explains most of the changes he made. Some examples may illustrate this. Rule 13 in the *Practice*, which discusses the occurrence of several auxiliaries with a single main verb (*We always do think so, always did, always will, and always must*), has been moved backwards in the *New English Grammar*, following Rule 28 which also deals with auxiliaries. Rule 67 in the *Practice* treats the position of the subject with several coordinated verbs (*He came, fought, and conquered*) and Rule 68 deals with coreferentiality between subject and reflexive pronominal (*Jane has not yet dressed herself*). These rules are preceded by a number of rules relating to the category of the adjective and followed by a rule on the position of prepositions, conjunctions and adverbs in the sentence. In the *New English Grammar* the two rules have been moved forward (Rules 13 and 14), so that they may now be found among other rules treating related matters of concord. The ordering of the rules in the *New English Grammar* is therefore clearly much more thematic.

Some rules have been omitted as part of the process of revision. Rule 26 in the *Practice* seems to present an incorrect analysis of the type of sentence in question: 'When one or more Implicate Persons or Names [i.e. objects] come between the Definite and the Indefinite Verb, the Particle *to* must be expressed; as, *I did that to try. He has me to teach. You have us to play. Ask them to sit down*'. Upon revising his grammar, Kirkby presumably recognized that in fact the verbs belong to different clauses instead of to one as the rule suggests. His decision to omit the rule altogether was therefore a sensible one. Rules 31, 32 and 34 do not occur in the *New English Grammar* either, that is, not in the chapter on syntax. They do appear elsewhere in the grammar, though in a different form. Two rules were added by Kirkby. Rule 3 has been modified in the *New English Grammar*. In the *Practice* the rule simply reads, 'The Relatives *which* and *that* may be used for *who*; as, *The Men which (or that) told us*', whereas in the *New English Grammar* Kirkby first observes 'When the Antecedent denotes an intelligent Being, its proper Relative is *who*; as *Men, who say*' (Rule 3). In a following rule he adds, 'Yet the

Relatives *which* and *that* are often used for *who*; as *The Man, which (or that) told us*' (Rule 4). It appears that Kirkby was well aware of the discussion then current with respect to the nature of the antecedent and the form of the relative pronominal.<sup>20</sup> The second addition fills a gap apparently noticed by Kirkby. Some nouns, Kirkby observes in the *New English Grammar*, never occur except after a preposition: '*They go in Quest of him. For your Sake. In my Stead. He is kept in Durance. In a Trice*' (Rule 11).

Kirkby's more systematic treatment of English syntax in the *New English Grammar* also resulted in the conflation of a number of rules, the clearest example being his rendering of the identically arranged Rules 42, 43 and 44 in the *Practice* as a single rule in the *New English Grammar*: 'The Words *whether, let, if* are understood by setting the Explicit [subject] after its Verb; as . . .' (Rule 44). Another example of a conflation of two rules, which at the same time involves a clarification of their contents, is Rule 69 in the *Practice* which deals with verbs which have two objects, a direct and an indirect object. The same phenomenon is treated elsewhere in the manuscript, in a later addition scribbled in between Rules 83 and 84, though from this rule it would appear that double objects occur only with a relatively limited number of verbs: *give, grant, show, teach, yield* and *forgive*. The new rule, number 67 in the *New English Grammar*, is stated more generally, while Kirkby has also added a note explaining how the indirect object can be distinguished from the direct object: 'This appears plain by putting the Person after the Thing, in which Case the Preposition must be expressed; as, *She sold her House to him. Make a Gown for her*'.

There are also, however, a number of significant differences between the two texts. One concerns the system for phonemic transcription used in the manuscript, which seems unique as far as I have been able to ascertain. To give an example of this system, see the following transcription of the twenty-one diphthongs Kirkby recognizes for the English language (p. 8):

- |                    |                                  |
|--------------------|----------------------------------|
| 1. ɔɪ i in Wine    | 8. ɔɔ yo in Yoke                 |
| 2. ɔɛ ea in Ear    | 9. ɔɛ you in Young               |
| 3. ɔɪ ya in Yard   | 10. ɔɔ you in Youth              |
| 4. ɔɪ ye in Yes    | 11. ɔɔ oi in Void                |
| 5. ɔɪ yie in Yield | 12. ɔɔ o in Once                 |
| 6. ɔɪ yo in York   | 13. ɔɔ ou in House, or ow in Cow |
| 7. ɔɪ yaw in Yawl  | 14. ɔɔ wa in Wax                 |



- |     |                      |     |                      |
|-----|----------------------|-----|----------------------|
| 15. | ⊙ we in <i>Wet</i>   | 19. | ⊙ wa in <i>Water</i> |
| 16. | ⊙ wa in <i>Wave</i>  | 20. | ⊙ wo in <i>Word</i>  |
| 17. | ⊙ wi in <i>Wit</i>   | 21. | ⊙ uoy in <i>Buoy</i> |
| 18. | ⊙ wee in <i>Weep</i> |     |                      |

The marks on the dedicatory page (see Plate 1), as well as on the page facing it, probably represent attempts at developing a suitable notation system. It must have been hard for Kirkby to find a printer willing to create a set of characters for the purpose of printing this book alone, and it may have been for this reason that he decided to omit the notation system altogether, subsequently completely rewriting his first chapter on pronunciation.<sup>21</sup>

As the title-page informs us, Manby and Cox on Ludgate Hill were the printers prevailed upon by Kirkby to take on his grammar. The advertisement at the back of the *New English Grammar* suggests that they specialised in the printing of works on and in Latin. It may have been to make his book more attractive to these printers that Kirkby added a short grammar of Latin to it, called *A Grammatical Vocabulary for the Latin Tongue* (pp. 155-95). As one of the subjects which Kirkby had taught Gibbon was Latin, producing a Latin grammar at short notice may not have been a great problem. The *Vocabulary* is only a rudimentary grammar, and is intended to be supplemented by the preceding English grammar. For this purpose, all rules in the English grammar which are identical for both English and Latin have been marked with an asterisk. Having studied the rudiments of Latin grammar, Kirkby's advice reads, 'then let him [the learner] learn the Agreement between the English and Latin Tongues in all those Rules, which are marked, as common to both, in the foregoing English Grammar' (p. 155). Kirkby was thus killing two birds with one stone: producing both an English grammar and an economically presented but nevertheless complete grammar of Latin. That the addition of a Latin grammar was no more than an afterthought appears from the title of the book as a whole: the book is presented as a grammar of English only.

Why Kirkby changed the title of his grammar is unclear, though the new title is certainly a more striking one. In the same year, 1746, another grammar appeared, anonymously, bearing exactly the same title as Kirkby's: *A New English Grammar*. Apart from the title, the two works seem to have little in common. Michael puts them into different categories on the basis of their systems of parts of speech.<sup>22</sup> There is, however, yet another grammar, probably published in 1745, which has a similar title, and which shows striking similarities with Kirkby's: Ann Fisher's *New*

*Grammar*. I shall return to this below.

### 5. *The dedication in the New English Grammar*

There is yet another difference between the manuscript and the printed grammar. Kirkby dedicated his *New English Grammar* to his former employer, Edward Gibbon's father, 'IN Acknowledgement of the many Favours Received'. As observed above, Kirkby had originally planned to dedicate his grammar to Charles Watson, Earl of Rockingham, but the latter's sudden death forced him to look for a new patron. Finding someone willing to accept the dedication of a book must have been a time-consuming process, and the imminent publication of the grammar may well have made the matter an urgent one. To dedicate the book to Gibbon's father must have presented itself to Kirkby as a most welcome solution. Not only did it provide Kirkby with a last-minute patron – Gibbon's approval of the dedication may not even have been solicited – but it also gave Kirkby an opportunity to try and reinstate himself with his former employer. The date of the dedication, 5 November 1745, probably refers to the time of Kirkby's dismissal from the service of the Gibbon family; according to Edward Gibbon Junior, Kirkby became his tutor in April of the previous year, exactly eighteen months earlier. Kirkby presumably presented the boy's father with a copy of his grammar when it was published; when writing about the grammar and about Kirkby in general, Edward Gibbon notes that he has the book lying in front of him. However, Kirkby's attempt at peace-making met with little success, for Edward Gibbon observes that soon after Kirkby's dismissal, he lost touch with him: 'how the poor man ended his days I have never been able to learn' (pp. 31-32).

### 6. *Ann Fisher's grammar*

So far, a number of puzzling questions relating to Kirkby's grammar have been answered. However, there is one problem which, it seems, is less easy to solve. It has so far remained unnoticed that a number of rules in Kirkby's chapter on syntax are strikingly similar to those in Ann Fisher's *New Grammar*.<sup>23</sup> The first edition of this grammar has never been located, but it must have been in existence in or about the year 1745, for according to Alston in his introduction to the facsimile

reprint of the book, the work was advertised in the *Newcastle Journal* of 29 June 1745. Usually, as here, the book is referred to by its second edition, which came out in 1750, but Michael refers to it as Fisher (1745).<sup>24</sup> Kirkby and Fisher use a different terminology, such as Fisher's *leading state* for 'subject', for which Kirkby uses the term *Explicit*. Furthermore, they each present a different system of parts of speech, though in themselves the differences are not very great. In fact, the only difference is that, according to Michael's classification, Kirkby includes the verb, with the participle, in his category called 'Adjunctive', while in Fisher's grammar the verb plus participle forms a category of its own; the adjective plus article make up the fourth part of speech.<sup>25</sup> Some of the rules are almost exactly identical, as the following instances demonstrate:

Ann Fisher:

Rule VII: A Preposition has the following State [direct object] of a Relative after it; as, *She abides with us*; they came *to me*.  
(p. 119)

Kirkby:

9. A Preposition has the Implicit State [direct object] after it; as *Among whom we live*. *She abides with us*. *They came to me*.  
(p. 116)

Anne Fisher:

A conjunction, also the Particle *than*, connects like States; as, she reviles *you*, and *them*, and *me*. *He is two Inches taller than I*, i.e., *than I am*. *You conversed with them more than (with me)*. (p. 119)<sup>26</sup>

Kirkby:

12. A Conjunction, also the Particle *than*, connects like States; as *She reviles you and them and me*. *He is two Inches taller than I*, i.e. *than I am*. *You conversed with them more than (with) me*. (p. 116).

Sometimes, it is only the examples given that are identical.

The exact nature of the relationship between the two works is unclear, but given the fact that Kirkby apparently did not shrink from plagiarism, as the case of his novel *Automathes* has shown, it is not implausible that Kirkby, in his chapter on

syntax as well as in his new title, drew heavily on Fisher without acknowledging his source. There is some dispute over Kirkby's place of birth,<sup>27</sup> but he himself claims to have been born in Cumberland,<sup>28</sup> and though he spent much of his life in Kent, he may have kept up his northern connections to such an extent that he somehow became acquainted with Ann Fisher's grammar, which had been published in Newcastle.

It is therefore ironical that it is always Kirkby who is cited disapprovingly as being the first grammarian to provide the rule on the use of sex-indefinite *he*,<sup>29</sup> for the rule may be found *verbatim* in Ann Fisher's grammar which possibly even provided the source of Kirkby's rule:

Ann Fisher:

The *Masculine Person* answers to the *general Name*, which comprehends both *Male* and *Female*; as, *Any Person who knows what he says*. (p. 117n)

Kirkby:

The *Masculine Person* answers to the *general Name*, which comprehends both *Male* and *Female*; as *Any Person, who knows what he says*. (p. 117)

## 7. *The importance of Kirkby's Grammar*

Kirkby's *New English Grammar* was not a very successful work. According to R. C. Alston, the book was never reprinted.<sup>30</sup> Gibbon thought favourably of it, as witness his appreciation of it in the *Memoirs*: 'The Grammar is executed with accuracy and skill, and I know not whether any better existed at the time in our language' (p. 34). However, it is doubtful whether Gibbon's opinion of the grammar should be given too much credit; his favourable comment may have been inspired by his feeling sorry for the dismissed tutor. Even so, the work is not entirely devoid of merit. Bror Danielsson observes that Kirkby's 'apparently genuine observations on accent . . . are nearly always borne out by other eighteenth-century authorities',<sup>31</sup> and he is quoted, albeit sometimes critically, by a later writer on shorthand, William Tiffin.<sup>32</sup> The chapter on syntax is of particular interest in that it often allows for actual usage being different from rules prescribed in a grammar. Some examples may be provided by Kirkby's discussion of the relative pronominal

which with personal antecedent, already referred to above, and by his treatment of multiple negation. Having first observed that sentences with a double negative are 'Solecisms', he adds, 'And yet these are all found to be common Expressions in Conversation' (pp. 126-27). In modifying the original stricture, he shows himself more tolerant than Ann Fisher, who merely observes, using exactly the same words, that 'a Negative in *English* cannot be express'd by two Negatives . . . Such Expressions are Solecisms, which, instead of Negatives, make Affirmatives' (p. 120). Kirkby's addition confirms the suggestion made above that his syntax may have been based on Ann Fisher's rather than Ann Fisher's on his.

Kirkby's concern for usage is significant, as it reflects a new attitude among English grammarians which is usually not thought to have begun until Priestley published his grammar in 1761.<sup>33</sup> Another precursor of Priestley in this context is Benjamin Martin (1748),<sup>34</sup> which suggests that the new approach to grammar was more general, and must therefore be dated somewhat earlier than has previously been done. Moreover, Priestley's interest in usage may well be traced back to Kirkby as, according to the *Dictionary of National Biography*, for some time after the year 1745 Kirkby was one of Priestley's teachers. In this light it is important to identify one source of indebtedness relating to Priestley's grammar. In the opening pages of his grammar, Priestley observes, 'I have adopted the usual distribution of words into *eight classes*, in compliance with the practice of *most Grammarians*'.<sup>35</sup> As observed above, Kirkby's grammar presents a threefold system of parts of speech, discussed in detail in Chapter VII, 'Of the Kinds of Words'; this system is not found in any other grammar of English. However, in actual practice Kirkby did not stick to this system, using a system of eight parts of speech instead: nouns, adjectives (including the article), pronouns, verbs (including the participle), adverbs, prepositions, conjunctions and interjections (Chapters VIII-XIV). According to Michael, this system is first used by Priestley in his grammar of 1761, and subsequently by others after him.<sup>36</sup> This cannot be a coincidence. It would appear that the system had become so ingrained in Priestley's mind, presumably as a result of Kirkby's lessons, that he conceived of it as the accepted system to use. 'The practice of *most Grammarians*', he calls it, though in fact the only grammarian ever to have used it before him – and this has so far not been recognized – was his former teacher, Kirkby.

In itself Kirkby's grammar may not have been very significant, but it did leave its mark on the history of English linguistics, if mostly through its influence on Priestley, who appears to owe some of his renown to Kirkby. Kirkby's name also

lives on – more dubiously and, perhaps, unjustly – as that of the first grammarian to have formulated the rule for the use of sex-indefinite *he*. That it may well have been Ann Fisher who first included this rule in her grammar appears to have escaped the attention of the modern-day writers on this subject.

#### 8. *Kirkby's subsequent career*

Following his dismissal from the Gibbon family in November 1745, nothing much is known about Kirkby. Gibbon notes, with some regret it seems, that he lost touch with him soon after his departure. Kirkby must have been in touch with the Gibbons at least once more, when he presented them with a copy of his newly published grammar, in a futile attempt to make peace with Edward Gibbon Senior. Not long afterwards Kirkby is encountered again, either as tutor of Priestley and congregational minister of Chapel Hill, Heckmondwike,<sup>37</sup> or as schoolmaster there, in which capacity he appears to have counted Priestley among his pupils.<sup>38</sup> For how long he remained in Heckmondwike is unclear.

The last trace of Kirkby I have come across is through his letters to the Royal Society already referred to. The address given in both letters is St Peter's Street in Canterbury;<sup>39</sup> presumably he moved there in order to take care of his other incumbencies – he was vicar of Waldershare and rector of Blackmanstone. While in Canterbury, he was apparently still occupied with the writing of books. At the same time, he was trying to develop new activities, as appears from his first letter to the Royal Society:

Worthy Sirs

Having some Time ago published a Work, which I find to have suffered most miserably from the Press, as well as by two or three Faults received wholly from my self (tho' these latter, not such as in the least affect the whole Design), I have therefore, in my own Defence, made bold to send a Duplicate of it corrected, to have a Place (at least for one of them) in your publick Library. And it wou'd lay a high Obligation upon me, if any Member of your honourable Society wou'd be so kind as to correct what other Faults he may discover in it by his own Observation. The

Foundation, as laid down from the 37<sup>th</sup> to the 43<sup>d</sup> Page, upon more mature Consideration, I have now entirely rescued from the Mist it has been hitherto involved; so that I dare match it with the most apparent Demonstration. And this with a more perfect Digestion of the whole briefly advanced to a Height, that seems never yet to have been suspected, together with a most regular Application of it (if required) to the Principles of Gravity, I wou'd be glad (with your Approbation) to have published in your Philosophical Transactions. In which also I presume to have many more Things worthy of a Place, as coming within the Verge of its Province; but upon Subjects of a different Nature from this.

The Truth is, I have several Pieces, which (I persuade my self) are necessary to be made publick; and as I wou'd willingly hereafter establish Weekly Lectures of different Sorts in some Part of London; I conceive it wou'd be no small Advantage to these Purposes, to have the Honour of subscribing myself one of your Society. An Honour, which it is therefore my humble Request to receive from you, if it may be complied with. Which wou'd lay the greatest Obligation upon

Your most obedient

Humble Serv.<sup>t</sup>

John Kirkby (sic)

St. Peter's Street Canterbury

Jan. 6<sup>th</sup>. 1751/2

In particular, he envisages a series of lectures, possibly in some way organised or backed by the Royal Society. Such lectures were very popular at this time, especially on what was then known as natural and experimental philosophy. Benjamin Martin, a contemporary of Kirkby's and also author of an English grammar, frequently toured the country for this purpose, attracting large audiences wherever he went.<sup>40</sup> It would be mere speculation to suggest that Kirkby and Martin may have been acquainted with each other. However, it may just be that Kirkby attended one of Martin's lectures; according to Millburn it is possible that

Martin lectured in London in 1751.<sup>41</sup> Being struck by the similarity of their careers – they were of the same age and had both published a grammar around the same time – Kirkby may have conceived of a similar plan, that is of trying to increase his income by giving public lectures. From the letter to the Royal Society it appears that Kirkby had been very active as a writer and researcher, offering to have the results of his investigations published in the Royal Society's 'Philosophical Transactions'. These investigations, on the subject of gravity as well as 'upon Subjects of a different Nature', would presumably have formed the basis for his proposed series of Weekly Lectures. Whether he ever gave any of the proposed lectures seems unlikely in view of the lack of encouragement he received subsequently.

There is yet another matter on which Kirkby approaches the Royal Society: the possibility of becoming a Fellow. This would, he writes, 'be no small Advantage to these Purposes', for the announcement of a Lecture to be delivered by a Fellow of the Royal Society would surely attract a large audience. However, his 'humble Request' met with little success, as becomes clear from the following rather discouraging reply in the hand of Thomas Birch, who was in charge of the Royal Society's correspondence:<sup>42</sup>

To the Revd. Mr. John Kirkby at Canterbury.

London Febr. 18. 1752

Revd. Sr.

The Indisposition of the President of the Royal Society, & the long Illness & Death of my Predecessor Dr. Mortimer, whose province it was to carry on their Correspondence, were the only Reasons why you have not sooner receiv'd their thanks for the present of your two Books, which are repositid in their Library. I sincerely wish you Success in all your Studies & Labours for the public, & am, Sr.

Your most humble Servant,

Tho. Birch.

Birch's letter suggests that he replied only to the luckless Kirkby's second letter, in which no further mention is made of the possibility of joining the Royal Society. Unfortunately for Kirkby but understandably in the circumstances, Birch does not seem to have taken the trouble of looking up the preceding letter, in which case he



might well have written a less non-committal letter and Kirkby's life would have had a more favourable and perhaps a less untimely conclusion.<sup>43</sup>

As it is, Kirkby died little more than two years later, on 21 May 1754, presumably a frustrated and disappointed man. His career was an ambitious one, as witness his many publications and especially his first letter to the Royal Society, but it seems to have been hampered by ill luck and ineffective attempts on his part to better his position. His posthumous reputation was equally unlucky: it is not Kirkby but Priestley who is credited as the first grammarian to express an overt interest in usage, and it is Kirkby not Ann Fisher who is blamed for formulating the rule for the use of sex-indefinite *he*. Apart from identifying Kirkby as the author of a hitherto anonymous manuscript, the present article will, I hope, serve to invest Kirkby with the posthumous recognition he has long deserved.

NOTES

An earlier version of this article appeared as *Dutch Working Papers in English language and linguistics* 20 (Leiden, 1990).

<sup>1</sup> MS Ig.1, Brotherton Collection, University of Leeds.

<sup>2</sup> Ian Michael, *English Grammatical Categories and the Tradition to 1800* (Princeton, 1957), p. 549.

<sup>3</sup> Reprinted in facsimile by R. C. Alston, *English Linguistics 1500-1800* (Menston, 1971), (EL 297).

<sup>4</sup> Michael (1970), p. 263.

<sup>5</sup> Michael (1970), p. 549.

<sup>6</sup> John Stevens, *A New Spanish Grammar* (London, 1725), p. 22.

<sup>7</sup> Michael (1970), p. 214.

<sup>8</sup> Michael (1970), pp. 223-28.

<sup>9</sup> This is Michael's System 43, discussed on pp. 263-64.

<sup>10</sup> Michael (1970), p. 514.

<sup>11</sup> See Michael (1970), p. 513. The term *Explicit* is first found in Rule 38, scribbled in between the lines. Before, but often enough afterwards as well, the term *Person* is used to refer to the subject. It is not until Rule 71 that the term *Explicit* is used again, scribbled over the word *Person* (cf. Rule 74). In the next rule, the word *Person* has been crossed out and replaced by *Explicit*, and a later addition to the text of this rule, written above it, reads 'When the Explicit comes before its Verb . . .' (Rule 72). However, Rule 75, though opening with an otherwise identical sentence once again has the word *Person*.

<sup>12</sup> See Michael (1970), p. 392.

<sup>13</sup> Royal Society Archives L.&.P.II.251 and British Library Add. MSS 4312.

<sup>14</sup> That the books had, indeed, arrived appears from the following entry in the Royal Society Journal Book for 9 January 1752 (R.S. JBC.XXI):

Two copies of a Book intituled the Doctrine of Ultimators &c by the Revd. M<sup>r</sup>. John Kirkby Vicar of Waldershare in Kent 4<sup>o</sup>. London 1748. were presented to the Society from the Author, and a Letter from him to the Society giving an Account of his Work the Errors of the impression, and of his correcting the Copies transmitted to the Society was read.

Thanks were ordered to M<sup>r</sup>. Kirkby for this present.

However, this order was not carried out for reasons of illness on the part of the person in charge of the Royal Society's correspondence. Kirkby's second letter did receive a reply, in the hand of

Thomas Birch, who acknowledges the receipt of the books and apologizes for the Royal Society's negligence in not writing to him sooner.

There is yet more evidence of Kirkby's handwriting. In his first letter to the Royal Society, Kirkby complains of the poor quality of his book which contains many printing errors. One of the copies he sent to the Royal Society contains corrections inserted in the book by Kirkby. This copy is still in possession of the Royal Society, as I have been informed by Alan J. Clark, Deputy Librarian of the Royal Society. I am most grateful to Mr Clark for his assistance in my search for material on Kirkby.

<sup>15</sup> *The Complete Peerage*, rev. and ed. Geoffrey H. White (London, 1949). Vol. 11, s.v. Rockingham.

<sup>16</sup> Edward Gibbon, *Memoirs of my Life*, ed. Georges A. Bonnard (London, 1966), p. 31.

<sup>17</sup> Folke Bergström, 'John Kirkby (1746) on English Pronunciation', *Studia Neophilologica*, 27 (1955), 65-104 (at 65-66).

<sup>18</sup> Before this time, Kirkby had been invested with two incumbencies. According to Bergström (1955, p. 65), 'in 1739 he was appointed vicar of Waldershare in Kent and in 1743 rector of Blackmanstone, Romney Marsh (South Kent)'. See also the *Dictionary of National Biography*, s.v. Kirkby.

<sup>19</sup> Gibbon, *Memoirs*, p. 32.

<sup>20</sup> See S. A. Leonard, *The Doctrine of Correctness in English Usage 1700-1800* (Madison, Wisc., 1929), p. 261.

<sup>21</sup> To his description of diphthongs in the *New English Grammar* Kirkby adds two more, *oa* in *Board* and *oo* in *Door*, and *oo* in *Moor* and in *poor*. The order of the diphthongs given is otherwise much the same (pp. 9-10).

<sup>22</sup> System 33 for the anonymous grammar, System 43 for Kirkby's grammar. See Michael (1970), pp. 255-56, 263.

<sup>23</sup> Newcastle upon Tyne, 2nd ed. 1750; repr. in facsimile by R. C. Alston, *English Linguistics 1500-1800* (London, 1974) (EL 130).

<sup>24</sup> *The Teaching of English* (Cambridge, 1987), p. 457.

<sup>25</sup> Cf. Michael (1970), pp. 258 and 263.

<sup>26</sup> In a later edition, published in 1789, this stricture was slightly rephrased and turned into a separate rule, reading:

Rule XI. Conjunctions connect like States; also the Adverb *than*, which always follows qualities of the *Comparative Degree*; as, *she reviles you, and them, and me. He is two Inches taller than I*, i.e. *than I am* (p. 122).

<sup>27</sup> See Bergström (1955, p. 65, note), who observes that according to the *Dictionary of National Biography*, 'John Kirkby (1705-1754) was born at Londesborough in Yorkshire and

proceeded to Cambridge in 1723, where he graduated B.A. in 1726 and M.A. 1745. According to Venn, *Alumni Cantabrigienses*, however, the John Kirkby who was born at Londesborough and took his degrees at Cambridge was "not the author and tutor of Edward Gibbon, as in *D.N.B.*"'. There is even more confusion about Kirkby. In the *Dictionary of National Biography*, in the entry for Priestley, a John Kirkby, congregational minister of Upper Chapel, Heckmondwike, is mentioned as having been one of Priestley's teachers. See also Ann Holt, *Life of Joseph Priestley* (Westport, Conn., 1931): 'Here Priestley learnt Greek and Latin and, during holidays, Hebrew from Mr. Kirkby, the minister at Heckmondwycke' (p. 7). However, Kirkby's date of birth (1677) given by the *Dictionary of National Biography*, sub Priestley, differs from that of the entry for Kirkby himself (1705), and the same year is mentioned in Ivan Poldauf, *On the History of Some Problems of English Grammar before 1800* (Prague, 1948), p. 137. I have been unable to solve this confusion, but in view of the fact that the 1740s and the years until his death in 1754 represent Kirkby's most productive years – during this period he published a novel, a grammar as well as some other works – the year 1705 is more likely the correct year of his birth. Had Kirkby been born in 1677, he would have been sixty eight when he embarked on his writing career, a career which may be characterised as one marked by several attempts at making money for himself by publishing a number of books. This seems the occupation of a much younger man.

<sup>28</sup> See Gibbon, *Memoirs*, who quotes the rather dismal story of Kirkby's life before he met him (p. 31):

During my abode in my native County of Cumberland, in quality of an indigent Curate, I used now-and-then, in a summer, when the pleasantness of the season invited, to take a solitary walk to the sea-shore, which lies about two miles from the town where I lived. Here I would amuse myself one while in viewing at large, the agreeable prospect which surrounded me; and another while, (confining my sight to nearer objects) in admiring the vast variety of beautiful shells thrown upon the beach, some of the choicest of which I always picked up to divert my little ones upon my return. One time among the rest taking such a journey in my head, I sat down upon the declivity of the beach, with my face to the sea, which was now come up within a few yards of my feet: when immediately the sad thoughts of the wretched condition of my family, and the unsuccessfulness of all endeavours to amend it, came crowding into my mind, which drove me into a deep melancholy and ever anon forced tears from my eyes.

According to R. V. and P. J. Wallis (*Bibliography of British Mathematics and its Applications*, Part II, 1701-1760, Newcastle upon Tyne, 1986), Kirkby's wife came from Egremont (p. 205), a place in Cumberland not far from the coast. Possibly, Kirkby lived there himself at the time of the above narration. (The Kirkbys had four children, two of whom died in infancy.) Bergström has noted a number of 'obvious Cumbrian traits' in Kirkby's transcription of contemporary

pronunciation (1955, p. 67).

<sup>29</sup> See Ann Bodine, 'Androcentrism in Prescriptive Grammar: Singular "They", Sex-indefinite "He", and "He or She"', *Language in Society*, 4 (1975), 129-46 (at 135), and Jennifer Coates, *Women, Men and Language* (London, 1986), p. 23.

<sup>30</sup> R. C. Alston, *A Bibliography of the English Language*, Vol. 1 (Leeds, 1965).

<sup>31</sup> *Studies on the Accentuation of Polysyllabic Latin, Greek, and Romance Loan-words in English* (Stockholm, 1948), pp. 412-13.

<sup>32</sup> William Tiffin, *A New Help and Improvement of the Art of Swift Writing* (London, 1750?). Helge Kökeritz, 'English Pronunciation as Described in Shorthand Systems of the 17th and 18th Centuries', *Studia Neophilologica*, 7 (1934-35), 73-146 (at 93), suggests that the Kirkby referred to by Tiffin 'may be' the John Kirkby who is the subject of my discussion here. However, all three quotations in Tiffin's book can be identified as coming from the *New English Grammar* (pp. 4, 7 and 2 respectively), and the identification is therefore certain.

<sup>33</sup> See Leonard (1929), p. 14.

<sup>34</sup> *Institutions of Language* (London, 1748; repr. in facsimile by R. C. Alston, *English Linguistics 1500-1800*, London, 1974, EL 258).

<sup>35</sup> *The Rudiments of English Grammar* (London, 1761; repr. in facs. by R. C. Alston, *English Linguistics 1500-1800*, London, 1974, EL 210), p. 2, note.

<sup>36</sup> Michael (1970), p. 231.

<sup>37</sup> See the *Dictionary of National Biography* s.v. Priestley, as well as, possibly, Holt (1931), p. 7.

<sup>38</sup> Poldauf (1948), p. 135.

<sup>39</sup> The address given in the second letter, 'St Peter's', is obviously an error; compare another mistake made by Kirkby in spelling his own name in the first letter.

<sup>40</sup> See John R. Millburn, *Benjamin Martin. Author, Instrument-Maker, and 'Country-Showman'* (Leyden, 1976), pp. 43-44.

<sup>41</sup> Millburn, p. 62.

<sup>42</sup> British Library Add. MSS 4312.

<sup>43</sup> Benjamin Martin made an equally abortive attempt to become a Fellow of the Royal Society. The main reason for his lack of success in this matter was that he was unaware of the election procedure of the Royal Society, which, as Millburn puts it, 'required that a certificate signed by several Fellows should be displayed in the meeting room for some months in case objections should be raised' (1976, pp. 35-36). Clearly, Kirkby was not aware of this procedure either.

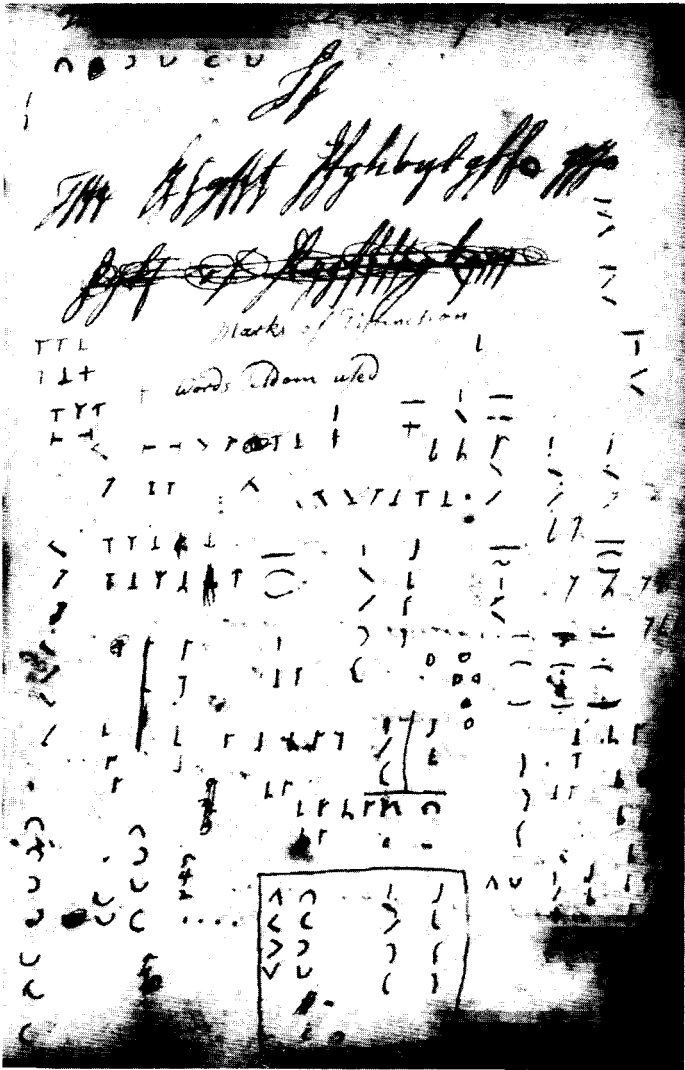


Plate 1

The obliterated dedication in *The Practice of Speaking and Writing English*: 'To the Right Honourable the Earl of Rockingham'. Underneath it, marks which apparently represent some of the author's attempts at developing a phonemic notation system.

(Handwritten notes on a page, likely a manuscript or a page from a book, showing rules of grammar. The page is numbered 52, 53, 54, 55, 56, and 57. The text is written in cursive and includes various annotations and corrections. The page is titled 'The Adjective' and discusses the placement and use of adjectives in English grammar. The text is written in cursive and includes various annotations and corrections. The page is numbered 52, 53, 54, 55, 56, and 57. The text is written in cursive and includes various annotations and corrections.

52. The Adjective comes generally before its Name; as *a good Scholar*. *A very wife aged Man*.  
*but in some cases it follows* *as a scholar good*  
*as in Poetry it may follow* *as a scholar good*  
*as in Poetry it may follow* *as a scholar good*

53. A Possessive Adjective must always come before its Name; as *George's House*, *Her Portion*. *Whose Book is this?*  
*Definite Adjectives must always come before the Noun* *as a Man; the third Company; such Things*  
*as in Poetry it may follow* *as a scholar good*

54. When a Possessive Adjective comes before a Possessive Adjective, it must stand after; as *This House of George's*. *That Portion of hers*

55. But the Possesives *whose, whose/ever, ones* can never stand after of. Thus we say not *the House of whose*, but *the House of whom*: not *the House of whose/ever*, but *the House of whomever*: not *the House of Ones*, but *the House of one*.

57. When two Names have the Particle of between them, the latter may be put the former, and turn'd into a Possessive Adjective; or if it be an Appellative may be taken

Plate 2

Direction to the printer, in the right hand margin, to invert the order of the rules originally numbered 53 and 54.

455

On the Beginning of last month having  
made bold to send two Copies of a very ill printed  
Book, if it deserve no worse Character, entitled the  
Doctrines of Ultimators; my Desire was to have  
a Place for these in <sup>the</sup> Library belonging to your Society  
(to whose Order and Government I am a perfect  
Stranger); but having never been able to know  
whether these came to Hand, I beg, Sir, that you  
or any other Member would grant this Favour  
to your Humble Servt

John Kirkby

St Peters Canterbury Feb. 13<sup>th</sup> 1752

Read Sunday Feb. 15. 1752

Plate 3

Kirkby's second letter to the Royal Society (BL Add. MSS 4312).