Section 2: Traditional Grammar

To pillory such offenses [as all inaccuracies of speech, whether offenses against etymology, lexicography or syntax], to point out the damage which they inflict upon our language, and to expose the moral obliquity which often lurks beneath them, is, we believe, the duty of every scholar who knows how purity of speech, like personal cleanliness, is allied to purity of thought and rectitude of action.

--William Matthews, Words: Their Use and Abuse (1876, 335)

The difficulties agreeing to an unvarying definition of grammar aren't merely the subject for academic squabbles. For centuries, as you'll read here, trying to define grammar and setting out any invariable components and typical uses of language or of a specific language meant studying what it is to be human. After all, philosophers would ask, what defines us more than our use of language? And if we can't understand what it is to be human directly because, for example, we share so many physiological characteristics with other species, we can try to unearth such knowledge by getting a fix on what language is by, some argue, how we use it. That means, for most philosophers, theorists, or just curious individuals, understanding the grammar of language.

One of the important consequences of these debates and attitudes toward humans and their language is that various definitions of grammar expose deep-seated ideological differences. Thorny contentions arise about what value knowledge about language or about grammar holds, what that awareness says about human intelligence, whether that information should be shared, and, if so,
how best to deliver that instruction. Teaching grammar, for instance, is a
controversy in and of itself, one that will be addressed later in this text. But for
now, consider these questions about instructing others in the technicalities of a
language.

- Does teaching grammar mean showing people how language aids in
  understanding human nature?
- How does that understanding guide us through logic and rhetoric?
- Or does teaching grammar necessarily mean punitive assessment of
  others' use of language ostensibly to improve human nature?
- If being human means having language, can humans be perfected—come
closer to heaven, so to speak—by perfecting their language use?

Most contemporary grammarians would agree that correcting **parts of**
speech or insisting, for example, that sentences do not end with prepositions
doesn't even scratch the surface in understanding grammar. In fact, **grammar** as a
singular notion is a misnomer because **grammars**—defined in this review as
models to explain structures and meanings—compete with one another for which
is the most reasonable, most formal, most teachable, or just most usable
paradigm. Of the many models, **traditional grammar** is the name most people
associate with teachers, editors, and unpleasant encounters with language
mavens and opinionated pedagogues. *Traditional grammar* itself, not surprisingly, is not one grammar nor one set of rules nor one approach to or definition of a language and its uses. What we sometimes quixotically call *traditional grammar* comes to us through examinations of many languages, many explanations of human behavior, and many more good intentions sometimes giving way to misinterpretations and misapplications. Historically, this approach arises in handbooks (sometimes also called *grammars*) as well as philosophical treatises written by classical philosophers and rhetoricians and reinterpreted, at times with more consistency and sense, by later thinkers. Medieval scholars, for instance, used Greek and Roman interpretations as the bases for their speculative grammars; then 17th and 18th century grammarians turned their attention toward creating and refining approaches to language in order to solidify their own political positions as literary pundits and cultural leaders of the people while, simultaneously, improving the morals of their countrymen. All these reinterpretations, clarifications, and variations leave us a somewhat mismatched collection of theory and teaching tools that is still popular with native and nonnative speakers who want to “master” English in order to rise in their economic, cultural, social, and political worlds.

As you’ll see, looking critically at the ideas usually associated with
traditional grammar forces us to admit that, as an explanation of language, the model has problems. For instance, it's largely based on intuitions about meaning and form rather than logical, verifiable, or even consistent definitions. Various grammarians/philosophers didn't agree on how to divide words up into classes; that means that, today, we wonder about why a noun is defined in traditional grammars by meaning while the same grammars define a preposition based on examples (in, to) or how it is supposed to be used.

Another point never satisfactorily addressed by traditional grammar advocates is how do people “get” grammar. An individual learns a traditional grammar's directives nearly one-by-one in school, but is everyone getting the same set? And what did we all speak before the teacher and textbooks opened up the world of grammar and its rules? And exactly what do we do with these rules? Trying to put these dictates together into a system or attempting to set up a generalized or overall theory of grammar from these rules seems nearly impossible. That is, if I know what a subject is and can readily find it in a sentence, how does that knowledge fit into a model of language that predicts other dynamics of language such as passive voice constructions. Don't I really have to know what sentence means before I can figure out subject? Lots of details are fine to pick and choose from; however, details alone have ever a philosophy of
language made.

Moreover, advocates of a traditional grammar seek to prescribe “normal” language behavior for all speakers and writers and base “normality” on the works of published writers who are accepted, usually by book critics and educators, as the most influential writers of a certain time period. But remember, taste changes as does the canon of acceptable literature. As a result, one recognized way of polishing written prose has its own inconsistency build it: if I experiment with language in light of what others have already done, that is, write from what I’ve learned about or copied from other writers’ styles, ideas, and methods, how do I know I picked the correct writers for my audience? Believe it or not, philosophers and rhetoricians living as early as the fifth century B.C. E.¹ advocated just this method of improving beginning rhetors’ [speaker's] arguments. Today countless students try to get higher grades by styling their writing after that of other writers, particularly those writers pressed on them by grammar textbooks. If Ernest Hemingway or William Faulkner wrote it that way, it ought to be good enough for a passing grade in freshman English or technical writing. But what students of grammar want to know more about is

¹That is, Before the Common Era.
what precedes that (sometimes wrong-headed) experimentation and how can imitation teach one a language or provide an explanation for a language.

Finally, consider this problem inherent in a traditional grammar for English as an approach to understanding and theorizing about the English language. Prescribing usage for English from principles that worked for Greek and Latin, even though they are related languages, introduces to all sorts of headaches because English, a language descended from Germanic languages, isn't directly related to classical Greek or Latin. In other words, the generalities that make up Greek and Latin rules aren't always close matches to the generalities that make up English usage. Applying rules promulgated over nearly 2,500 years from a language such as classical Greek or Latin to its contemporary form poses its own problems. Those difficulties are only compounded when the classical rules get applied to a language like English, more Latin's third cousin, once removed than Latin's identical twin. Much the same types of difficulties come up if we appeal to noteworthy writers like Chaucer, Shakespeare, John Dryden, Jonathan Swift, Jane Austen, George Eliot, Mark Twain, or any of the thousands of acclaimed stylists of the past. In short, we're neglecting obvious realities about language. For one, the lexicon, markers, and syntax of English, like Greek or Latin or any other living language, changes
over time. Shakespeare's English, while understandable to contemporary English speakers, doesn't “sound” or “read” like the language we speak. And Geoffrey Chaucer (c. 1340-1400 C.E.) would be at much the same loss understanding Shakespeare as we would most likely be. Many of the same words. Mostly the same sentence structures. But something is certainly different. Another obvious problem is that English, like every other language, varies depending upon the region: where you grow up in this world decides the variety of English you speak. Ireland and England may be geographically as close as Maryland and West Virginia, but the English spoken in each of those regions is distinctive. Again, many of the same words and most of the same sentence patterns but, it seems, not the same English grammar.

Whatever its inconsistencies, irritations, or difficulties—and it has many!—a traditional grammar is, as Francis Dinneen notes, important because it is “the most widespread, influential, and best-understood method of discussing Indo-European languages in the Western world” (Dinneen 1967, 170). Furthermore, if you look up the phrase traditional grammar in most linguistics dictionaries, you will most likely be directed to the term grammar and told that traditional grammar is the oldest statement of the regularities and irregularities of a
language. Then when you start investigating this statement, you will find that the grammars it refers to are somewhat more irregular than readers would like but somewhat more regular than linguistic critics disclose. It depends, frequently, on the writer's agenda.

As we've noted, although rich in history (i.e., in 'tradition'), widespread, and influential, a traditional grammar historically has favored a prescriptive approach over descriptive or explanations based on custom. That is, whatever the version, a traditional grammar sets forth collections of rules (with a capital R), usually as handbooks or guides, that dictate "correct" usage. Often touted as a universally valid set of rules that show how a language ought to be spoken or written, a traditional grammar asserts that only certain styles of a language are

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2For example, the five-page definition of traditional grammar Kristen Malmajær presents in The Linguistics Encyclopedia rightly notes that, despite the confusion one finds in traditional grammar, "a great deal of the grammatical terminology and many of the concepts used in linguistic theory derive from traditional grammar, and...ultimately western linguistics devices from the Greek preoccupation with language" (478).
worthy of study and imitation, primarily literary, scholarly, or religious texts, and that these texts are appropriate guides to language use for everyone who wishes to control his language or rise in her society. The language we hear and use outside school and church every day is vernacular, vulgar, short-sighted, and, overall, inadequate for clear, eloquent communication. In short, a traditional grammar's lessons seldom, if ever, reinforce the language as humans actually speak it.

Remember, then, the most important for this survey is an obvious, typically unstated point about a traditional grammar's real value, one that explains why it is reasonable not only for a study of grammar but also for most intellectual activity in every discipline: we learn from the past. That is, whether their proponents admit to the fact or not, all contemporary theories of grammar take relevant principles from traditional grammar. What individual theorists do with these insights, as you’ll see later, is fascinating.

I. Classical Origins to Grammar Study

A. The Greeks

Although often arrogantly monolingual, Greek philosophers were intrigued by all languages, particularly their own. During the Hellenistic times—the lifetimes of philosophers such as Socrates (470?-399 B. C. E.), Isocrates
(436-338 B. C. E.), Gorgias of Leontini (490?-380? B. C. E), Lysias (444?-380 B. C. E., Plato (427?-347 B. C. E.), Aristotle (384-322 B. C. E.), Philodemus (110?-44? B. C. E.), Diogenes Laertius (412?-323 B. C. E)—the scholars of Athens and its surrounding territories reached a distinguished level of intellectual sophistication. Along with drafting constitutions that reflected Greek philosophical ideals, advising rulers of state, conducting scientific experiments, and lecturing on rhetoric, they debated “the true meaning of the word” [etymology], pondered whether or not the names assigned to people, places, and things arose from an item’s inherent nature or from convention, classified and analyzed the basic elements of language (e.g., nouns, verbs), pondered questions of levels of diction, and incorporated their many speculations about language into their philosophical treatises. Overall Greek philosophers/rhetoricians/grammarians

- were concerned with large questions of nature of humans and their universe,
- worked on the assumption that some deep universal truths must exist and could be understood,
- tried to discover these truths through what they saw, quite naturally, as the uniquely human ability: language.
Greek philosophers believed language had been given to humans as a divine gift. Phrased another way, language—especially Greek—represented divine perfection. Despite this ardent interest in language as a defining quality of humanity, only a few Greek thinkers, loosely called the **Sophists**, taught grammar, rhetoric and, to a more limited extent, writing. Their students were the select few who could, and wanted to, pay for the Sophists' expertise. In many ways bridging oral and literate societies, the philosopher/ gadfly Socrates taught these topics even though he discredited the Sophists for cheapening the study of language, thought, and all other concepts that made humans human. Despite the fact that his teaching were preserved by his star pupil, Plato, in writing, Socrates placed his trust is spoken language. In Plato's words, Socrates distrusted written language nearly as much as he worried about the consequences of dishonorable individuals who possessed exceptional oratorical skills (i.e., demagogues) or who taught those skills (i.e., Sophists).

Nonetheless even Socrates, Plato reports, realized that written language was important because it lasted. He knew and respected the facts that, in everyday life, scribes wrote accounts, administrative records, public documents and registers, often without fully comprehending the nature of the written work.

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3See the dialogue *Phaedrus*. 
Typically, manuscripts were copied, laboriously, and great men were known in part for the extent of their libraries. As a result, literacy (for men) increased.

Along with athletics, oral poetry, music, 5th and 6th century Athenians learned grammar, rhetoric, and then writing with the assistance of written texts in preparation for taking their places as statesmen, generals, rulers, and judges.

Soon writing “had spread so widely, and had come to be used so much in daily life, that in the end education was unable to ignore it” (Marrou 1956, 42; Haussman 1993, 12). Literacy demanded that people have rules for writing as well as for speaking. Grammarians rose up to fill the need.

**Plato**

Despite the warnings he attributes to Socrates' in his dialogues *Gorgias* and *Phaedrus*, Plato (c. 428-347 B.C.E.) contributed substantially to language study. For instance, Plato was probably the first theorist to use the term *grammar* [*grammatike*] meaning “the art of writing words.” As did the Sophists he despised, Plato

- was influenced by divine-origin theory when he developed his theory of the "natural logic" of language,
- turned his attention to analysis of words and their meanings, and
- devised possibly the first word-classification system based on two classes:
**Onoma** (noun): a word that designates the performer of an action or that about which something is asserted and

**Rhema** (verb): a word that designates the performing of the action or the asserting of an ontological state.

Most interesting of Plato's many speculations on language and discourse is his discussion of meaning and reference. In several of his dialogues, Plato speculated whether a given word bears an inherent, natural, and therefore logical relationship to the thing or concept for which it stands. In *Cratylus*, Plato has Hermogenes query Socrates about the origins of language and the nature of meaning. After being needled by Cratylus about the inappropriateness of his name, Hermogenes argues that language came as a convention or habit by speakers; hence, since the connection between a word and the item it refers to (i.e., its meaning) is always arbitrary, his name is not inappropriate. It's just a name. Cratylus, on the other side, maintains that language originated naturally; therefore, an intrinsic relationship exists between a word and its referent. It's not

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4 An unlucky and rather unschooled fellow by any account, Hermogenes' name means "son of Hermes," the messenger of the gods; thus Hermogenes should be quick, knowledgeable, and fortunate.
just a name; it’s the essence of an individual’s anima.

Socrates at first seems to straddle the fence. He admits “that things have names by nature, and that not every man is an artificer of names,” but he also concurs with Hermogenes that one properly “looks to the name which each thing by nature has, and is able to express the true forms of things in letters and syllables” (Cratylus 390e). He proposes to Hermogenes and Cratylus a series of rather ingenious, genuinely imaginative etymologies that are as curious—and ironic—as they are enlightening. Socrates’ purpose, we come to see, is not to divine the origin of words but, first, to have a bit of fun with language and, second, to teach Cratylus and Hermogenes the use and function of language. If the language we use is adequate for the purpose we have, then the language will adhere to certain structural principles. Thus the advocates of “convention” (the Heremogenes of the world) are only partially correct when they argue for arbitrariness. Language is not totally subjective. The “right” name will be the name that meets all the purposes that the discourse requires. On the other hand, the Cratyluses of the world have a reasonable viewpoint: it is true assigning names to referents follows a set of principles. Therefore, it is not entirely

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5 For an overview discussion of Cratylus, see D. Anthony Storm’s “A Commentary on Plato’s Writings” at http://www.2xtreme.net/dstorm/plato/cratylus.htm.
Plato sets up two points important for any discussion of grammar. First, he has Socrates agree that naming is important primarily because it is a form of classification and, therefore, essential to scientific inquiry. Second, he creates his argument by appealing to word origins, a then new, somewhat speculative study. Socrates seeks his word histories from Homer who reports that the gods, with considerable foresight, spoke the names to things (referents) that were inherently appropriate to the items. In short, he is once again making the spoken word primary over the written word and is suggesting that, to some extent, word origins and meanings are divine, appropriate, and fixed. Even if we have temporarily forgotten the gods' original intent, the meaning is latent in the word or name:

**Socrates:** Again, is there not an essence of each thing, just as there is a color, or sound? And is there not an essence of color and

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6 Socrates chides Heremogenes with “Cratylus is right in saying that things have names by nature, and that no every man is an artificer of names, but he only who looks to the name which each thing by nature has, and is able to express the true forms of things in letters and syllables. . ..[W]e have discovered that names have by nature a truth, and that not every man knows how to give a thing a name” (390e-391b).

7 Socrates' imaginative word histories set a pattern for subsequent grammarians who will, as we'll see, interweave their entomologies with even more political ideology than Socrates has. Some of them, apparently, missed Socrates' humor.
sound as well as of anything else which may be said to have an essence?

Hermogenes: I should think so.

Socrates: Well, and if anyone could express the essence of each thing in letters and syllables, would he not express the nature of each thing? (Cratylys 423e).8

If the Socrates of Plato's dialogues accurately expresses Plato's views, then we know Plato held a naturalist position, typical of the Greeks, that there was a fundamental and principle-driven connection between the meaning of a word and the thing that the word signified. Hold that idea in the back of your mind for a while because it influences how later theorists try to define words and parts of speech.

8 As Anthony Storm points out, Plato uses the Greek word stoicheion, defined in Liddell Scott Jones Greek-English Lexicon (ninth edition) as "a simple sound of speech, as the first component of the syllable," rather than gramma, the Greek word for "letter" to emphasize the elemental nature of word meanings.
Aristotle, as you’ll see, holds more closely to Hermogenes’ position, today frequently called the conventionalist position, that strings of sounds, or words, have meaning because native speakers agree that a certain word is linked by convention to its meaning. But even Aristotle had to agree with Plato that meaning could be inherent, god-given, and, once adequately defined, difficult to misinterpret. Aristotle worried because he realized that misunderstanding could arise from different people perceiving words differently and using words without a sense of style. Persuasiveness and “the foundation of good style,” he argued, hinged not only on a rhetor’s ethics, temperance, and moral use of rhetoric, but also on the speaker’s clear understanding of “correctness of language” that will make a speech “easy to read and therefore easy to deliver [understand]” (Rhetoric 1407a-1407b).

A related, and, for our purposes more important, issue concerns whether words and their rules for formation, classes, and meanings hold a regular relationship—that is, does a language have patterned or paradigmatic connections that can be defined? This viewpoint, called the analogist position, holds that two language units are related or similar because they share an element. You learn one rule and apply it to all of the items that enter a particular class, for

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9 Analogy from the Greek word analogia meaning double relation.
instance that a certain ending goes on all verbs in certain circumstances. Many grammatical and semantic irregularities in a language, in this case Greek, could be the products of natural usage that should not be tampered with by setting up normative standards. In other words, analogists took a view of language and extended it to a position we'd call today “Stop Worrying About Your Language!” Other grammarian-philosophers, however, were skeptical. For this group, adherents who held the anomalist position, it was an absence of pattern that characterized language. In fact, focused their attention on the exceptions to the pattern (such as irregular noun plurals or verb forms such as write-wrote-written).

To reach a more divinely inspired language—and, one presumes, human nature—these variations just had to go.

Who won? Neither group. When the anomalists point to the differences between grammatical and natural gender as evidence that language in general and Greek in particular lacks detectable consistency, the analogists could not disagree more. There is a system, they would claim. We just have to define it.

Compromise was out of the question. It took a Roman scholar Marcus Terentius Varro (116-27 B.C.E.), working in the tradition of the Greek grammarians, to reexamine and clarify these positions by suggesting broad, rather inclusive categories for elements of language to fall into. Varro, you could say, got
grammar's act together so that traditionalists in later centuries could take it on the road. Even at that, modern traditional grammars often have both ideas threaded through their discussion.

**Aristotle**

Like his teacher and mentor Plato, Aristotle (c. 384-c. 322 B.C.E.) was fascinated by language, rhetoric, and grammar. Unlike the aristocratic Plato, however, the Stagyra-born Aristotle took a more practical, taxonomic approach to his studies, seeking to understand human behavior and nature by breaking language into discrete units. Aristotle

- added a third word class, *syndesmoi* (roughly, *conjunctions*), that included all words not included in Plato's two broad classes,
- pointed out certain structural word features, such as his observations that nouns possess *case* and verbs carried *tense*, and
- provided probably the earliest definition of *word*: the smallest meaningful language unit.¹⁰

Aristotle must have had a great time arguing with Plato, and it seems that again and again Aristotle noticed points that could only have tweaked his

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¹⁰ Many centuries later, structuralist grammarians renamed this smallest unit the morpheme.
mentor. Of the more interesting differences of opinion Aristotle had with Plato are his positions on the origins and patterning in language. In his essay “De interpretatione” ["On interpretation"], Aristotle takes Hermongenes' essential position, modifying it to argue that words were tokens or signs referring indirectly to items in the real world. Aristotle saw “spoken words [as] the symbols of mental experience and written words [as] the symbols of spoken words.” Furthermore, he evoked convention as a defining quality because “nothing is by nature a noun or name—it is only so when it becomes a symbol” (McKeon 1941, 40).

Most of what Aristotle had to say about grammar is in Book III of his Rhetoric, probably a collection of the lecture notes he used in his own academy. His discussion of elements we would call grammatical comes primarily in his discussion of style where he suggests that because speakers have choices in the language they use to present their perspectives, orators must know the intricacies of style. What is style? Basically, a flourish, an artistic use of language that can help, but not replace, the bare facts or persuasive rhetoric of arguments. One virtue style has is clarity, which arises from choosing words (nouns and verbs) that are common and putting them together so that the whole conveys good diction and good sense. A second is appropriateness: when speaking of trifling
things, one should not use elevated language. After all, “Nobody uses fine
time, one should not use elevated language. After all, “Nobody uses fine
time, one should not use elevated language. After all, “Nobody uses fine
language when teaching geometry” (Rhetoric, III 1404a). The foundation of
applicable style comes from grammar; specifically it is achieved by the correct
use of connective particles, the use of specific terms, the avoidance of ambiguity,
proper attention to gender and number, and an avoidance of solecism. Cold,
distant, unpersuasive prose comes from overcompounding (e.g., beggar-
poet-toady), the use of archaic or dialect words, overwriting with long, untimely
or crowded epithets, and inappropriate metaphors (Rhetoric, III 1406a). Aristotle
goes on to point out the parts of a speech and how to manipulate those parts, but
his contribution to a study of grammar is clear if, from Plato's probable
viewpoint, a bit too moderated. Plato probably would have tried—and failed—to
smile indulgently at such declarations from his prize student. He would,
however, have had much less patience with another group of thinkers, the
Stoics, who would have seemed just plain wrong-headed to him.

Stoics

Stocism, a philosophy named after the Painted Porch (Stoa Poikile) on
which Zeno of Citium (c. 336–c. 264 B.C.E.) and his followers met, sought an
order in individuals' lives that replicated the order of the cosmos as the Stoics
saw it. System, wisdom, self-control, and adherence to the law of nature are the
basic injunctions of Stoicism and the fundamental principles that guided the
Stoics' contributions to language study. Since the universe has a basic order and
since that order is something humans can understand, the Stoics claimed that
happiness arose from discerning this order. In brief, information and knowledge
of the system bring pleasure, not just power. Further the Stoics viewed

linguistics as a formal study of language. Language was a path one followed
from sound, the *signifier*, to meaning, the *signified*.

\[
\text{Sound/Signifier}/(\text{ta } \sigma\epsilon\\mu\alpha\iota\nu\iota\nu\alpha\nu\tau\alpha\tau\iota) \quad \longrightarrow \quad \text{Meaning/Signified}/(\text{ta } \\
\sigma\epsilon\mu\alpha\iota\nu\iota\nu\alpha\nu\tau\alpha\tau\iota)
\]

[.art\em\i\ži]/artemisia

that sagewood or wormwood

plant that just caught my toga

and is tearing a rather nasty hole

in it

This distinction between signifier and signified is generally accepted as the first
principle of linguistics because it leads the way to investigations of language that
depend more on observation and generalization than on metaphysical
speculations (Robins 1967, 16). The distinction also led the Stoics to divide the
study of language into categories still used in linguistic analyses:

- **phonetics**, a study of sounds;
Dragons That Won't Be Slain

- **morphology**, a study of meaningful units;
- **semantics**, a study of meaning; and
- **syntax**, a study of the ordering of meaningful units.

These labels and definitions still hold for contemporary language studies, so much so that frequently current traditional grammar handbooks will use them even though the terms weren't typically used in earlier handbooks.

The Stoics flourished during the time that monolingual Greece was coming into contact with other cultures and languages. In fact, Zeno's first language was Semitic, not Greek, and coming from this different language background Zeno quickly came to see the rather arbitrary connection between sound sequences and meaning. That is, the connections in any language between the signifier and the signified were primarily those of convention and the general consensus of speakers rather than divine intervention or natural connections. That assumption meant that an individual could learn about language, and that conclusion fit Zeno's interpretations of humans and view of himself as a teacher quite nicely. Zeno's form of Stocism was perhaps the most dogmatic of the Hellenistic philosophical movements. His teachings claimed that a wise man could have absolute knowledge of truth, could rise above all emotions, could follow an austere concept of virtue. Man could speak absolutely correctly and
(thereby) come to full knowledge and virtue. Zeno further elevated *rhetoric* to a science (*epistēmē*) of speaking well and *dialectic* to a science of correct discussion in question and answer" (Kennedy 1994, 90). That meant Zeno could teach others about language and wisdom—and be paid handsomely for it. His interpretation was as good as anyone's if consensus was the rule.

But Zeno's was only one voice of the school. Often considered the co-founder of Stocism, **Chrysippus of Soli**, (c. 280-c. 264 B.C.E.) viewed the basic structures of language as but one way to discover the universe's basic laws. To make his point clear, Chrysippus wrote at least four grammars, primarily on verb anomalies, in which he argued that usage, not regularity of forms, should set standards for language (i.e., should determine what is or is not grammatically correct). Chrysippus and his students

- expanded Aristotle's three classes to four, adding *articles*,
- divided nouns into proper and common nouns, and
- made detailed studies of tense and agreement in verbs and of case in nouns, concluding that nouns possess five cases or forms:
  - **nominative** (subject),
  - **accusative** (object),
  - **dative** (secondary object),
As a group, the Stoics were active participants in the anomalists/analognists debate. Despite their adherence to order, form, and regularity in other venues, most of the Stoics frequently allied themselves with a rather extreme form of the anomalist position that language overall was a rather haphazard phenomenon. They demeaned the analogists as purists who used overly generalized examples to prescribe usage. Language, the Stoics argued, was far more complex. One word, for example, never had just one meaning, and anyone suggesting such a one-to-one correlation mislead speakers. In this debate, however, the Stoics and, later in linguistic history, the pure anomalists lost. As language scholars discovered regularities such as those typical of inflectional (e.g., -ed past) and derivational (e.g., -ion in creation) affixes, the basics of analogists' argument eclipsed the anomalists. The speculative elements of this debate, however, play a critical role in the 20th century when transformational generative grammarians, principally Noam Chomsky and his students, find themselves challenged by generative semanticists, primarily George Lakoff and his adherents. Chomsky, not too surprisingly, prevails.
But, for now, back to the third century B.C.E. Like so many of their predecessors and contemporaries, the Stoics didn’t study grammar because they had nothing better to do or because some despot mandated that they compose a “definitive grammar of Greek” for all citizens to memorize. The Stoics nobly sought to demonstrate that the outer forms of language reveal inner truths about human nature—no small trick by anyone’s standards. By in large, however, they were not successful.

By end of 400 B.C.E., after the conquests of Aristotle’s prize student, Alexander the Great (356-23 B.C.E.), Greek culture dominated the Near East and Mediterranean. To inculcate their cultural values, political influence, and literary tastes, the Greeks expanded their educational system and, in so doing, set the pattern for education for generations to come. Students, for example, practiced writing compositions on wax tablets that could be smoothed and reused or on plain wood with ink (Petroski 1992). Lessons on Homer’s literary works, on grammar, and on criticism were seen as the best ways to prepare citizens for

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11 In the mid-twentieth century, transformational-generative grammarians adapt this concept as a part of their contention that language possesses distinct yet interactive deep and surface structures.
advanced study in rhetoric and philosophy and, eventually, for full participation in the political functions of their empire (Marrou 1956, 95-216; Haussman 1993, 12-13).

As education expanded, Athens began to lose its death-grip as the center of the empire's intellectual activity. While Zeno and his school flourished, in Asia Minor Cleanthese of Assos (c. 331-c. 264 B.C.E.) pursued Stocism through poetry and religious visions; and in Cyprus, Chrysippus set forth competing forms of stoicism. The cities of Alexandria, Antioch, and Pergamum became centers of scientific research. As the center of learning shifted from Athens to Alexandria and elsewhere, Greek scholars worried about the state of education because, as they saw it, the Greek language—and consequently the culture—was deteriorating. Various grammarians tried to construct absolutely accurate versions of the epics in order to “freeze” the language in its purest form. Instead of satisfying their demands, their efforts led them to question the regularity and stability of a language over long periods of time. As grammarians they suspected that their language had changed—and they weren’t overjoyed about this possibility. Unlike the Stoics, grammarians from these outlying areas were as interested in grammatical correctness as the Athenians. They

• sought proper classifications for items,
• established standards, leading them to label some words as unacceptable/obscene, and

• saw grammar as tied intimately to style.

Stoic grammarians, however, took opposite views. After all, the Stoics understood how to create systems and deserve recognition as establishing a firm foundation for the description of the Greek language. Remember, they not only distinguished between signifier—an utterance without any content—and signified—the content of an utterance, they also

• wrote definitions of grammatical categories,

• saw grammar as important in-and-of itself rather than as a link to logic;

• figured out the verb system for Greek, complete with present and imperfect tenses and aspect; and

• reaffirmed four parts of speech, or “parts of the sentence,” that we still use today: noun, verb, article, and conjunction.

Later they confirmed the split between proper and common nouns and added another part of a sentence, adverb. They argued a seemingly obvious point: the best style was brief, simple, and straightforward and came from the best grammar that was also simple, straightforward, and standardized. And they insisted that consistency, not usage, should set the standard for language, in
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essence an analogist view. But the Stoics aren't typically studied today in part because only fragments of their texts survived the 2200 years between when they were written and now and in part because other writers, sometimes less talented than the average Stoic, got credit where credit wasn't necessarily due.

**Sophists**

Plato, Aristotle, and the Stoics were far from being alone in their speculations. In particular, the **Sophists**, those typically denigrated teachers of Greek rhetoric, contributed to grammar, particularly in our contemporary understanding of gender and mood of verbs. Before the middle of the 5th-century B.C.E., the term *sophistes* was used in a nontechnical sense to mean wise, prudent, or statesmanlike conduct and was restricted to seers, prophets, and sages such as Orpheus and Pythagoras. Later in the century, *sophist* appears in Greek discourse referring to poets, musicians, wise men, philosophers, or other accomplished, admired persons. However, because later Sophists taught anyone who would pay them, they were vilified. Ancient Greeks like Socrates and Plato, for instance, would use the term *sophist* when suspicious of another's intelligence or learning in much the same sense we use "egghead" or "nerd" to describe some academics.

Even though some of his best friends, like **Gorgias of Leontini**, were
Sophists, Plato joined with many other writers in taking shots at Sophists and sophistry. On the rather thin but nonetheless good side, Sophists aptly criticized many traditional ideas such as moral and political standards. On the less than admirable side, however, many Sophists were more concerned with making money and winning arguments by any means whatsoever than with spreading knowledge. Hence, Sophists come out as men who taught devious methods rather than ways to seek truth. Even Aristotle, who like Plato and Socrates taught for money, condemned sophistry in *Sophistical Refutations* as “the semblance of wisdom without reality” and the sophist as “one who makes money by from apparent but unreal wisdom” (McKeon 1941, 209).

Yet in many ways the Sophists do not deserve the derisive reputation they have. Plato and Aristotle rightly condemn the few eggs who taught the art of public speaking so ambitious politicians could succeed. However, the Sophists actually spent most of their time teaching willing students public speaking, grammar and linguistic theory, moral and political doctrines, precepts about the gods and the nature and origin of humans, literary analysis and criticism, mathematics, and, in some cases, elements of physical theory about the universe such as astronomy (Barrett 1987). They influenced the addition of the **trivium** (i.e., logic, rhetoric, grammar) to the **quadrivium** (i.e., arithmetic, music,
geometry, and astronomy). During the Middle Ages, these studies taken together constituted the Seven Liberal Arts, the bases for contemporary higher educational systems. In a way, you're studying what you are studying because of sophistry.

At the top of the list, the Sophists deserve recognition because they sought explanations of the universe in terms of observable phenomena rather than appeals to outside principles or to metaphysical worlds. Hence they saw Plato's rather mystical and idealistic Theory of Forms as blasphemous. For Sophists, the real world and the people who populated it were apt objects for study and the primary means through which to discover universal truths. Gorgias and other Sophists, such as Protagoras of Abdera, Hippias of Elis, and Thrasymachus, recognized everyday experiences could be contradictory but nonetheless could explain 'reality'—whatever it is.

When dealing with language, the Sophists pointed out problems in the argument that language was divine perfection. For instance, if language developed logically or held any inherent relationship to the items it referenced (as Plato suggested), no illogical features could exist. But illogic does exist. This view of language explains why some languages, for instance, don't have separate words for the male and female of all animal species and some other languages
have multiple ways to differentiate gender. Observations such as these fed the analogist/anomalist debate and, eventually, led to first Greek and Latin grammar books including that by Crates of Mallos, a 2nd-century Greek anomalist, and, much later, by Cicero's contemporary and friend, the Alexandrian literary scholar, Dionysius Thrax.

**Dionysius Thrax**

Born in Thrace during the 1st-century B.C.E. Greek philosopher-historian-Stoic, Dionysius Thrax began his study of language as a student in Alexandria and continued it as professor in Rome. With the shift of intellectual and cultural influence away from Athens, Alexandrian society fostered a group of scholars, philologists, and literary critics who, from around 280 B.C.E., concerned themselves with a study of language as it related to literature and science rather than to logic. The obvious question they asked was *How is it best to study the language?* Their equally obvious answer was *Preserve great literary and scientific texts!* The Alexandrians set about doing just that, but restoring texts meant figuring out elements of the language because, when a text had missing parts of words or phrases, the scribe had to know what regular or irregular endings, words, phrases, or terms were probable, given the language, to restore the text's meaning correctly. As they gathered observations about their language,
individual scholars began writing treatises on ‘correct Greek’ (Hellēnismos) that taught students the norms of acceptability and set out the regular inflections (i.e., indicators of grammatical relationships) of the language. What’s important to remember here is that these norms and inflections were not based on how people spoke the language but how skilled authors wrote in the language. By the time Dionysius and other first century analysts started writing their grammars, studies using written language had come to be known as studies in grammaticē.

Aristarchus of Samothrace (c. 216-144 B.C.E.), one of the most noted of the early scholars, based his investigations on Homer and taught his student, Dionysius, that using Homer's works was the clearest way to present information about Greek. Dionysius learned his lessons well. He consolidated his study of Aristotle's methods of classification, his knowledge of Stoic linguistic theory, and his years of scrutiny, education, and thought in the first formal grammar of Greek, the textbook Téchnē grammatikē (Τέχνη γραμματικῆ). In short, Dionysius combined observations of arbitrary (anomalist) elements with his extensive background and wrote a description that puts the regularities (the analogies) of Greek into categories that are descriptive and mutually exclusive.

Used for nearly 1500 years as a model for standard grammars, the Téchnē
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is a snappy little handbook that, even though it left out a great deal, shaped the way texts on grammar—including the one you're now reading—were organized. It runs fifteen pages and twenty-five sections, each comprising a summary account of a structural element. Dionysius defines grammar as "the practical study of the normal usages of poets and prose writers" (Kemp 1986, 345) and progresses through sections on reading, tone, punctuation, letters and syllables of the language, parts of speech, words, sentences, and the noun. Interestingly, the Tēchnē's primary omission is a review of Greek syntax.

In terms of textbook elements we mostly associate with a 'grammar' or a 'handbook of grammar,' the Tēchnē:

* begins with an account of the phonetic values of the letters (grámmata or γράμματα) of the Greek alphabet,
* considers the sentence the starting point for grammatical analysis and the word the minimal unit;
* expands words classes to eight: nouns (ónoma), pronouns (antōnymiā), verbs (rhēna), participles (metochē), articles (ártethon), adverbs (epirrhēna), conjunctions (sýndesmos), prepositions (próthesis);
* gives detailed definitions to each word class; and
* establishes as linguistic gospel that the best way to describe a language
was to begin with a description of its words (its parts of speech).

Like so many before him, Dionysius gave particular attention to noun, which he defines, in simple terms, as “a part of speech inflected for case, signifying a person or a thing” (Robins 1979, 33). He united the Stoic common and proper nouns into one class, noting that nouns could be declined (that is, made to show what they do in sentences), could designate concrete or abstract items, and had three genders, two species (primitive and derivative) and various forms (schêma [σχῆμα]), numbers, and cases.

Reported by his colleagues as plodding and a bit dull, nonetheless Dionysius would, if asked So What?, answer that a close study of grammar aids students in giving accurate and entertaining public recitations of literature. He recognized that poetry was both written and oral speech, and, so, he included an exegesis of poetry as part of grammar. The learning curve, for Dionysius, was simple but necessary. The Têchnê introduced young boys into the study of grammar as the first stage of written composition. A careful understanding of grammar (through Dionysius' text) helped the boys

- to read aloud, thus giving them a sense of the rhythms of language;

- to identify tropes in the readings, thus familiarizing themselves with simile, metaphor, and other such niceties of language;
• to determine etymologies, thus expanding their vocabularies;
• to decline nouns and conjugate verbs, thus mastering basic language forms; and
• to critique literary texts, thus adding to their literary sophistication and inaugurating them into the more complex study of rhetoric.

Later, as adolescents fully schooled in the basics of grammar, students moved to an advanced study of rhetoric in which they analyzed prose writers for relevant techniques of argumentation, organization, amplification, and ornamentation. If these young men happened to discover what made certain prose writers ‘great’ and others mediocre, as their teachers had already determined, Dionysius could only be more pleased with his efforts. Sound familiar?

Dionysius claims that “the noblest part of grammar,” the only language worth the scholar's attention, was “the appreciation of literary compositions” (Harris 1951, 83). Spoken vernacular had so degenerated from its original "pure" state and had become so corrupt through long years of neglect that it was undeserving of the language scholar's serious attention. This viewpoint, obvious, has had long-ranging consequences. Today many individuals argue that only the style used by certain writers accurately reflects what English should be and that the styles spoken in everyday conversations not only threaten to
defeat effective communication but substantive thought. Consider, for one example, what John Simon, arts and drama critic, writes about errors and sloppy style in English:

After all, we think in words, we conceptualize in words, we work out our problems inwardly with words, and using them correctly is comparable to a craftsman’s treating his tools with care, keeping his materials in good shape. Would you trust a weaver who hangs her wet laundry on her loom, or lets her cats bed down in her yarn? The person who does not respect words and their proper relationships cannot have much respect for ideas—very possibly cannot have ideas at all. My quarrel is not so much with minor errors that we all fall into from time to time even if we know better as it is with basic sloppiness or ignorance or defiance of good English (Simon 1980, 204).

Hmmm. Nonetheless, Dionysus’ grammar text, in sum,

- set poets and prose writers as the authorities for grammar (i.e., usage);
- set the tone for most grammar textbooks that followed—direct, brief, heavy on classification with few but pithy exemplifying illustrations;
- set the classifications out for purposes of teaching language rather than
linguistic speculation;

- set up the definitions for parts of speech by analogy to other parts of speech; and
- set for all future studies the idea that a basis for grammar is a word-class system.

No small accomplishment for a single, doltish individual.

B. The Romans

As Greek domination gave way to Roman, the dividing line between the disciplines of rhetoric and grammar blurred, especially in discussions of style. Bilingual rhetoricians (educated individuals fluent in Latin and Greek grammar, literature, and public speaking) wrote texts about language structure so that lesser writers could enrich their literary works. Additionally, these grammarians grilled students in tropes, metaphors, and figures of speech—each, in its way, dependent upon classifying the language. Early on, Latin grammars were patterned after Greek models for pragmatic and political reasons. Pragmatically, both Latin and Greek are highly inflected languages. Hence Roman grammarians could simply take Greek grammatical categories and apply them to Latin (a close fit but not exact). Politically, Greek, even today, is considered by many, especially those connected with philosophy and science, a prestigious,
cultured language. Snob appeal counts for a lot, even in the first century.

But slavish imitation produces distortions since no two languages are identical. For instance, Roman scholars had to ‘fudge’ their grammars because Greek lacks an ablative (i.e., place/manner adverbial) case. As the Roman Empire conquered more areas, as Latin became the language for government and religion, and as the works of writers such as Virgil (70-19 B.C.E.) and Marcus Tullius Cicero (106-43 B.C.E.) dominated literary and rhetorical discussions, Latin took over as the prestige language. Everyone who considered himself educated or powerful knew Latin—no questions asked. Roman grammarians bravely took on the responsibility for clarifying the best of Latin, forgetting, for the most part, that they’d started with Greek classifications. Just as the Greeks before them, as the Roman Empire began to weaken, grammarians began to police language vigorously. Citizens at large and grammarians in particular came to regard it as a sacred duty of grammarians to preserve the purity of Latin from whatever decay vernacular (spoken) languages might impose. If they could do nothing else, grammarians should ameliorate the corrupt practices that had already taken place and stand guard against future language deterioration.

Marcus Terentius Varro

Inheriting beliefs in an ultimate order of the cosmos and in human ability
to reason from that ultimate order, the 2nd-century Roman philosopher/grammarian Marcus Terentius Varro (c. 116-27 B.C.E) took the Greek precedents about language and complicated them with his own speculative approaches. Through investigating the anomalist-analogist controversy, Varro discounted the analogist position that words in particular and language in general are natural and logical. In works such as De Lingua Latina (On the Latin Language), Varro argues that word choices and language practices are related in arbitrary and accidental ways (i.e., anomalist position). He guessed that

- patterns in language were only approximate,
- most grammatical rules were only labels invented by people,
- that irregularities and exceptions --'anomalies'--were fundamental characteristics of language' [Haussman 1993, 134].

De Lingua Latina is 26 books of Varro's perceptions on etymology, morphology, and syntax. He tried to account for differences between Latin and Greek and to present Latin as principally a social phenomenon, used fundamentally for communication. He determined that languages, by nature, are tripartite:

- words are imposed, i.e., created over time with histories [etymology];
- words are derived and inflected, i.e., changed by adding and combining
parts [morphology] and;

- words are systematically combined to produce sentences, i.e., put into meaningful order [syntax].

Varro's characterizations of language are broad generalizations, rather than Dionysius' narrower categories, that can easily apply of any language. Working in generalization rather than specifics lead Varro to see parts of speech not as noun, verb, or adverb but in open classes. All words would fall into one of four classes:

- one with case (e.g., pronouns),
- one with tense (e.g., participles),
- one with both case and tense (e.g., verbs), and
- one with neither case or tense (e.g., interjections).

If you take the ideas the Stoics had, add to them the ideas Dionysius put together from his teachers and his studies of Greek literature, and flavor the concoction with Varro's more generalized categorizations, you end up with an approach to the grammar of classical Greek and Latin that makes up the foundation of the Roman *ars grammatica*. Nice information to know if you're living in ancient Rome and speaking Latin; however, we aren't and don't. So what importance do these fellows have for today? Looked at from a longer
perspective, these classical sources give us what we understand as grammar today if we understand grammar as including ideas about

- how we can identify what nouns are doing in sentences (i.e., declension),
- how we understand what tense a verb is in and how that tense helps us understand the time in a sentence (i.e., conjugation),
- how language can be divided into patterns (i.e., sentence structures), and
- what those patterns might be (e.g., simple, compound, complex, declarative, imperative).

But remember, none of these thinkers worked in isolation. Each was influenced by previous ideas as well as by the people around them. They may have depended for their data on texts like *The Iliad* and *The Odyssey*, but they spent a lot of time talking to one another about what was going on with language.

*Aelius Donatus*

Toward the end of the millennium, *Julius Caesar* (100-44 B.C.E) wrote his own outline of the grammatical regularities of Latin, and Latin scholars *Marcus Tullius Cicero* (c.106 -c.43 B.C.E.) and *Marcus Fabius Quintilian* (c.30-40-c.96 A.D.) extended older lists of words, parts of speech, and other patterns into questions of language usage, public speaking, argumentation, style, and rhetorical grammar (i.e., statements about how to use specific aspects of
language to get an audience to agree with a speaker/writer). Taking a basically analogist viewpoint in *Institutio Oratoria*, Quintilian, for example, had traced word etymologies and concluded that word choices were made originally not because of some natural connection between sound and meaning but on the basic principles of natural logic and analogy. His teachings and subsequent writings encouraged students to judge correctness of current language practices by paying attention to authority of current usage.

Second only to the medievalist Priscian, the most interesting writer during this time was a mid-4th century C.E. Latin scholar Aelius Donatus (fl. 354 A.D.) who taught St. Jerome and who composed perhaps the most famous of all Latin grammatical treatises, *Ars maior*. *Ars maior*, the first grammar book printed using wooden type, became a standard Latin grammar through the Middle Ages. It was so popular that Donatus condensed and simplified his study as the shorter textbook *Ars minor* (or "Lesser Study") and, thereby, got his ideas and prescriptions about language out to an even larger audience. And he was an opinionated prescriptivist. His judgments on barbarisms, for instance, give a clear sense of his organizational principles and aesthetic standards:

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12Gutenberg seems to have found it advantageous to publish many editions of Donatus' *Ars maior*, not only as practice but also as a source of much needed revenue. There are twenty-four known editions of the text in Gutenberg’s earliest type, all preceding the famous Bible.
Barbarism is a bad part of speech in ordinary speech, in poetic discourse it is called metaplasm. In our language it is called barbarism, in the speech of foreigners it is called barbarolexis, as if someone were to say *mastruga* `sheepskin' (a Sardinian word), *cateia* `club' (a Celto-Germanic word), *magalia* `hut' (a Punic word). Barbarism occurs in two ways: in pronunciation and in writing. These have four types each: addition, subtraction, changing and transposing of letters, syllables, tones and aspiration.

Reportedly, medieval teachers repeated Donatus' question “Quae pars oratonis est?”\(^{13}\) so frequently that English now has the verb *parse*, meaning to divide a sentence into its parts. However, overall in his textbook *Ars Grammatica*, Donatus pays less attention to the parts than to defining the faults and virtues of style and outlining basic tropes and figures of speech so that students would know how to compose more effective, readable texts. Donatus divides figures of speech (single words, phrases, or sentences) into

- those related to speech, which are the proper subject for a grammarian,

\(^{13}\)Meaning, roughly, What sorts of language are there? or How is language parsed or divided?
those related to oratory, which are the proper subject for a rhetorician, and
those related to thought, which are the proper subject of philosophers.

Using a prescriptive viewpoint, he defines barbarism (above) as a grammatical error in the use of a single word and a solecism as an error in the use of words in context (Kennedy 1994, 274-75). Only when poets used these errors as ornaments of style could such miscues be allowed. Otherwise, they were barbarisms.

**Priscian**

The greatest representative of Latin grammars was undoubtedly the 6th-century Latin scholar Priscianus Caesariensis because his *Institutiones grammaticae* (Grammatical Categories) is the most complete grammar of Latin written. Priscian taught Latin in Constantinople with the intent of transferring, as much as possible, the grammatical system of Dionysius Thrax's *Téchnē* and other Greek grammatical wonders to Latin. At this time, Constantinople was a Greek-speaking city in a Greek-speaking area, but Latin was the official language. Thus to make it in this new capital of the Eastern Empire, native speakers of Greek had to know Latin, and Priscian set out to teach them the best of that language.

What Priscian admired in Greek grammars was their systematic approach to the study. So in *Institutiones*, an 18-volume work, he started with
pronunciation and syllabus structure and moved through a description of letters (litterae) including the elements of articulate speech, the names of the letters, their written shape, and phonetic values. He then turned his attention to defining the word (dictiō) as the minimal unit of sentence structure and the sentence (ōrātiō) as the expression of a complete thought. (Remember, these definitions are from about 450 A.D., not the 1990s!) With these basics established, Priscian moves on to more relevant information: specifically, he sets out the classical system of eight word classes, defines each, and illustrates each one with a copious number of examples from classical texts, particularly Greek literary works. The eight parts of speech or word classes Priscian identifies are nearly the same as those in the Téchnēs:

- **Nōmen**, or noun, included words that indicated a substance or assigned a quality to a body or thing;
- **verbum**, or verb, indicated action and had tense (either present, past [imperfect, perfect, plain, and pluperfect], or future) and mood [indicative and subjunctive] but not case;
- **participium**, or participle, derived from verbs and nouns and had tense as well as case;
- **prōnōmen**, or pronoun, substituted for [proper] nouns;
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- adverbium, or adverb, functioned as syntactic and semantic sisters to verbs, but not as important;
- praepositio, or preposition, appeared before inflected words;
- interiectio, or interjection, indicated feelings or state of mind; and
- coniunctio, or conjunction, joined syntactically two or more members of any one of the previous word classes (Robins 1979, 57-58).

What Priscian doesn't do anywhere in his Institutiones grammaticae is define grammar. At least other Latin grammars gave Thrax's definition! Why not define the term that confounds us today? We can only speculate that, by the time Priscian wrote this tome, grammar had long since come to mean a study of the word classes, inflections, and word order of a prestige language in order to use that language appropriately.

Although nearly a copy of Dionysius Thrax's Téchnē and, in many ways, an inferior analysis to Varro's De Lingua Latina, Priscian's Institutiones was the end of the classical grammars and the beginning of linguistic scholarship for the Middle Ages. Institutiones ran to hundreds of manuscripts, the Medieval equivalent of multiple printings, and its approach to language lies under countless philosophical and rhetorical studies for hundreds of years to come.

Overall the heritage Priscian and the other Roman grammarians set the models
for grammatical description and language teaching that continue to influence language specialists today. In a very real sense, the Roman contribution to our lives is the model we call traditional grammar.

II. The Middle Ages

Greek and Roman civilizations, with their teachers and scholars on rhetoric, philosophy, poetics, and grammar, gave way to Christianity and an educational system designed by clergy for the narrow purpose of spreading and controlling the religion. Rather than taking their examples from Virgil, Homer, and other great literary figures, monks took them from the Bible. Rather than having their unschooled students memorize speeches, tropes, lists, or lessons, clerics taught chanting. Unlike language instruction during the Classical era, medieval students now spoke one language outside the monastery walls and learned the structure of another, now “dead” language (mainly, Latin) within those walls. Various languages existed side by side for both pragmatic and political reasons. To share their everyday experiences, people used their native languages (e.g., the ancestors of contemporary English, French, Spanish, Portuguese, Italian); to be accepted in the realms of power, one had to know Latin, the language of high culture, religion, the courts, and aristocracy.

Although typically called the Middle or Dark Ages, the period between c.
1100-c. 1500 was not entirely without serious investigations of language structure. Education, such as it was, arose from the *trivium*, with grammar being the lynchpin for the whole of learning. **Speculative** grammars moved away from Aristotelian views of semantic relations and from classical distinctions between formal meaning (*dictio*) and sound (*vox*) and centered on **syntax**, the study of grammatical acceptability, word order, function, and transitivity. The 113th- and 14th-century authors of such grammars, the Modistae, argued that classes of words represented reality. That is, words “stand for” (i.e., *modus significandi*) concrete and abstract items. This position sounds more philosophical than linguistic because it is! The Modistae turned to philosophers as reliable sources on grammar (i.e., *philosophus grammaticam invenit*) because philosophers could tease out the universal grammar that underlies the superficial differences among languages.

Specific grammatical studies also appeared, mostly based on the models set out by Donatus and Priscian. For example, in *De Grammatico St. Anselm* (1033-1109), a French Benedictine abbot, turned his attention to the grammatical distinctions expressed by concepts of **signifier** (i.e., sequence of sounds or graphic signs) and the thing **signified** (i.e., concrete object or abstract idea referred to). Between 1275-1300, **Peter of Spain** (later Pope John XXI), like
Anselm, became intrigued by questions of grammar, particularly on the differences between the signifier and signified. Grammars of vernacular (i.e., indigenous) languages flourished. Languages as diverse as Hebrew, Arabic, Old English, and Old Irish were analyzed, classified, dissected, and categorized—mostly in terms of existing Latin grammars. A particularly interesting work, a grammar of Old Norse called *First Grammatical Treatise*, was written sometime around 1150 by a scholar now known only as the First Grammarian. The Treatise was appended to Snorri Sturluson's 13th-century textbook on poetic style and construction called *Prose Edda*. The First Grammarian used quite modern descriptive methods including setting out a phonological record of Icelandic in minimal pairs (i.e., units that contrast only in a single aspect of sound), thus anticipating a primary basis of 20th-century phonological theory. The First Grammarian also provided exercises in spelling reform as well as methods for and problems with applying the Latin alphabet to Old Icelandic.

**III. The Renaissance**

*Renaissance* literally means a rebirth or revival. Starting in Europe in the 14th century and extending through the British Isles well into the 17th century, scholars, artists, philosophers, and intellectuals enjoyed a humanistic revival of
classical art, literature, and learning. In terms of language study and traditional grammar, the Renaissance opened up extensive linguistic data to scrutiny. Explorers and missionaries found themselves face-to-face with non-Indo-Europeans who spoke languages that didn't come close to the English, German, Italian, French, and other related languages they spoke. Consequently, new grammars for languages such as Quechua appeared, and dictionaries of various languages came into being. What's more, access to knowledge figuratively exploded with the advent of printing—and so did grammars.

Specific works on grammar proliferated. For example, the 16th-century Spanish classical scholar and professor of Greek and Rhetoric at Salamanca Francisco Sanchez de Las Bronzas (1523-1601)—known more generally as Sanctius—used language evaluations as means of interpreting literature. His Minerva: o, De la propiedad de la lengua latina (c. 1562) was considered for years the standard Latin grammar in Spanish. Sanctius believed all languages were developments of a single set of universals. Noam Chomsky, arguably the most influential linguist in the 20th century, credits Sanctius' theory of ellipsis with influencing the 17th-century rationalist grammarians (Chomsky, 1968). French philosopher and renegade Pierre de la Ramée, usually known by his Latinized academic name Peter Ramus (1515-1572), wrote grammars of Greek, Latin, and
French. His *Scholae* stresses the need to consult everyday usage of native speakers as appropriate guides. Anxious to preserve their languages’ purity, the Italian government created the *Accademia della Crusca* in 1582. The French followed suit in 1635 with the *Académie française*, a linguistic institution that set the standard for subsequent language academies. **Philip V of Spain** (1683-1746) promoted the creation of a Spanish Academy in 1713. And over the years academies have been established in Sweden (1786), Hungary (1830), Israel (1953), and South Africa (1961), each with the intent of moderating and managing their native languages.

**IV. English and the English in the Renaissance**

In England, studies in grammar got boosts from royalty and controversy, two not unrelated phenomena. About 1417, the official correspondence of **Henry V** (1387-1422) suddenly and almost entirely stopped being written in French, the official language since the 11th century Norman Conquest, and started being written in English. By mid-15th century many government documents and even private letters were in English, and before 1500 even statutes were being recorded in English. This restoration of English as the official language of the court virtually assured the gradual emergence of a single dialect of English as the accepted standard out of the many varied regional dialects that already existed.
English now performed the functions formerly served by Latin and French in the court, the Parliament, and the judiciary. Another, perhaps even more important boost for English came, somewhat by chance, from a bureaucracy. Increasingly during the 15th century, the written form of the language used by scribes in the Chancery House, and known today as Chancery English, in combination with other influences such as the newfangled process of printing from movable type, established a single accepted standard for the correct grammatical aspects of the language.

If English is to be the standard, then someone has to dictate the acceptable standards for that standard. And there were many Brits who rose to the occasion. By mid-16th century, the English Renaissance brought on a revival of learning and letters and, with it, a deliberate—but far from universal—interest in the English language as an eloquent medium for literature and learned discourse. Controversy ensued. The desire to use the native tongue, the vernacular, was strong enough to pull even staunch defenders of classical languages into the debate. Many learned men sought to enrich the supposedly impoverished Anglo-Saxon language by importing words from Latin, Italian, and French. Even more words than in previous periods of its history poured into English and took on "regularized" pronunciations and grammatical elements.
Among those who encouraged this increasing the English word stock with European imports were Sir Thomas Elyot (c. 1490-1546) and Sir Thomas More (1478-1535). On the other side of the argument were purists such as Roger Ascham (1515-68) and Sir John Cheke (1514-57), who preferred their English either straight up or, like English poet Edmund Spenser (1552?-99), enhanced with English archaisms.

The debate over imported versus native words and their use or deterrence in literature and public discourse raged for some time, becoming, inevitably, a subject of satire. William Camden (1551-1623) laments then complements English in Remaines Concerning Britain:

As for the Monosyllables so rife in our tongue which were not so originally, although they are vnfitting for verses and measures, yet are they most fit for expressing briefly the first concepts of the minde, or Intentionalia as they call them in schooles: so that we can set downe more matter in fewer lines, than any other language. (Cited in Crystal 1995, 70)

Thomas Wilson (c. 1523-1581) published the first logic handbook, The Rule of Reason (1551), and the first rhetoric text in English, The Arte of Rhetorique (1553). In Rhetorique Wilson pays special attention to tropes and metaphors (words and
phrases that he knew could inappropriately alter meaning) to figures (words that alter shape but not meaning), and to abominations to the language he classifies as *ynkehorne* [inkhorn] terms—learned words imported from other languages to enrich the penurious English tongue. Using words of Latin, Greek, French, and Italian origins, Wilson wrote that

> Among all other lessons this should first be learned, that weenever affect any stranunge ynkehorne termes, but to speake as is commonly received: neither seeking to be over fine, nor yet living over-carelesse, using our speeche as most men doe, and ordering our wittes as the fewest have done.

(1553, XX)

Not to be outdone, Thomas Elyot, in his *Boke named the Gouernour* (1531) shot back that he was constraind to vsurpe a latine word... Yet by declaring the vertue in a fewe mo wordes / the name ones brought in custome / shall be as facile to vnderstande as other wordes late commen out of Italy and France / and made denizins amonge vs... And this I do nowe remebr for the necessary
augmentation of our langage

John Cheke concurred. In 1557 he wrote to Thomas Hoby

I am of this opinion that our tung shold be written cleane
and pure, unvixt and vmangeled with borowing of other
tunges, wherein if we take not heed bi tijm, euer borowing
and neuer payeng, she shall be fain to keep her house as
bankrupt. For then doth our tung naturallie and praisablie
vtter her meaning, when she bouroweth no countrerfeitness
of other tunges to attire her self withall. . ..

By the 17th century, however, the other side of the argument took the
forefront. John Wallis (1616-1703), Oxford mathematician and early member of
the Royal Academy, wrote his Grammatica Linguæ Anglicanæ (Grammar of the
English Language, 1653) in Latin and in part to dispel some of the erroneous
connections between Latin and English and encourage schools to teach English
grammar rather than the Latin language. He abandoned many of the methods
used in previous Latin grammars but, nevertheless, introduced some headaches
that we still debate. For instance, Wallis' grammar is the source of the much
discussed distinction between shall and will. It's also the grammar Dr. Samuel
Johnson referred to in the front matter of his 1755 dictionary. In 1664 the Royal
Academy voted to form a “committee for improving the English language”; however, their efforts produced no substantive document on the language (Haussman, 1993, p. 21).

John Dryden (1631-1700) weighed into the controversies with his Defence of the Epilogue (1672) in which he complains that French, not Latin, has had too great an influence on English vocabulary. And as the Renaissance turned into the Age of Reason, Jonathan Swift (1667-1745) demanded in “A Proposal for Correcting, Improving and Ascertaining the English Tongue” (1712) that if English could be refined and standardized perhaps there might be Ways found out to fix it for ever; or at least till we are invaded and made a Conquest by some other State; and even then our best Writings might probably

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14 John Dryden defended the English of his time as an improvement over the English of Shakespeare and Jonson, neither of whom was during Dryden’s lifetime noteworthy literary figures. Dryden also was a worrier, specifically about language. He is probably the first person who expressed concern about ending sentences with prepositions and worked assiduously to eliminate many such from his own writings when revising his works for a collected edition. Again, he used Latin syntax as a model.
be preserved with Care, and grow in Esteem, and the
Authors have a Chance for Immortality.

With all these correctives, one wonders how the language survived.

Grammars preserving the language from its steady decay and laments about the simplest of phenomenon, spelling, were also incredibly popular.

Dramatist Ben Jonson (1573-1637) wrote an aptly entitled text An English Grammar. . .for the Benefit of all Strangers, out of his Observation of the English language now Spoken, and in Use, published posthumously in 1640. Short, sketchy, and intended for the use of foreigners, Jonson's grammar describes English from its author's knowledge of a Latin grammatical framework. Jonson went so far as to quote Roman rhetorician Quintilian’s dictum "Custom is the most certain mistress of language." Despite such lofty intentions and classical appeals, Jonson saw usage and custom as the guiding principles for language but despaired about its commonness.

Spelling was, to some extent, a matter of taste rather than grammar. People mostly spelled things the way they sounded., thus avoiding the uniformity we tend to cherish. Schoolmasters Richard Mulcaster\(^\text{15}\) (1531?-1611),

\(^{15}\)Mulcaster probably was the model for Shakespeare's pedant Holofernes in Love's Labour's Lost.
in *Positions Concerning the Training Up of Children* (1581), and, somewhat later, Edmund Coote, in *The English Schoole-Maister* (1596), argued for regularized spelling. They were not alone in seeking this goal. Radical reformers such as Sir Thomas Smith and William Bullokar devised phonetic alphabets to better represent English speech sounds. Bullokar's *Booke at Large, for the Amendment of Orthographie for English Speech* (1580) presented an alphabet of 37 letters and several diacritic markers. Bullokar also got into the grammar race when, in 1586, he published *Bref Grammar for English*—the first English grammar book and, more than likely, a text intended to introduce students to English so they could later study a more important language, Latin.

**IV. The Seventeenth and Eighteenth Centuries**

In addition to contributing to the great vocabulary wars, these centuries saw two major philosophical debates, with far-reaching consequences for the study of grammar, that pitted opposing viewpoints both of which find their roots in the Greek and Roman grammarians' speculations about language. The first of these debates, the analogists vs. anomalist's argument, reappeared from the Stoics' debates as an element in the broad broader context of the rationalist versus the empiricists. The second debate, best characterized as the battle between the prescriptivists and the descriptivists, dates to Dionysius of Thrax.
A. Rationalism vs. Empiricism: Analogist/Anomalist Debate Revisited

Rationalism, which flourished during the Renaissance, held that true knowledge comes through the exercise of pure reason, not experience, because experience depends on how humans sense events and everyone knows how notoriously inaccurate senses can be. In privileging reason, the rationalists favored innateness; that is, the rationalists like Spinoza and Leibniz, argued that humans were born with some innate ideas that constituted a form of knowledge. How conscious humans were of these innate ideas was a subject of some debate among the various rationalists, but the existence of such innate ideas was not.

In terms of grammar, the rationalists came from an anomalist position to suggest that humans had the capacity for language. What speakers needed were prescriptive mandates about language/grammar/writing/speech/style rather than any descriptive approach. In large part, the French mathematician and philosopher René Descartes (1596-1650) epitomizes their viewpoint.16 Descartes agreed that humans learn in part from experience, but he affirmed that more of what makes us human is hardwired and built-in. Like other rationalists,

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Descartes was closer to Greek philosophers in his beliefs that the phenomenon language is evidence for eternal, universal truths; and that language has inner and outer forms: Inner form should tell grammarians/philosophers about the mind/cognition.

Descartes, in particular, argued that only humans have language; that only humans can and must have language. He cites as support that humans characteristically express in language

- a vast scope of diversity,
- an innovative unpredictability, and
- a sense of appropriateness.

Representing the Empiricists'/anomalists' team, we find philosophers such as John Locke (1632-1704), Etienne Bonnot de Mably de Condillac (1714-1780), and David Hume (1711-76), heavy hitters all! In general these philosophers, called empiricists, saw humans as “blank slates” who learned everything, including language, strictly from experiencing the world. Empirical data, in the form of direct experience gained through the senses, makes us what we are and teaches us what we know. In science, empiricism has profoundly influenced what people investigate and how they go about such investigations. Observations about physical phenomena were facts; speculations about mental
phenomena and other unobservables were idle wastes of time. We learn by observing what goes on around us and then, by inference, forming hypotheses about these events that we then test. Language is, therefore, “learned behavior” that comes about when humans hear a language spoken around them from birth and imitate what they hear. In the 20th century, these ideas about how humans learn and, specifically, about how individuals come to speak a language characterize behaviorism, a branch of psychology that tends to run rats, dogs, and humans through various mazes for sometimes speculative reasons.

John Locke, one of the most cited of the empiricists, set out to discredit the Cartesian philosophy of innateness in his Essay Concerning Human Understanding (1690). For him, language merely reported thought; thought came about by the combination and procession of simple ideas to complex ideas private to individuals. He writes that “words are sensible Signs, necessary for Communication,” meaning that language exists to express thought and that thought is merely (!) a succession of ideas in consciousness. In other words, what we mean exists in our minds as thought, and the language we use is at best a learned pattern suitable for expressing but not creating those thoughts. Heavenly intervention, literally God, enables one individual to understand others’ thoughts.

French philosopher, associate of Rousseau and Diderot, and admirer of
Locke, Condillac in *Traite des sensations* maintains that language came about before thought. He goes on to argue that thought is impossible without language and uses as his example two infants, a boy and a girl, alone in a desert. Condillac assumes that for the children the first phenomenon would be physical attraction; next would be physical responses to natural events. Gradually they would wish to communicate about these phenomena. Therefore, he reasons, their first 'utterances' would prompt thought because the children would gradually realize that their grunts, cries, etc. were communicative.

French empiricist, literary figure, philosopher **Jean Jacques Rousseau** (1712-1778), basically agrees with Locke and Condillac. What he adds to the idea of language study and grammar ties to his more general adherence to social contracts. Specifically, it is a kind of social contract that creates the desire in human being to communicate. Rousseau's position, however, leaves us with a tantalizing puzzle: which came first? The individual's desire to communicate or the society that exists on communication?17

The empiricists' perspective has a bit of a problem, however. When you stop to think about it, if meaning is in individual minds and ideas are private,

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17 The debate between the analogists/anomalists or rationalists/empiricists subsided during the late 18th and 19th centuries, only to be revitalized in the late 1950s by Chomsky’s speculations on universal grammar.
how can one speaker know, when she uses a word, that that word stands for the same or a similar idea in another speaker's mind? One speaker cannot have my idea any more than I can have another speaker's exact idea. So how do individuals test the empiricists' theory of meaning? If God is the conduit through which meaning is exchanged, how does such an exchange work? And if experience is the primary teacher, how can an individual experience this conduit through her senses? What's more, the argument that "It's so because God makes it so" wasn't given much credence in scientific studies in the 17th century and isn't given much today. Moreover, if meaning exists before thought, why doesn't language also exist simultaneously with meaning since linguistic expression is the form of thought in our minds? In brief, how can thought and language be truly independent of one another? And, if we take these speculations a step or two further, it seems reasonable to assume to the richer the language, the more complex the thoughts would be or, at least, the greater the chance that speakers could think discerning about the world around them. So how, given the empiricists' insistence on direct experience before knowledge, how do humans get sophisticated language? The problems only get more complex, and the language to describe gets fuzzier at every turn.18

18Steven Pinker takes on this thought/language debate in The Language Instinct and succinctly
B. Port Royal Grammarians

Another version of rationalism appears in the various religious and educational foundations set up in 1637 and disbanded in 1661, owing, in large part, to political and religious discord. Between these years one small community of intellectuals and religious clerics, established in Port-Royal, Versailles, France, contributed more to the study of grammar than most others. As grammarians, the Port Royals are natural successors of the medieval scholastic grammars combined with a hefty dose of Cartesian philosophy and a heretical preference against the pagan literature of classical antiquity. Most of these thinkers were logicians, interested in European vernacular languages, particularly French, which they vehemently argued was equal to a now moribund Latin. And as logicians the wrote grammars that give logic its strongest expression. They pursued concepts of universal grammar, not in the form of a new language (as French philosopher M. Mersenne or England's Bishop John Wilkins advocated19) but, instead, by discovering the principles that puts it to rest.

19 Mersenne, influenced by Decartes, wanted to set up the best of all possible languages, one in which all thought could be put into brief, clear terms. Wilkins, in Essay towards a real character and a philosophical language, was a product of the (then) recently founded Royal Society. In critiquing various natural languages, Wilkins argues for a systematic, universally applicable language that would promote international communication. Such a systematized language could bring together all knowledge because it would have a set of universal phonetics, or 'letters,' that
underlay all existing languages. In brief, the Port Royal grammarians concluded that all languages had to share some characteristics—most likely in sounds, word classes, and syntactic orders—and that, if they could discover these similarities, they could put them together into a universally understood and usable language.

In general the Port-Royal Grammarians, as they have come to be known, were convinced that

- languages had numerable similarities,
- vernacular languages were valuable areas for research, and
- the similarities were numerous enough to suggest that languages came from a universal source and that grammarians should rightly be searching for the universals that mark that one language.

Using these points as rationale, these grammarians argued that a fully developed

stood for the major categories of articulation of all the known languages of the world; a set of word classes for all communicative needs; and an abbreviated set of syntactic relations. Interestingly, clergyman Wilkins saw Latin as coming the closest to fulfilling his dreamed-of universal language.
vernacular language, such as French, was more representative of language universals than Latin, a scholarly language no longer spoken by the general populace. After all, by the 17th century Latin was almost exclusively the property of scholars and clerics. The Port Royals rightly found this language without living speakers too rigid and too modified by its restricted purposes. Speakers, they urged, needed to know about their living or native language. Grammarians should only be in the business of describing what they find as accurately, completely, and objectively as possible. Modern students of grammar should feel heartened to learn that the Port Royals opposed exercises designed to correct, refine, fix, or repair a language. Such efforts, they proposed, are unrealistic and misguided when we realize that languages simply exist. Any rules grammarians set up should describe what goes on in a language as it exists rather than prescribe what some individuals deem should go on. In a truly radical move, the Port Royals advocated that French should replace Latin as scholarly language of France. The Church, however, drew a firm line opposing this idea.

In a more philosophical vein, the Port Royal grammarians believe that language represents human mind because language is an outer, expressive form of inner human cognition. More boldly stated, they believe that language exists
primarily to convey thought. They set about showing how human languages reflect universal human thoughts and saw thought as having three components: percept; judgment; reasoning.

In 1661, the grammarians published Grammaire générale et raisonnée, widely considered the work of two of the Port Royal monks, Claude Lancelot (1615-1695) and Antoine Arnauld (1612-1694). True to their conception of a universal language, Lancelot and Arnauld's grammar text views language as phrase-structured rather than word-oriented. They redefined the nine classical word classes—noun, article, pronoun, participle, preposition, adverb, verb, conjunction, and interjection—semantically: the first six related to the objects of human thought, and the last three related to the form or manner of human thought.

Lancelot and Arnauld define a sentence as a string of phrases that express an underlying thought. The "inner form," or deep structure, of a sentence is its implicit body of abstract ideas or thought relationships that are present in the human mind and are common to all
human thinking. Its “outer form,” or surface structure, is the observable structure of a sentence. The fact that various languages can (and do) express the similar thoughts in different outer forms proves the existence of language universals.

As an example to prove their theory, the Port Royals used a now famous sentence: Invisible God created the visible world. A simple subject-predicate string, this sentence expresses three rather compelling propositions that all speakers can understand even though the premises are never directly stated:

- God is invisible.
- God created the world.
- The world is visible.

Because the propositions are understandable without overt expression, deep-surface structure relationship must be a language universal.

The Port Royals gave an honest try to the project of writing a general grammar. They drew their examples from Latin, Greek, Hebrew, and, importantly, most of their contemporary European languages. This group of thinkers, more than any other group, confirmed the value of different languages—they got other theorists and language users to see that every language is equally worthy, that ideas aren’t expressed ‘better’ or ‘more beautifully’ in any one
particular language. They saw *grammar* as a way of describing what into all languages--well, at least the languages they knew because they weren't interested in non-European languages--and not just the particular aspects of one language, even though they were exceedingly proud of the beauty of their native language French. After the Renaissance, the empiricists would spend their time stressing the individual variations of particular languages and set up their grammars so that the categories they proposed matched the language under scrutiny. Empiricists were, in other words, working in the shadow of the Port Royals' claims. Moreover, the rationalists would spend part of their time looking for the similarities that lay just below the surfaces of various languages. Like the empiricists, the rationalists also worked in the traditions of the Port Royals. As you'll see in later discussion, Johannes Hjelmslev (Johannes Petersen) (1873-1950), in his early *Principes de grammaire générale*, Leonard Bloomfield (1887-1949) in his landmark book *Language*, Firthians when dealing with a general theory of language, and even the 20th century's premier linguist, Noam Chomsky, all share ideas initially proposed by the Port Royals.

C. Prescriptivists versus Descriptivists

In this long introduction to and discussion of traditional grammar, the terms *prescriptive* and *descriptive* keep cropping up. The concepts surrounding
these terms differentiate traditional grammars from more contemporary, linguistic grammars. Prescriptive or normative grammars, rules guiding how the language should be used, proliferated during the eighteenth century. Prescriptivists debated the “correctness” of various rules, drawing extensively on earlier philosophical, historical, literary, and even aesthetic tenets to support one view over another. Language specialists who argued that grammars should record usage lost out to those who held that grammars must evaluate usage and recommend, in the strongest terms, what constituted precise language.

The 17th and 18th centuries saw an explosion in prescriptive grammatical leanings as increasing nationalism, along with Great Britain’s expanding empire, prompted native speakers to year for regulation of the language. The best way seemed to be by an academy similar to the ones established in Italy in the 16th century and in France in 1635. Calls for the establishment of an English academy came as early as 1617; among the writers to urge one were John Dryden in 1664, John Evelyn in 1665, and Daniel Defoe in 1697.

In the 18th century grammars were written predominantly instructional manual for English speakers. The grammars also took a turn toward prescriptivists’ error-hunting. This change in the underlying philosophy of grammar toward correcting errors becomes explicit in perhaps the first
18th-century grammar, *A Key to the Art of Letters*. . .(1700) by another schoolmaster, A. Lane. Lane argued it was a mistake to view grammar simply as a means to learn a foreign language. Instead, "the true End and Use of Grammar is to teach how to speak and write well and learnedly in a language already known, according to the unalterable Rules of right Reason" (Merriam-Webster).

What, we might wonder, happened to the 17th century appeals to custom? Other professional writers of the era joined in, particularly in the then popular press. **Joseph Addison** (1672-1719), **Sir Richard Steele** (1672-1729), and Jonathan Swift all treated grammar in one way or another in *The Tatler* and *The Spectator* in 1710, 1711, and 1712. In 1712 Swift argued yet again for—and almost got—an English academy. Miscellaneous writer **John Oldmixon** (1673-1742) attacked Swift's proposal in the same year. The popularity of these newsletters speaks both to increasing literacy and a public interest that created a market for the grammar books. And just like contemporary newspapers and controversies they report, the raging disputes about grammar, academies, the state of the English language fueled the sales of both grammar texts and the newsletters. Some grammarians “got down and dirty,” in an Enlightenment manner, by accentuating their advantages by denigrating their predecessors, sometimes in abusive terms.

Typical of the evaluative grammars of the 18th century are **Bishop Robert**
Lowth's *A Short Introduction to English Grammar* (1762) and American Lindlay Murray's *English Grammar* (1795). As a scholar, clergyman, and, eventually, Professor of Poetry at Oxford, Lowth (1710-1787) was steeped in the traditions of Latin grammars and in the belief that, by using Latin precedents, he could set out clearly the correct "rules" of English. He was also greatly influenced by James Harris' theories, found in *Hermes* (1751), a rather eccentric compilation of ideas about universal grammar. Lowth seems to have derived his ideas about the perfectibility of English grammar from Harris, and he did not doubt that he could reduce the language to a system of uniform rules. Lowth brought almost a religious zeal to his grammar:

The principal design of a Grammar of any Language is to teach us to express ourselves with propriety in that Language; and to enable us to judge of every phrase and form of construction, whether it be right or not. (Lowth, 1976, p. ?)

His *English Grammar* laid down laws and illustrated them with examples from authors he felt were "the politest part of the nation," for instance Shakespeare, John Milton, Alexander Pope, and everyone's favorite, Jonathan Swift.

Born in Swartara Creek, Pennsylvania, Lindlay Murray (1745-1826)
trained as a lawyer and felt that especially in legal documents language must be correctly and clearly used. He drew extensively from Lowth's work for his *Grammar* and purposely designed the text for students to use every day.

Although he tried to balance simple statements of rules with ample examples, Murray nevertheless threaded his text liberally with moralizing statements and numerous exercises for students to correct. For example, Murray tackled tricky constructions in English—sometimes accurately, sometimes not--and put forth his solutions:

> When a verb comes between two nouns, either of which may be understood as the subject of the affirmation, it may agree with either of them; but some regard must be had to that which is more naturally the subject of it, as also to that which stands next to the verb; as, ‘His meat *was* locusts and wild honey.’ ‘A great cause of the low state of industry *were* the restraints put upon it;’ ‘The wages of sin is death.’

(Murray, 1795, p. 90).

Murray’s pedagogical innovations have continued in contemporary textbooks, causing many linguists and language specialists to denounce the “search for errors” mentality of traditional grammars. It seemed, for a time, that
the descriptive grammars of the 16\textsuperscript{th} and early 17\textsuperscript{th} centuries were long gone.

However, the travesties of hyper-correction, coupled with a growing interest in the origins of language and the interrelatedness of languages as seeming different as English and Sanskrit, lead 19\textsuperscript{th}- and early 20\textsuperscript{th}-century language theorists to abandon Latin formulae for correctness and attempt objective descriptions of what a language is. These grammars, called \textit{descriptive} or \textit{linguistic} grammars start with philologists such as Jacob Ludwig Karl Grimm (1785-1863), 19\textsuperscript{th} century Neogrammarian Karl Verner, and Otto Jespersen and develop into the sophisticated grammars of the latter 20\textsuperscript{th} century.