

“’Tis not so easy a matter to read well”: directions for reading aloud in eighteenth-century English grammars

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Abstract

In the second half of the eighteenth century the number of English school grammars underwent a dramatic increase, and grammar writers used title pages, prefaces and, in general, other book components to attract potential buyers. A very common commercial strategy consisted in adding supplementary material to the grammars. Among this material, a type of supplement, commonly called “directions for reading”, is often found in these grammars. This was intended to provide guidance on reading aloud to students, since a successful and effective oral delivery was considered a polite social asset and an important professional skill at the time. This article aims (i) to present a representative list of school grammars of English with “directions for reading”, (ii) to compare the directions for reading contained in different works to identify those aspects considered essential for a good reading performance, and, finally, (iii) to explore the relationship between these directions for reading and some works of the eighteenth-century elocutionary movement.

Keywords: reading aloud, eighteenth-century grammars, elocutionary movement, directions for reading

1. Introduction

Until the end of the seventeenth century, grammar writing in England had been scarce and highly influenced by Latin, which was both the object of study and the language used in the first grammars of the English language (Finegan 1999:536-5, Vorlat 2007:502-503, Locher 2008:128). Due to the Latin dominance in grammar writing practice, early eighteenth-century grammar writers still felt the need to justify the publication of English grammars, and, accordingly, frequently included arguments supporting the excellence of the English language in the prefaces to their grammar books (Rodríguez-Álvarez & Rodríguez-Gil 2013:206-210). However, in the course of the eighteenth century, especially once it became clear that England would not have an academy to regulate the language (Tieken-Boon van Ostade 2008:4), the number of English grammars started gradually to rise, undergoing a significant increase in the 1760s (Tieken-Boon van Ostade 2008:5-6). Thus, the second half of the eighteenth century witnessed a dramatic boost in the production of grammar books intended to cater for the practical needs of the new middle class generations in need of guidance on language usage (Fitzmaurice 1998:310).

As marketable commodities which contributed to the social progression of their consumers, grammar books were subjected to commercial strategies to garner as

positive a reception as possible in a highly competitive market (Tieken-Boon van Ostade 2008:12, Rodríguez-Álvarez & Rodríguez-Gil 2013). These persuasive and marketing techniques were mainly based on the paratextual apparatus of the grammar book. The paratext, as defined by Genette (1997),¹ comprises all the elements that present and surround the text –such as the title, the preface, the dedicatory letters, the table of contents, the notes, the glosses, the supplements, etc.–, and contributes to understand the text’s genesis, its organisation, its meaning, and its ideological foundations. But, above all, the paratext is instrumental in the self-promotion of a book by praising its novelty and virtues. In short, the paratextual apparatus of a book seeks to ensure the text’s favourable reception, enhances its value, and, eventually, helps to its commercial success.

Paratextual elements in eighteenth-century grammars have indeed been used to ensure positive audience response. Rodríguez-Álvarez and Rodríguez-Gil (2013:220), for instance, have proved that prefaces were harnessed to promote a given “grammar by offering explanations on how to use the text and by highlighting the strengths of the book and the qualities of the author”. Likewise, titles of eighteenth-century grammars included linguistic devices “to persuade the reader of the importance of a knowledge of grammar in their society” (Yáñez-Bouza 2016:21; see also Yáñez-Bouza & Rodríguez-Gil 2016), and the inclusion of supplementary material “was deemed beneficial to improve the linguistic competence and politeness of a socially rising middle class”. Accordingly, grammar writers “incorporated into their books [these] ‘appealing’ elements that increased the value and users’ eligibility of their English grammars” (Domínguez-Rodríguez 2016:2).

By the mid-eighteenth century, the importance of the study of English in the students’ curriculum was no longer questionable, thus, grammar writers turned their attention to language issues which could have a strong appeal to potential users in a market saturated with grammar books, such as the pedagogical merits of their grammars and the supplementary material that complemented them (Vorlat 2007:517-520, Hickey 2010:7, Yáñez-Bouza 2015). In this sense, as Mitchell notes, “grammarians responded to the needs of their middle-class audience [...] by including material relevant to everyday lives and vocations” (Mitchell 2001: 73). Therefore, although quite often overlooked, additional, supplementary or subsidiary material, as Michael calls it (1970:195), was highly regarded at the time, as evinced by the number of grammars that included it and the variety of its contents (Michael 1970:195, Yáñez-Bouza 2015:928-930). Supplements and appendices were not a fixed part of the likewise flexible structure of the eighteenth-century grammar book, but, still, “throw light [...] on the development of grammar-books” and, mainly, on the development of other disciplines which started as subsidiary features in grammars and ended up as material of proper textbooks in the course of time (Michael 1970:197).

¹ This date corresponds to the English translation of the French work *Sevils*, first published in 1987.

This article focuses on the ‘directions for reading aloud’, which was one kind of supplementary material that arose special interest just when the elocutionary movement gained considerable momentum and was included in British school grammars published between 1750 and 1800. The study pursues to describe and characterise these supplements and assesses their relationship with the elocutionary movement. After presenting in Section 2 the sociohistorical context to the practice of reading aloud in eighteenth-century Britain, including the emergence of the elocutionary movement, I will present in Section 3 a corpus of eighteenth-century grammars that contain such sections and will draw some conclusions on the importance of these instructions in schoolbooks. Section 4 will then analyse the directions for reading aloud in detail, emphasizes the practice’s importance (Subsection 4.1), distinguishes between directions addressed to schoolmasters (Subsection 4.2), and to students (Subsection 4.3). In Section 5, I will compare the instructions in the different grammars in order to identify a common pattern, which includes the identification of some of the directions’ potential sources. Finally, the article presents the concluding remarks in Section 6.

2. On reading, elocution and grammar

During the eighteenth century, reading aloud was a common social practice in both the private and public spheres. Families and friends in Britain and elsewhere used to gather to read aloud from a novel, a newspaper, religious texts, or other pieces of writing. Besides, reading sessions were usually combined with talks, entertainments and games (Michael 1987:184, Tadmor 1996, Jackson 2004, Arizpe & Styles 2006:54-61). That this was a habitual activity in family life is attested not only in literary texts, but also in contemporary diaries or journals, as recorded in *The Reading Experience Database 1450-1945*, which compiles a high number of testimonies from the eighteenth century.² Even book frontispieces from the eighteenth century depicted “communal forms of reading, a book read out loud to an assembled company”, and a high number of books were produced for “domestic enjoyment and performance of literature” (Williams 2014:97). But reading aloud was not confined to the domestic space; as a communal activity, it was regularly practised at public meetings –in pubs, clubs and even in libraries–, and recitals from published works were very popular at the time (Mattingly 1954:112-116, Raven 1996, Newlyn 2000:17-18, Colclough 2007:146-175).

Reading in public convincingly required, besides talent, much practice and special instruction to achieve an appearance of authenticity and obtain an effective response from the audience. However, a group of scholars, the so-called *elocutionists*, denounced the deplorable speaking skills shown by contemporary public figures (Millar 2002). The elocutionists took their name from the term *elocution*, used to refer to ‘verbal delivery’, instead of ‘style’, which was the original meaning attached to the word *elocutio* by classical rhetoricians (Brown 1996:212, George 2009:373). Accordingly, the elocutionary movement gave

² This database can be consulted in < <http://www.open.ac.uk/Arts/reading/index.php>>.

prominence to all the aspects related to delivery, namely, pronunciation, accent, pauses, volume, voice modulation and gestures (Brown 1996:212, Kennedy 1999:278).³

Although the first complaints about the poor state of the oratorical performance of eminent personalities were voiced at the beginning of the century (Howell 1959, Brown 1996:211, Goring 2005:35-36 and 2014), the second half of the eighteenth century represents the heyday of the elocutionary movement with names so well known as Thomas Sheridan or John Walker. The elocutionists were so concerned with the widespread inability to read or speak well that they gave lessons and wrote manuals to provide guidance to those who, due to their professional engagement to the pulpit, the bar or the bench, were in need of oratorical instruction (Goring 2005:35, Hickey 2010:11). These elocution guides, “normally divided into four sections (voice management, vocal production, bodily action, and pronunciation” (Brown 1996:212), became very popular, and by 1750, “elocutionary writing already constituted a fairly well-established field in the print market” (Goring 2014).

But the elocutionists deemed it necessary to address what they thought was the origin of the problem: the Latin-based school curriculum and schoolmasters’ incompetence (Jajdelska 2010). As for the school curriculum, early eighteenth-century scholars suggested that the long dominance of Latin on British education was responsible for schoolmasters’ faulty reading in English. They contended that a Latin-based instruction had prevented schoolmasters from acquiring basic literacy competences in their own language, and, therefore, they were unable to teach reading skills successfully. Accordingly, the elocutionists’ efforts were also directed to schoolmasters since, according to Sheridan, oratorical deficiencies had their roots in children’s bad instruction:

Those who taught the first rudiments of reading, thought their task finished when their pupils could read fluently, and observe their stops. This employment requiring no great talents, usually fell to the lot of old women, or men of mean capacities; who could teach no other mode of utterance than what they possessed themselves; and consequently were not likely to communicate any thing of propriety or grace to their scholars. If they brought with them any bad habits, such as stuttering, stammering, mumbling, an indistinct articulation, a constrained unnatural tone of voice, brought on from imitation of some other; or if they were unable to pronounce certain letters, these poor creatures, utterly unskilled in the causes of these defects, sheltered their ignorance under the general charge of their being natural impediments, and sent them to the Latin school, with all their imperfections on their heads. (Sheridan 1775:4-5)⁴

To remedy the inadequate training of school teachers, Sheridan addresses his *Lectures on the art of reading* “to all masters and mistresses of academies and boarding schools”, as he had observed that in “several advertisements, [they]

³ For a comprehensive study of the elocutionary movement, see Howell (1959 and 1971), Spoel (2001), DeWispelare (2012), and Goring (2014), for instance.

⁴ Original spelling, punctuation, word division and italics have been retained in all quotations. Capitalisation has been regularised. My emphasis has been marked in bold in the quotations.

made the teaching of the art of reading and speaking English correctly, a material branch of [their] profession” (Sheridan 1775:ix). He also indicates that such teaching cannot be successfully implemented without preparing a previous “method of instruction”, hitherto non-existent. His *Lectures*, Sheridan points out, could fill in this gap by providing a work that would ensure

you therefore to proceed hereafter upon sure grounds, in the prosecution of this your laudable design [...]; as you will be enabled thereby to correct all errors in such of your pupils as are natives of England, and place them in the right way of obtaining a just delivery. (Sheridan 1775:x)

In this way, becoming an effective reader and a good speaker was not only the logical aspiration of preachers, lawyers and politicians, but had also become an ability to be cultivated in the schoolroom, because “the educated, and those who aspired to education and its rewards, were increasingly aware of the importance of speech” (Michael 1987:286), as expressed in an eighteenth-century elocutionary treatise:

Suppose a youth to have no prospect either of sitting in parliament, of pleading at the *bar*, of appearing upon the *stage* or in the *pulpit*; does it follow, that he need bestow *no pains* in learning to speak properly his *native language*? Will he never have occasion to read, in a company of his friends, a copy of *verses*, a *passage* of a *book*, or *news-paper*? Must he never read a discourse of Tillotson, or a chapter of the *Whole Duty of Man*, for the instruction of his children and servants? (Burgh 1761:2)

The idea of public reading as a valuable asset for professional opportunities may to a considerable degree account for the introduction of specific instructions on reading aloud in school books, especially grammar books.

Throughout the eighteenth century, grammar schools proliferated all over the country. These filled their classrooms with the children of an emerging middle class very conscious of the value of education for their offspring’s socio-economic progress (Fitzmaurice 1998:310, 325-326, Arizpe & Styles 2006:49, Hickey 2010:8-9). Schoolmasters, usually the authors of their own schoolbooks (Fitzmaurice 1998:326, Tieken-Boon van Ostade 2000a:878, Yáñez-Bouza 2012:56), claimed to provide the future generations of businessmen, clerks, tradesmen, lawyers or clerics with the necessary reading and writing skills, as stated in the following quotation from a mid-century grammar book:

[...] for the use of youth designed for mechanick and mercantile arts, who have no occasion for Latin [...], for the sake of such as have not capacities to acquire a mastery therein; and lastly for the service of young women I thought it might be no useless labour, to endeavour to point out a rational method of education purely English [...] The first business is to bring the learner to read and spell; he should be kept to these entirely till he can read pretty correctly and intelligibly. (Gough ²1760:xiii)

With the advancement of the century, it was more and more frequent to find in British grammar books supplementary material that complemented students’

training in writing and reading (Yáñez-Bouza 2015:928-936, Domínguez-Rodríguez 2016). This supplementary material was often presented in appendices that consisted in easy and practical instructions to improve writing and reading skills. Among the appendices focused on writing, we find lists of abbreviations, lists of names with difficult spelling, lists of honorary titles, or instructions on the use of capital letters; by contrast, among the reading-oriented appendices, there are instructions on the use of punctuation marks, lists of proper names with a difficult pronunciation, or instructions on elocution. One of these appendices consisted in a set of guidelines that were usually called “directions for reading”. Unlike the works of the elocutionists, which were addressed to adults (Michael 1987:286), the directions for reading aloud included in school grammars were intended for young learners in early stages of their instruction (Fischer 2003:256-257).

3. Corpus compilation

The reading instructions analysed in this paper have been selected using the *Eighteenth-Century English Grammars* database (*ECEG*), an electronic resource which provides bio-bibliographic information on the grammars of the English language printed during the eighteenth century, as well as information on their authors. A distinctive feature of *ECEG* is that it includes both stand-alone English grammar books and grammars attached to other works. Besides, it allows carrying out searches by using one parameter or a combination of parameters (Yáñez-Bouza & Rodríguez-Gil 2013), an extremely useful function for the purpose of this study.

To compile my study corpus, I performed a search in *ECEG*. By means of the parameter “Subsidiary contents”, I limited the selection to grammars with “Directions for reading”.⁵ The seventeen records retrieved⁶ included fifteen English grammar books, one letter-writing manual and one dictionary published in England, Ireland, Scotland and America. Besides, I also carried out two other searches for the subsidiary contents “Elocution” and “Rhetoric”, as I realised that the sections called “Directions for reading” in Newbery (1745) and Fisher (1753), “Of reading” in Gough (1760) and “Instructions for reading” in Ward (1777) had been categorised in *ECEG* under the headings “Elocution” or “Rhetoric”, although they are not included in such sections in the grammars.⁷ The

⁵ “Directions for reading” is one of the categories listed by Yáñez-Bouza & Rodríguez-Gil for the subsidiary contents in *ECEG* (2013:156-157).

⁶ Charles Johnson’s *The complete art of writing letters* (1767?), considered a plagiarised version of Samuel Johnson’s (1758), has been excluded from the corpus (for more information, see entry in *ECEG*). Likewise, I have also excluded from the corpus the grammar included in the preface to the anonymous *A new spelling dictionary of the English language* (1781) since it is exactly the same as that attributed to Meikleham (1781), published in the same year by the same printers.

⁷ A slight adjustment seems to be needed to avoid, for instance, cases of misleading categorisation. As case in point, *ECEG* categorises Johnson’s (1758) and Newbery’s (1745) directions for reading under different labels, “Directions for reading” and “Elocution” respectively, even when both sections bear exactly the same name and deal with the same contents.

final list of English grammars retrieved from *ECEG* with directions for reading aloud is included in Table 1 below:

Table 1. Eighteenth-century English grammars with directions for reading aloud retrieved from *ECEG*

Author	Abridged Grammar-Title	Year
Dyche, Th.	<i>A practical grammar of the English tongue</i>	1720
Jones, H.	<i>An accidence to the English tongue</i>	1724
Newbery, J. [?]	<i>An easy introduction to the English language</i>	1745 ⁸
Anon.	<i>A new English grammar by question and answer</i>	1746
Fisher, A.	<i>A new grammar with exercises of bad English</i>	³ 1753 ⁹
Johnson, S.	<i>A compleat introduction to the art of writing letters</i>	1758
Gough, J.	<i>A practical grammar of the English tongue</i>	² 1760 ¹⁰
Manson, D.	<i>A new pocket dictionary</i>	1762
Fenning, D.	<i>A new grammar of the English language</i>	1771
Crocker, A.	<i>A practical introduction to English grammar and rhetoric</i>	1772
Ward, H.	<i>A short but clear system of English grammar</i>	1777
Cattanach, J.	<i>Elements of pronunciation and grammar</i>	1778
Meikleham, W.	<i>A comprehensive grammar</i>	1781
Corbet, J.	<i>A concise system of English grammar</i>	1784
Anon.	<i>A key to spelling and introduction to the English grammar</i>	1788
Chown, W.	<i>English grammar epitomized</i>	1788
Trusler, J.	<i>An English accidence</i>	1790?
Wilson, J.	<i>Fisher’s grammar improved</i>	1792 ¹¹
Carson, J.	<i>A practical grammar of the English tongue</i>	1794
Anon.	<i>Rudiments of constructive etymology and syntax</i>	1795
Rhodes, B.	<i>A concise English grammar</i>	1795
Carter, J.	<i>A short and easy introduction to English grammar</i>	1797
Woodbridge, W.	<i>A plain and concise grammar of the English language</i>	1800

Of these twenty-three records, the study corpus comprises just those available in *Eighteenth Century Collections Online (ECCO)*, that is, nineteen works by sixteen known and three anonymous authors altogether,¹² all of them the first extant editions, except Gough’s which is a second edition, published in Britain. They are listed in Table 2:

⁸ This grammar is generally attributed to Newbery.

⁹ As for the first edition, no copy has survived. Alston (1965:25) suggested 1748 was the date of this first edition, but Michael (1987:457) conjectures 1745, a date confirmed by Tieken-Boon van Ostade (2000b) and Rodríguez-Gil (2002: note 1, 2008:149) on the grounds of an advertisement in the *Newcastle Journal*. Henceforth, edition numbers are indicated by a superscript number preceding the date.

¹⁰ The first edition published in 1754 is not in *ECCO*.

¹¹ Wilson’s grammar is a revised version of Fisher’s (1753) work.

¹² Instructions for reading verse have been excluded from this study.

Table 2. Study corpus of eighteenth-century English grammars with directions for reading aloud

Author	Abridged title	Year	Pages	Section title
Jones, H.	<i>An accidence to the English tongue</i>	1724	51-57	Of delivery
Newbery, J.	<i>An easy introduction to the English language</i>	1745	125-128	Rules for reading, and particularly of the emphasis belonging to some special word or words in a sentence
Anon.	<i>A new English grammar by question and answer</i>	1746	83-86	Of emphasis
Fisher, A.	<i>A new grammar with exercises of bad English</i>	³ 1753	145-151	Directions for reading prose according to the points, cadence, and emphasis
Johnson, S.	<i>A compleat introduction to the art of writing letters</i>	1758	11-12	Rules for reading, and particularly of the emphasis belonging to some special word or words in a sentence
Gough, J.	<i>A practical grammar of the English tongue</i>	² 1760	94-96	Of reading
Manson, D.	<i>A new pocket dictionary</i>	1762	E3v-E5r	Directions for reading [included in the grammar prefixed to the dictionary]
Fenning, D.	<i>A new grammar of the English language</i>	1771	178-183	Directions for reading with propriety and grace
Crocker, A.	<i>A practical introduction to English grammar and rhetoric</i>	1772	59-61; 65-69	Rules for reading
Ward, H.	<i>A short but clear system of English grammar</i>	1777	99-111	General instructions for reading and speaking our mother-tongue
Cattanach, J.	<i>Elements of pronunciation and grammar</i>	1778	175	Reading
Meikleham, W.	<i>A comprehensive grammar</i>	1781	28-29 (also 22)	Directions for reading (Of emphasis and cadence)
Corbet, J.	<i>A concise system of English grammar</i>	1784	35-36 (also 33-34)	Directions for reading with elegance and propriety (Of emphasis)
Anon.	<i>A key to spelling and introduction to the English grammar</i>	1788	31-34	To read properly
Chown, W.	<i>English grammar epitomized</i>	1788	19-22	Directions for reading with propriety
Trusler, J.	<i>An English accidence</i>	1790?	19-21	In order to read well
Wilson, J.	<i>Fisher’s grammar improved</i>	1792	152-157	Directions for reading prose according to the points, cadence, and emphasis

Anon.	<i>Rudiments of constructive etymology and syntax</i>	1795	132-142	Directions for reading [included in the exercises of bad English]
Rhodes, B.	<i>A concise English grammar</i>	1795	70-78 (also 69; 78-88)	Reading and speaking (The use of stops in reading and speaking; elocution)

4. Directions for reading aloud in eighteenth-century grammars

The importance of reading aloud for the eighteenth-century professional prospects of middle class generations has already been mentioned in the introduction to this paper. Besides, a good delivery was also crucial for lawyers, preachers and politicians, and, in general, was a highly valued social asset. However, bad oratorical performance was the rule rather than the exception in professional and school settings. This accounts for a real concern on the part of schoolmasters, who considered reading aloud a paramount skill in children’s education, as shown below in 4.1, and, therefore, strove to put a remedy to this general failure by providing guidance both to their colleagues and to their students in a set of recommendations and directions that will be discussed below, in 4.2 and 4.3, respectively.

4.1. The importance of reading aloud in school instruction

As early as 1721, Watts states in the preface to *The art of reading and writing English* that

‘Tis not so easy a matter to read well as most people imagine: there are multitudes who can read common words true, can speak every hard name exactly, and pronounce the single or the united syllables perfectly well, who yet are not capable of reading six lines together with a proper sound, and a graceful turn of voice, either to inform or to please the hearers [...] (Watts ²1722:xvi-xvii)

Watts’s concern is shared by other teachers who also observe that reading aloud is still an unresolved matter in children’s education, as attested in the prefaces to their school grammars or in the preceding paragraphs to the sets of instructions,¹³ as Crocker (1772:59) points out:

Did people but accustom themselves to read with the same rests, emphasis, and cadence which they use in their common conversation, there would be no occasion for rules to direct them in pronunciation: but as we find this grand rule, *read as you talk*, so shockingly violated by most boys at school, it may not be improper, in this place, to give some directions for avoiding common errors, as well as some rules for reading with elegance and propriety.

¹³ Michael provides a list of quotations on reading from eighteenth-century schoolbooks which is very illuminating on the teachers’ concern for this practice, although he is more concerned with the reading texts than with reading aloud and delivery (Michael 1987:200-212). Similarly, Smith notes the prominent role of oral performance in eighteenth-century education (Smith 2013: 35-37).

It seemed then essential to find a solution to those deficiencies at an early stage of instruction since, as Newbery remarks, “for want of an early acquaintance with English grammar, there are many grown persons, and those of good natural abilities, who [...] express themselves very improperly in common discourse” (Newbery 1745: iv). And, as Newbery notes,

if this deficiency is so observable amongst men who have been train’d up in the schools for business, and even for the learned professions, no wonder it is so general amongst the fair sex [...] incapable of pronouncing their words with any tolerable grace. (Newbery 1745:v)

In the light of this concern for the inability to read aloud properly, we may gauge the importance attached to reading aloud in instructional works in general, not just in English grammars. To check whether they were present in other kinds of schoolbooks, I conducted a search restricted to the keywords “directions for reading” in the tab “entire text” of *ECCO*. The search yielded 190 records which were scanned to locate instructions for reading aloud. The final list of volumes, most of them spelling books, is displayed in Table 3, and, as we will see below, they are relevant for the discussion on the sources of the directions for reading aloud in Table 2.

Table 3. Textbooks other than grammars with instructions on reading aloud

Year	Author	Grammar-Title	Pages	Name of the section
² 1722	Watts, I.	<i>The art of reading and writing English</i>	47-54	Directions for reading
1740	Anon.	<i>The Irish spelling-book</i>	284-306	Directions for reading (Of reading prose)
1763	Anon.	<i>The British instructor</i>	41-43	Directions for reading with Propriety
1770	Douglas, A.	<i>The English school reformed: or, an introduction to spelling and reading English</i>	135-138	Directions for reading, Directions concerning the emphasis
1790	Anon.	<i>A spelling book for the use of Ackworth School</i>	142-143	Directions for reading
1794	Ussher, M.	<i>A pronouncing grammar, and spelling book</i>	197-198	General directions for reading
⁴ 1797	Bingham, C.	<i>The American preceptor</i>	5-7	General directions for reading and speaking
1799	Alexander, C.	<i>The young ladies' and gentlemen's spelling book</i>	125-126	Directions for reading distinctly

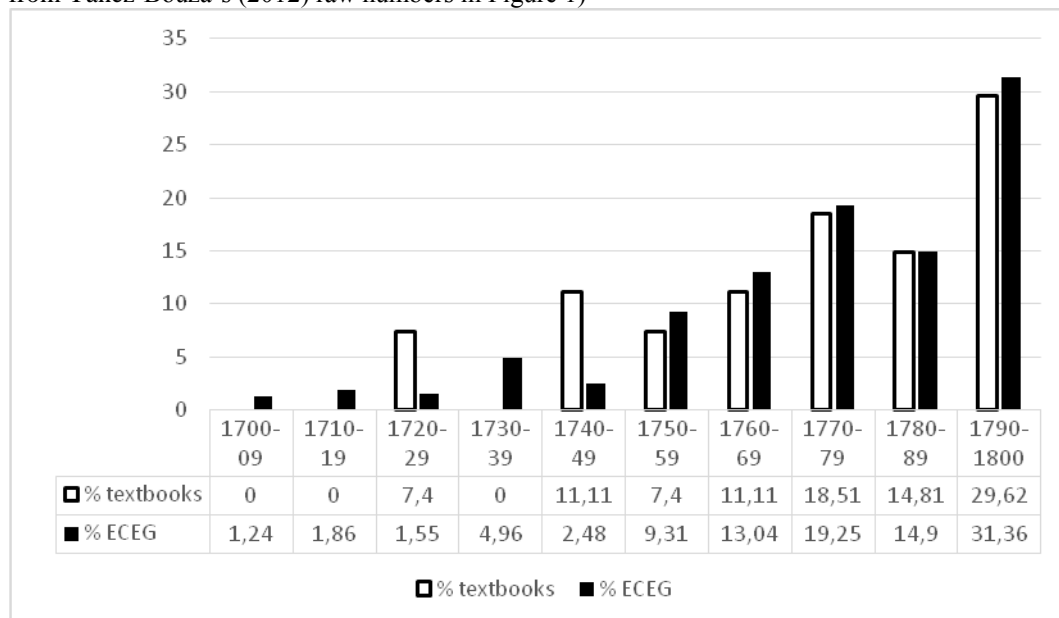
The number of schoolbooks other than grammars with instructions on reading aloud would have been probably higher, had I included other keywords such as “emphasis”, “delivery”, etc., which goes beyond the scope of the present paper. Nevertheless, the sample sufficiently illustrates the importance of reading aloud in school instruction.

Furthermore, as one of the main concern of this study is to assess the relationship between these sets of instructions and the elocution manuals published mainly in the second half of the century, I present both the chronological distribution of textbooks that contained directions for reading, including grammars, and the chronological distribution of English grammars published during the eighteenth century to see if the increase of the former in the second half of the century is a relevant fact or just a reflection of the parallel increase in the publication of the latter. The figures are not raw figures, but proportional to the total amount of textbooks with directions for reading throughout considered in this paper (27 in total). Besides, these percentages will be shown side by side with the percentages of grammars published in the same decade, since the rate of grammatical publication during the eighteenth century was unbalanced, which means that one grammar with directions for reading published in a decade with a low grammatical production is likely to have been more relevant than one in a decade with a high grammatical production.

Figure 1 shows the results. It can be observed that there is a clear tendency to include directions for reading aloud in the second half of the century (white bars). At first sight, one could relate this tendency to the emergence of the elocutionary movement, which advances as a parallel phenomenon in the second half of the century, though addressed to a different public, as mentioned above. However, a more reflective examination of these figures reveals that this progress corresponds to the gradual increase of grammar books in the eighteenth century (black bars) and, therefore, a relationship cannot be sustained.¹⁴

¹⁴ See Beal (2013) for a similar conclusion on the relationship of the rise of the elocutionary movement and the inclusion of sections on pronunciation in eighteenth-century grammars.

Figure 1. Chronological distribution of eighteenth-century textbooks with instructions on reading aloud vis-à-vis eighteenth-century English grammars published by decades (percentages derived from Yáñez-Bouza’s (2012) raw numbers in Figure 1)



A second conclusion, related to the teaching reality in the eighteenth-century classroom, can be drawn from our knowledge of grammar writing at the time. Most eighteenth-century schoolbook writers were schoolmasters themselves who wrote their own texts with the contents they usually taught to their students, as announced in the prefaces and on the title-pages of these volumes (Tieken-Boon van Ostade 2000a: 878, Yáñez-Bouza 2012:56):

For the use of schools. (Dyche 1720, title-page)

calculated for the use, not only of schools, but of private gentlemen (Fenning 1771, title-page)

designed for the use of schools, as well as private families (Corbet 1784, title-page)

Therefore, the inclusion of instructions for reading aloud in their schoolbooks suggests that reading was a common practice in eighteenth-century school rooms (Jajdelska 2010:152-153).

A third conclusion derived from the compilation of the corpus is based on the explicit reference to directions for reading aloud on the title-pages of the grammar books. According to Yáñez-Bouza (2016:1), “during the eighteenth century, the commercial function of title-pages developed strongly, with a greater emphasis on the textual (rather than the visual) features, in order to fulfil the purpose of persuading the reader to buy the book”. Thus, the informative burden of title-pages grew by the end of the seventeenth century, incorporating textual labels that identified and, above all, advertised the book contents. In fact, publishers and

printers alike were aware of the readers’ expectations for the contents of certain works and tried to meet these expectations on the title-pages. This point can be illustrated with a reference to Tyrkkö’s survey on the inclusion of grammars in eighteenth-century dictionaries. Out of the thirty dictionaries containing a grammar of English, twenty-seven announced their inclusion on the title-page, “which suggests that grammars were regarded as ‘a marketable commodity’, and that the failure to mention the grammar on the title-page could be perceived by readers as ‘a shortcoming’ (Tyrkkö 2013:185-186, 189)”. Likewise, mentioning rules for reading on the title-pages of grammars can be considered a clear indicator of their marketing appeal at the time:

To which are prefixed, a practical grammar; with **directions for reading** (Manson 1762; emphasis mine)

With an appendix containing II. **General instructions for reading** and speaking our mother-tongue, with elegance, propriety, and a good grace (Ward 1777; emphasis mine)

With **rules for reading** prose and verse. (Trusler 1790?; emphasis mine)

4.2. Recommendations to schoolmasters

The inclusion of rules for reading in grammar books tried to remedy the deficiencies in children’s reading performance. But reading directions were not only addressed to students, but also to schoolmasters, who could benefit from this kind of recommendations. Thus, Fisher (³1753:145), for instance, suggests that “before any directions be given to the *scholars*, it may not be improper to propose one to the *teacher*”. These directions can be summarised in the following three points:

a) Imitation

Fisher (³1753), Cattanach (1778), Gough (²1760) and Wilson (1792), among others, recommend teachers to begin the lesson by reading aloud to the whole class. They should do it slowly, and paying attention to the punctuation marks, the accents of words, and the emphasis in sentences so that children can imitate them. According to some grammar writers, imitation obtains much better results than “a mere correction of their faults” (Fisher ³1753:145; Wilson 1792:152 [= Fisher]).

b) Using different types of texts

Schoolmasters are advised to use different types of real texts for reading exercises such as poems, the Bible, newspapers, dialogues, etc. (Fisher ³1753; Chown 1788).

c) Good comprehension

Grammar writers note that an essential requirement to read a text properly is that the reader understands what he is reading. Although this is normally mentioned in

the directions to the students, Chown also recommends it to the teacher, who must monitor the students’ reading and verify that they really understand the meaning of every single word in the text. Besides, the teachers must point out to their students “the principal parts of speech; the proper use of stops; where the emphatical word or words are in the sentence; and also to give a proper definition of every word of which he does not understand the meaning” (Chown 1788:21).

4.3. Directions to students

As for the directions to students, most grammar books deal essentially with the same topics, that is, those issues that young learners must take into account in their reading process. Therefore, the discussion below will follow a content organization similar to the one present in the selected grammars, which consists in a list of short tips and pieces of advice, as in this image reproduced from Cattanach’s work (1778:175):¹⁵

In order to read with any degree of satisfaction, observe the few following directions.

1. Attain to a perfect knowledge of the letters, and then pronounce well the commonly occurring words.

2. Let your attention be fixed, and do not guess at any word with which you are not acquainted, lest you get the base habit of miscalling words, and reading falsely.

3. Let the tone of your voice in reading be the same as in speaking; but, at times, it will be necessary to vary the tone, that it may the better suit the subject.

4. Lay the accent upon the proper syllable, and observe your pauses well; but make none where the sense will not admit.

5. Raise your voice when a question is asked, which is known by a point, thus ? called a point of interrogation. Do the same at the exclamation point, thus ! and lower it in reading words inclosed in a parenthesis, thus ().

6. Attend to those who read well, and endeavour to imitate them.

The above list is quite typical for the period. Point 1, on distinct pronunciation, is found in a number of other works. Grammarians recommend students to read every single word of the text distinctly, taking pains in articulating all sounds right and respecting “the quantity of the vowels and diphthongs” (Meikleham 1781:28).

Regarding point 2 above, on the prediction of the pronunciation of new words, Cattanach recommends students not to guess the pronunciation of unknown words, since they may “get the base habit of miscalling words, and reading

¹⁵ Reproduced by kind permission of © The British Library Board.

falsely” (Cattanach 1778:175). This direction is intended to keep young learners from acquiring a bad pronunciation of words, a flaw which is difficult to correct afterwards. Thus, if students find a new word, schoolmasters should advise them to read slowly, syllable after syllable, before saying the whole word, since slow speed is preferable to a wrong pronunciation: “The way to arrive at reading truly, is to proceed slowly and surely” (Gough ²1760:94).

Voice modulation is dealt with in points 3 and 5 above. This aspect is variously called by different school grammar writers as *tone of the voice* or *cadence*,¹⁶ in reference to the voice inflections we adopt when reading. The general rule is that we must read as we speak, without affecting an artificial or feigned tone (Newbery 1745:125, Fisher ³1753:146, Crocker 1772:59, Cattanach 1778:175, Meikleham 1781:28, Corbet 1784:35, Chown 1788:19, Trusler 1790?:19-20, Wilson 1792:153). However, it does not imply that we should read without any variation, because this may lead to monotony, but just in a natural manner. Schoolmasters recommend their students to imagine themselves “in the author’s place, and endeavour to speak every thing with the same spirit, that it may be supposed he writ” (Anon. 1746:86). Furthermore, they offer guidance on the tone that should be adopted depending on the text type the students are reading and the nature of the subject, as shown in Table 4:

Table 4. Correspondence between types of text and voice modulations¹⁷

Type of text/matter	Voice modulation/tone
Narrative (newspaper, story)	Plain, neutral
Argumentative, affecting, persuasive (oration, exhortation, sermon)	Warm, earnest, strong, passionate
Pathetic	Warm (+), earnest (+), strong (+), passionate (+)
Instructive (instructions, explanations)	Slow, distinctive

In the same way, the different passions require different tones by the reader, as indicated in Table 5:

Table 5. Correspondence between passions of the mind and tones¹⁸

Passions of the mind	Tone
Love	Soft, charming, smooth, languishing
Hatred	Sharp, sullen, severe
Joy	Full, flowing, brisk, quick, sweet, clear
Grief	Dull, languishing, moaning, low, flexible, interrupted
Fear	Trembling, faltering, dejected, hesitating
Courage	Full, bold, loud
Anger	Strong, vehement, elevated

¹⁶ “Tone or cadence” (*A New English Grammar* 1746:86). “Cadence”: Fisher (1753:146); Gough (²1760:95); Wilson (1792:153-155). “Tone of our voice”: Jones (1724:51); Newbery? (1745: 125); Fenning (1771:180-181); Cattanach (1778:175).

¹⁷ Information from Fisher (³1753:143), Gough (²1760:95), Fenning (1771:180) and Wilson (1792:154).

¹⁸ Information from Fisher (³1753:146), Fenning (1771:181) and Wilson (1792:154).

A mismatch of passions and tones may shock the audience because, as Fisher points out, “It would be ridiculous to read *common* things in a *tragic, mournful* manner, which happen every day, and do not affect us with any concern: and, on the other hand, to pronounce *great* affairs, and matters of extraordinary moment, in a *low, unconcerned, and familiar* voice” (Fisher ³1753:147). All the authors agree that the key to a proper inflection of the voice in reading lies in the comprehension of the text. That is, the reader will only be able to convey the writer’s feelings if he understands his words.

As Cattnach notes in point 4, schoolmasters should warn students about the necessity of observing the pauses signalled by punctuation marks in the texts as they contribute to the hearer’s understanding and to the reader’s breathing needs. Most of the authors deal with punctuation marks separately¹⁹ and use cross-references to direct students to the relevant grammar section (e.g. Fenning 1771:178-179).

In point 4, Cattnach also reminds students to place the voice stress on that syllable which must receive it, a rule recorded by other grammarians who also direct students to the corresponding grammar section on accent. This reference to the need of observing accents serves as an introduction to the concept of emphasis. Emphasis is explained in the same terms as accent, that is, just like voice stress falls on one syllable of a word, within the limits of the sentence, one or more words can be read with marked voice strength. The only difference between the accent and the emphasis lies in the fixity of the former and the variability of the latter. As this variability may cause problems to students, grammar writers give some guidance on the position of emphasis. Although they acknowledge that “particular directions cannot easily be given”, they recommend “*To consider the chief design of the whole*” (Newbery 1745:127).

The directions on emphasis take up more space than the rest, as they include examples to illustrate how the position of emphasis may change the meaning of the sentence:

The following example will make the matter plain:

Will you ride to town to-day?

This question is capable of being taken in four different senses, according to the different words on which the *emphasis* is laid.

1. If it be laid on the word *you*, the answer may be, *No, but my brother will*.
2. If it be laid on the word *ride*, the answer may be, *No, but I shall walk*.
3. If it be laid on the word *town*, the answer may be, *No, for I must go into the country*.
4. If it be laid on the word *to-day*, the sense is something different from all these, and the answer may be, *No, but I shall to-morrow*.

Thus it appears, that placing the *emphasis* upon the right word, is not only requisite to make us read or speak with propriety, but is even sometimes indispensably necessary to determine the sense of what we read or speak. (Fenning 1771:179-180)

¹⁹ Only a few include here their discussions on punctuation marks: Crocker (1772), Ward (1777), Anon. (1788).

The detailed explanations on the changes of meaning derived from the different positions of the emphasis (see also Newbery 1745:128, Anon. 1746:83-85, Fisher ³1753:147-149, Trusler 1790?:21 and Wilson 1792:155-157) hint at the difficulties posed by this aspect in children’s oral performance.

Other grammarians deal with rules on hesitation expressions, reading speed and volume. Thus, schoolmasters recommend their students to avoid hesitation expressions like “hem’s”, “o’s”, “ha’s” (Gough ²1760:94). In order to control this humming and hawing, the students’ eyes should be quicker than their voices, thus predicting any possible difficulty before actually pronouncing words, as suggested by Fisher (³1753:145) and Trusler (1790?:20).

Students are also told to observe their reading speed as it is as bad to read excessively fast as it is to do it too slowly (Crocker 1772:60). Furthermore, when reading fast, students take the risk of “stammering; adding or omitting words” (Meikleham 1781:28). Besides, schoolmasters note children’s tendency to read hastily when they become proficient, which makes their reading difficult to follow (Gough ²1760:95, Crocker 1772:60).

As for the volume, grammar writers also propose a balance, neither too high nor too low (Jones 1724:52, Newbery 1745:125, Meikleham 1781:28). Children should read loud enough to be heard by all the members of the audience present in the same room, but not too much because their voice should not be heard by people next room. Besides, as Crocker, indicates, “*Reading too loud* is not only disagreeable to the hearers, but inconvenient to the reader; as it puts him under the inconvenience of overstraining his voice; by which he deprives himself of the power of modulating and managing it as he ought to do” (Crocker 1772:59).

Finally, as Cattanach recommends in point 6 above, students are told that all these helpful hints about pronunciation, pauses, speed, volume and intonation will be acquired more easily if they have good models to follow. They must pay attention to readings performed aloud by skilful readers and imitate them. However, they should not practise alone, but under the close supervision of expert readers or their teachers; otherwise, they may acquire bad reading habits which will unlikely be corrected in the future (Newbery 1745:126; Gough ²1760:95-96, Fenning 1771:181, Ward 1777:111, Cattanach 1778:175, Meikleham 1781:28).

5. The directions for reading aloud and the elocutionary movement: common traits and sources

Given the popularity of the elocutionary movement in the second half of the eighteenth century, it seems plausible to assume some relationship between the bulk of elocution guides published at the time and the sets of instructions on reading aloud discussed above. There are, however, differences between the two groups of works. Apart from the obvious one, which is that the guides were longer compared to the directions, the major difference lies in the target audience. Whereas elocution guides were mainly addressed to teachers or adult professionals, who had to speak in public, grammars were designed for young learners, as Sheridan clearly stated in his *Course of lectures on elocution*

(1762:18), when he offered a method for “the improvement of such as are **more advanced in life** [...] to guide them, in acquiring a just and natural delivery”, which comprises “pronunciation, accent, emphasis, pauses or stops” (emphasis mine).

Nevertheless, elocution guides and instructions for reading aloud shared common features. First, the elocutionists dealt with the same elements of oral reading as grammar writers, using very similar terms: articulation and pronunciation, pause and timing accent and emphasis, pitch and modulation (Robb 1941:46; cf. also Vandraegen 1949:54-55). They also recommended the imitation of “those who excel in it [oral reading], whether at the bar or in the pulpit” (Mason 1748:32) as a useful method to acquire good reading habits, and considered that an effective delivery could only be achieved through an adequate comprehension of the texts. Thus, Sheridan, discussing the wrong use of tones and emphasis, says that:

children are taught to read sentences, which they do not understand; and it is impossible to lay the emphasis right, without perfectly comprehending the meaning of what one reads, they get a habit either of reading in a monotone, or if they attempt to distinguish one word from the rest, as the emphasis falls at random, the sense is usually perverted, or changed into nonsense. The way to prevent this, is, to put no book into their hands, which is not suited to their slender capacities. (Sheridan 1775:155-156)

Perhaps most importantly, the insistence on reading as we speak, present in most of the directions for reading aloud (cf. the directions on voice modulation above, in Subsection 4.3), is consistent with one of the basic principles of the elocutionary movement (Vandraegen 1949 and 1953, Mattingly 1954):

In reading then attend to your subject, and deliver it just in such a manner as you would do if you were talking of it. This is the great, general and most important rule of all; which, if carefully observed, will correct not only this but almost all the other faults of a bad pronunciation; and give you an easy, decent, graceful delivery, agreeable to all the rules of a right elocution. (Mason 1748:18)

For *reading* is nothing but *speaking* what one sees in a book, as if he were expressing his *own* sentiments, as they rise in his mind. And no person reads well, till he comes to speak what he sees in the book before him in the same *natural* manner as he speaks the thoughts, which arise in his *own* mind. (Burgh 1761:8)

As grammar writers resorted to one of the first sources of the English elocutionary movement, i.e., the English translation of Michel Le Faucheur's *Traitté de l'action de l'orateur, ou de la prononciation et du geste* (1657), elocutionary influence was felt early. According to Howell (1959:6-7), the first translation was published in London around 1702, but today we only have the second edition of 1727 titled *The art of speaking in publick: or an essay on the action of an orator: as to his prononciation and gesture. Useful in the senate or theatre, the court, the camp, as well as the bar and the pulpit*. Fragments from the anonymous English translation

of Le Faucheur’s essay are closely followed by Fisher, as shown in the examples below:

It would be ridiculous to read *common* things in a *tragical, mournful* manner, which happen every day, and do not affect us with any concern: and, on the other hand, to pronounce *great* affairs, and matters of extraordinary moment, in a *low, unconcerned, and familiar* voice. (Fisher ³1753:147)

The several *passions* require much *variety*: *love* is to be expressed with a *soft and charming* voice; *hatred*, with a *sharp, sullen, and severe* one; *joy* is to be *full, flowing, and brisk*; *grief* to be *dull, languishing, and moaning*; *fear*, with *trembling and faltering*. (Fisher ³1753:146)

For it would be ridiculous to speak *common and ordinary things*, that happen every day, with a *tragical concern* or a *tone* of admiration; and as absurd on the other hand, to speak of *great affairs* and matters of extraordinary moment with a *low, unconcerned and familiar voice* (Anon. ²1727:96)

he [the orator] will shew his *love* best by a *soft, a gay, and a charming voice*; and his *hatred*, on the contrary, by a *sharp, sullen and severe* one. He’ll discover his *joy* well with a *full, flowing and brisk voice*; and his *grief*, on the other side, with a *dull, languishing and sad moan*; not without breaking off abruptly sometimes, with a *sob*; and fetching up a *sigh* or a *groan* from the heart. His *fear* will be best demonstrated by a *trembling and stammering* voice, somewhat inclining to uncertainty and apprehension. (Anon. ²1727:99-100)

However, although elocution guides and directions for reading aloud discuss common topics, and grammarians are inspired by major figures of the elocutionary movement such as Le Faucheur, and mainly Mason and Sheridan, the presence of instructions on reading aloud in grammars and textbooks cannot be considered, strictly speaking, a sequel of the elocution guides, but rather a different manifestation of a general interest in oral reading. Their simultaneous emergence in the printing market may have responded to a common concern for this social practice, a vigorous activity at the time, as mentioned in the introduction to this paper.

Indeed, grammar writers, most of whom teachers, resorted to other schoolbooks to write their own directions for reading, a practice well extended at the time, although very rarely acknowledged (Tieken-Boon van Ostade 1996, Smith 1998:435). Thus, Isaac Watts’s *The art of reading and writing English* (²1722),²⁰ and the anonymous *The Irish spelling book* (1740) are clear sources of some authors in our study corpus.²¹ In fact, Watts was a great precursor of the oral reading movement, as noted by Vandraegen, who vindicates this figure as one of the promoters of “naturalness in reading and speaking” and a major source in

²⁰ We are using the edition in *ECCO*, the first edition dates back to 1721.

²¹ Reading aloud instructions were rarely included in seventeenth-century grammar books. In fact, “in sixteenth- and seventeenth-century rhetorics reading aloud, in English, received little attention” (Michael 1987:293).

Mason’s work (Vandraegen 1949:50), perhaps the most inspiring elocutionist in the writing of these directions, mainly in the section on tones and cadence.

Michael (1987:293) notes that Watts’s directions for reading “were reprinted and recast and included in numerous anthologies, spelling-books and grammars until well into the nineteenth century”. This plagiarism is confirmed in Fisher’s grammar, as Watts’s address to the schoolmasters in the first paragraph of his “Directions for reading” is followed almost verbatim in Fisher’s grammar:²²

Before I give any directions to scholars, I would take the freedom here to propose one to the teacher; and that is, that what lessons soever he appoints the child to spell or read, he should sometimes spell or read, he should sometimes spell or read that very lesson over before the child; whether it be the tables of syllables, or words, or names, or verses in the Bible or Testament; or whether it be a newspaper, an oration, a dialogue, poetry &c. And let him observe the stops, read slow, give the proper accents distinctly to every word, and every part of the sentence.

Children that have a tolerable ear, will take in the sounds well, and imitate their master’s voice, and be secur’d against an ill turn of voice, or unhappy tone, by this method; and they will better learn to

Before any directions be given to the *scholars*, it may not be improper to propose one to the *teacher*; and that is, that what lesson soever he appoints the *learner* to spell, or read, he should sometimes spell or read that very lesson over *before* the *scholars*, for their *imitation*. In reading any part of Scripture, a news paper, an oration, a dialogue, poetry &c. let the *teacher* observe the stops, read *deliberately*, give the *accent* to the proper syllable, or syllables, in every word; and the *emphasis* on the proper word or words in a sentence. Learners that have a tolerable ear, will readily imitate the master’s voice; and by this method, be secured against a disagreeable turn of voice, or an unhappy canting tone: and they will sooner learn to pronounce,

²² Although plagiarism was commonplace in eighteenth-century grammar writing (see Tieken-Boon van Ostade 1996, Smith 1998, Watts 1999:44), it is interesting to discover a new case in which Fisher is involved, especially given her explicit objections to this practice. Thus, the unacknowledged copying of her examples of bad English (Michael 1987:327, Tieken-Boon van Ostade 1996, Shields 1973:56, Rodríguez-Gil 2002 and 2006-2007:342-343) gave place to this comment in the preface to *An accurate new spelling dictionary and expositor of the English language*:

The abstract of etymology and syntax is plain, concise and more practicable to learners than more tedious treatises, and is compiled from Fisher’s English grammar, the first that exhibited an etymology on the plan and system of syntax rules peculiarly adapted to the genius and idioms of the English language, independent of any other tongue, with exercises of false English, &c, all of which, most grammarians have since pirated, or *humbly* imitated, without improving upon, or even allowing me the originality of them. (Fisher ²1773:iv)

But her irritation reached a peak when she had to defend herself against an accusation of plagiarism, a judicial process that she vehemently denounced as a commercial strategy to promote John Entick’s *The new spelling dictionary* (1765). Although she was absolved (see Rodríguez-Álvarez and Rodríguez-Gil 2006 for a detailed account of this case), it is paradoxical that Fisher, who so strongly criticised plagiarism, draws from several sources to compose her directions for reading aloud without any notice of the original authors.

pronounce well whatsoever they read by this imitation, than by a meer correction of their faults, without any example.

Watts (²1722:47-48)

justly, whatsoever they read by this *imitation*, than by a mere *correction* of their faults, without such an *example*.

Fisher (³1753:145)

Fisher continues using Watts’s directions as a source of her own and adds extracts from *The Irish spelling book*, as attested by her discussion on cadence:

They lay down one rule universally to be observed, *viz.* that every discourse is to be utter’d according to the nature of its subject, and that the voice is to be managed so, as to humour the sense by *tones* proper thereto; thus,

If a thing be meerly *narrative*, and not affecting, it is to be spoken in a plain manner, with very little change of sounds, as being addressed to the understanding, and not to the will.

If it be *argumentative*, it requires somewhat more warmth and earnestness.

If *pathetic*, most of all.

Things natural are to be pronounced with an equable, distinct voice, ---- good actions, with noble *accents* of admiration; --- wicked actions with those of detestation. --- fortunate events of life, with a brisk air; unfortunate ones, with a sad and mournful one.

Anon. (1740:294)

Every *discourse* is to be uttered according to the nature of the subject, and the *voice* is to be managed so as to humour the *sense* by *tones* proper thereto: thus, if a thing be meerly *narrative*, and not affecting; it is to be spoken in a plain manner, with very little change of sounds, as being addressed to the understanding, and no to the will: if it be *argumentative*, it requires more *warmth* and *earnestness*; if *pathetic*, most of all. Things *natural* are to be pronounced with an *even, distinct* voice: *good actions* with lofty and magnificent *tones* of admiration; *wicked actions* with those of *detestation*; *fortunate events* of life with a *brisk* air; *unfortunate* ones, with a *sad* or *mournful* one.

Fisher (³1753:146)

While Fisher’s discussion on reading aloud follows Watts very closely, other authors reproduce different versions of his directions, as illustrated by the following excerpts about the risks of pronouncing unknown words:

If you do not certainly know any word at first sight, do not guess at it, lest thereby you get a habit of miscalling words, and reading falsely; but be sure to spell every word and syllable before you pronounce it, if you are not acquainted with it. (Watts ²1722:48-49)

Do not guess at a word at first sight, if you are not well acquainted with it, lest you get a habit of reading falsely. (Newbery? 1745:125)

[...] let the reader carefully avoid guessing at a word he doth not certainly know at first sight: let him spell every word, syllable by syllable, before he pronounces it, if he be not certain how to pronounce it. The way to arrive at reading truly, is to proceed slowly and surely. (Gough ²1760:94)

Let your attention be fixed, and do not guess at any word with which you are not

acquainted, lest you get the base habit of miscalling words, and reading falsely. (Cattanach 1778:175)

If you do not know a word at first sight, do not guess at its pronunciation, but go over the syllables, one by one, and then pronounce it clearly and distinctly. (Meikleham 1781: 28)

If you meet with a word you do not understand, do not guess at it, lest you get a habit of miscalling it; but divide it in your mind, into its proper number of syllables. (Corbet 1784: 35; Chown 1788:19)

Summing up, moved by a common concern for an efficient oral reading, both grammarians and elocutionists prescribed a set of rules to improve the performance of young and adult students. They used the same sources to compose their directions for reading and their elocution guides, namely, the English translation of Le Faucheur’s treatise, *The art of speaking in publick* (1727) and Watts’s handbook on reading and writing (1722), a fact that may explain their similarities. Therefore, although the major figures of the elocutionary movement, especially Sheridan, may have contributed to reinforce the grammarians’ interest in the teaching of reading, the instructions on reading contained in grammars did not derive, strictly speaking, from the elocution guides, but are rather a parallel product aimed at a younger audience.

6. Conclusions

The access to education by the emerging middle class in eighteenth-century Britain resulted in a demand of schoolbooks and grammars which could furnish their offspring with skills for social and professional promotion. This demand was more than catered for by a growing production of grammar books in a competitive market. In this marketing battle, the books themselves had to exert a strong appeal on prospective buyers, and thus, titles, prefaces dedicatory letters and, indeed, all the book sections that frame the main text of the grammars, and which constitute what Genette has called the paratext of the book, worked together to gain a positive reception from the public. In this sense, appendices and supplements emerged as a very appealing asset, and most grammar books included a wide array of subsidiary contents that complemented the contents of the grammar. School teachers, most of them authors of contemporary schoolbooks, became aware of the importance that reading aloud could have in their students’ prospective professions, and introduced in their grammar books supplements with directions for reading in English school grammars, especially during the second half of the eighteenth century. Their guidance is usually reduced to a set of

principles that could be easily followed by young scholars. Crocker (1772:61) succinctly summarised them all in the following excerpt:

[...] it is necessary that the reader begin sentences in an even moderate voice; that he keep his eyes a few words before his tongue, to observe the stops, &c. that he pronounce every word with a clear articulation; that he pay due regard to accent, emphasis, and cadence; and that he carefully attend to the sense and design of the writer. (Crocker 1772:61)

The inclusion of these directions and the references to classroom reading activities attest to the growing importance this practice acquired, which was also supported by the emergence of the elocutionary movement. Besides, there are evident relationships and similarities between the instructions on reading aloud in school grammars and the treatises on reading by notable elocutionists, who also served as sources for those sections of English grammars. This does not mean, though, that these instructions derive from the elocution guides, rather they are parallel manifestations of a common interest in the private and the public sphere: oral reading. Although the work of the elocutionists, mainly Mason and Sheridan, is somehow present in these instructions, their antecedents can be traced to earlier authors of spelling books, namely Watts (²1722) and the anonymous author of *The Irish spelling-book* (1740).

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