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John Ash and the Rise of the Children's Grammar

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From the second half of the eighteenth century onwards a knowledge of grammar served as an important marker of class in England. In order to enable their children to rise in society, middle-class parents expected their sons and daughters to learn English grammar. Since England did not have an Academy which would produce an authoritative grammar, many individuals took it upon themselves to compose grammars, and the Baptist minister John Ash (1724?–1779) was one of them.

Ash's *Grammatical Institutes* (1760) was originally written for the author's five-year-old daughter and was printed for the use of his schoolmaster friends. The grammar became available to a wide public in 1766 when it was published in London, as *The Easiest Introduction to Dr. Lowth's English Grammar*. Unlike Robert Lowth, whose grammar was regarded as being too difficult for beginners, Ash fared much better in producing an elementary manual, and it consequently played an important role in the rise of the children's grammar.

Making extensive use of primary source materials such as grammars, letters, reviews and newspaper advertisements, this study contributes to existing scholarship in the field of eighteenth-century grammars and grammarians. It provides an in-depth study of Ash's *Grammatical Institutes* and its influence on other popular grammars for children, such as those written by Lady Ellenor Fenn and the nineteenth-century female grammarians.

This book is of interest to sociohistorical linguists working in the field of eighteenth- and nineteenth-century grammar-writing, as well as to book historians and historians of education and children's literature.

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