THE HISTORY OF ENGLISH PODCAST TRANSCRIPTS

EPISODE 165:
GLAMOROUS GRAMMAR

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Welcome to the History of English Podcast – a podcast about the history of the English language. This is Episode 165: Glamorous Grammar. In this episode, we're going to look at the first attempt to describe the grammar of English in 1586. It may seem surprising that an English grammar had not been composed prior to this point, but that's because the term *grammar* wasn't typically applied to languages like English. *Grammar* was synonymous with Latin, and for the most part, the only grammar to speak of was Latin grammar. So when the concept was applied to English, it was done by applying that Latin framework to English. And we are still living with the consequences to this day. In this episode, we'll explore those developments, and we'll examine how they impacted the modern rules of English grammar.

But before we begin, let me remind you that the website for the podcast is historyofenglishpodcast.com. And you can sign up to support the podcast and get bonus episodes at Patreon.com/historyofenglish.

And let me also make a quick plug here at the beginning of the episode. For all of you who have listened to the entire podcast series, and enjoyed the earlier discussion about Old English and the Anglo-Saxon period of England, I wanted to let you know that there is a relatively new podcast dedicated to that period called, appropriately enough, the 'Anglo-Saxon England' podcast. So check that out if you want a more detailed look at the period. And since I'm plugging podcasts about Anglo-Saxon England, I should once again mention David Crowther's excellent podcast about the History of England called 'The History of England Podcast.' It also has a companion series dedicated to the Anglo-Saxon period. And another great podcast that covers that same period in detail is the 'British History Podcast' by Jamie Jeffers. So those are all great options for you if you want more information about the early speakers of Old English.

And speaking of Old English, that is also part of this story about the first English grammar. Almost every aspect of English has changed since that earlier period. The vocabulary, the pronunciation, the spelling system, and of course, the grammar itself has changed radically over the past thousand years.

As we've traced the changes to the language since then, you will have probably noticed that I've focused on those earlier factors – the changing vocabulary, the sound changes, and the evolution of spelling. But I haven't had a lot to say about grammar. And that is partly because grammar wasn't really a focus of writers and scholars prior to this point. For the most part, when scholars wrote about English, they wrote about English words. They wrote about where the words came from, and how they were spelled, and sometimes how they were pronounced, but they didn't write very much about how they were put together in a sentence. But around the current point in our overall story in 1580s, that finally started to change.

Now I should probably begin by noting that the word *grammar* is a Greek word. And in Greek, it didn't really have the meaning that it has today. *Grammar* is a variation of the root word *gram*, which referred to anything that was written down. We have that Greek root in a lot of words today. A *monogram* is the written initials of a person. A *telegram* was a written message sent by

telegraph. Today, you might use *instagram*, which is a combination of 'instant camera' and 'telegram.' And *gram* isn't necessarily limited to words that are written down. Early record players were called *gramophones* because the music was written into the vinyl discs that were played on it. And the recording industry gave out music awards that were called the Gramophone Awards, but they're known today as the *Grammys*. So believe it or not, the name *Grammys* and *grammar* come from the same Greek root word.

Early on, the word *grammar* was more concerned with the study of the letters of the alphabet. And from there, it spread to a more general study of the words written with those letters.

The study of letters was something that fascinated language scholars, but it also had practical applications. And one of those practical applications was espionage. In the Middle Ages, and in the early Modern period, people sometimes communicated in secret codes. That was especially true in the case of international espionage as rulers and diplomats tried to uncover the intentions of their rivals and sometimes the intentions of their allies. And during the reign of Queen Elizabeth, her spymasters had to work overtime to break the codes of conspirators and plotters who wanted to assassinate her.

At the current point in our overall story of English, we find ourselves in the middle of the 1580s. By this point, England and Spain were on the verge of war, and England had just made its first effort to establish a settlement in the New World.

The year was 1586, and in July, some disturbing news reached the Queen's closest advisors and officials. Another plot was underway to assassinate Elizabeth, and it had the backing of the Spanish king Philip. The person charged with uncovering those plots was Francis Walsingham, Elizabeth's secretary of state and primary spymaster. He had already uncovered several other plots, and he strongly suspected the involvement of Elizabeth's cousin, Mary, Queen of Scots. Mary had been under house arrest in England for nearly 20 years, and she was generally seen as the Catholic alternative to Elizabeth. Most of the plots against Elizabeth assumed that Mary would take the throne as soon as Elizabeth was dead or deposed. And Walsingham knew that Mary was willing to go along with those plans.

Walsingham used a double-agent to reveal the latest plot. The agent was a brewer who had agreed to smuggle letters to and from Mary in the bottom of beer barrels. Of course, the brewer turned the letters over to Walsingham and his agents before they were forwarded on to the recipients. And in July of 1586, a rich young Catholic man named Anthony Babington sent a letter to Mary via one of those beer barrels. Walsingham's men intercepted the letter to see what he had written, but it was written in a secret code. Rather than the normal letters of the alphabet, it was written with various numbers and symbols. He was obviously hiding his message in case it was discovered.

Now that posed a problem for Elizabeth's spymasters, so they made a copy of the letter and let the original pass on to Mary to avoid any suspicion that the authorities knew what was going on. Mary received the letter, and a few days later, she sent a reply to Babington. Once again, the letter was intercepted by Elizabeth's spymasters, and it was also written in code. The fact that

Mary's letter was written in code indicated that its contents were probably incriminating. So once again, they made a copy of the letter and let the original go on to Babington.

Walsingham's men suspected that the letters concerned another assassination plot, but they needed to unlock the secret code to reveal the terms of the plot and to prove Mary's involvement. But how would they do that?

Well, the messages employed a complicated code, but it was obvious that the code relied in part on simple letter substitution. The spellings replaced each letter of the alphabet with a symbol. So the code-breakers had to figure out which symbols represented which letters. And they knew that the letter [e] was the most commonly-used letter in the English alphabet. And that proved to be the key to unlocking the code.

Now I've talked about the prominence of the letter [e] in earlier episodes. Not only did it represent the vowel sound in many words, but English had also inherited a lot of [e]'s at or near the end of words thanks to the Old English inflectional system that had eroded over time. As we know, much of the grammar of Old English was dictated by specific word endings or suffixes. Those inflectional endings varied depending on how the word was used in the sentence. For example, in the case of nouns, the ending varied depending on whether the noun was singular or plural, masculine or feminine, and whether it was being used as the subject or the object of the sentence. Most of the grammatical information was conveyed by those inflectional endings. And those endings had different vowel and consonant sounds. But over the course of the Middle English period, most of those distinct endings had disappeared or had been eroded down to a generic 'eh' sound at the end of words. So *land* was sometimes pronounced *londe*, and *sun* was sometimes pronounced *sunne*. That 'eh' sound at the end was usually spelled with an [e]. During the 1400s and 1500s, that 'eh' sound at the end of many words had started to disappear, but the [e] spelling often remained. During the 1500s, the use of those final [e]'s varied. Printers would put them in and take them out as needed to justify the margins in a line of text. We've also seen how scribes and printers started to use those silent [e]'s at the end of words to indicate a long vowel sound like we do today to distinguish *hat* from *hate* and *hop* from *hope*.

But there were also other situations where an [e] was often inserted near the end of a word. There were still a few lingering inflections in the language that used that letter [e], and many of them still exist today. For example, when an adjective was used to make comparisons, it acquired an [-er] or an [-est] ending like when *big* became *bigger* and *biggest*. And if we think about the word *spy*, let's consider how it also varies depending in it's used. It doesn't have an [e], but when it is used as a verb it sometimes does. "I spy' without an [e], but "he spies" with an [e] ('s-p-i-e-s'). That third person suffix adds an [e]. And "I spy today" without an [e], but "I spied yesterday" with an [e] ('s-p-i-e-d'). That past tense suffix also adds an [e]. And I am 'one spy' without an [e], but together, we are 'several spies' with an [e] ('s-p-i-e-s'). And if I am referring to the 'spy's mission,' today I would add an [-'s], but in the Elizabethan period, the apostrophe wasn't used yet, so it would have also ended in [-es].

All of this points to something very interesting about the letter [e]. It's prominence in Modern English is partly due to the fact that it is often used to represent the remnants of the Old English

inflectional system. It represents the vestiges of what were once much more distinctive endings that have been worn down over time, and the letter remains at or near the end of many words either as a silent [e] or used in conjunction with other consonant sounds as part of a lingering suffix or inflection.

And in 1586, Elizabeth's spies used that prominent [e] to solve the secret code that Mary Queen of Scots was using. Since [e] was the most commonly-used letter in English, the code breakers looked for the most commonly-used symbol in the coded messages, and they assumed that it stood for the letter [e]. And then they applied that same approach to the other symbols connecting the most commonly used symbols with the most commonly used letters in English. And after a bit of trial and error, they were eventually able to decipher the code and the contents of each message.

The messages revealed a plot by Babington and six unnamed members of Elizabeth's court. The plotters were going to assassinate Elizabeth and free Mary from her confinement. And Philip of Spain was going to provide support for the new regime. Mary's letter read in part, "When all is ready, the six gentlemen must be set to work, and . . . when it is accomplished, I may be in some way got away from here . . . then we will await foreign assistance."

With the plot revealed, Walsingham and his fellow spymasters began to investigate the plot and the persons who might be involved. Over a dozen conspirators were identified, and a few weeks later, they were arrested. That included the original letter writer, Anthony Babington. This plot has become known to history as the 'Babington Plot,' and it was the plot that sealed the fate of Mary, Queen of Scots. Her apartments were searched and her papers seized. And one of the documents found among her papers was the specific cipher that she used to read and write the coded letters. She had been caught red-handed in a plot to overthrow Elizabeth, and she was soon charged for her role in the plot. [*SOURCE: Tudors, Peter Ackroyd, p. 416-7.*]

A few weeks later, all of the plotters were executed, and Mary was found guilty as well. Of course, it was much trickier to execute Mary since she still proclaimed herself to be the Queen of the Scots. Elizabeth knew that killing a fellow queen could be seen as justification for her own assassination. And she feared that it would provoke a civil war between Protestants and Catholics. So she hesitated to sign the death warrant, but in the end, Elizabeth's advisors convinced her to authorize the punishment. A short time later, Mary Queen of Scots was beheaded. [*SOURCE: Tudors, Peter Ackroyd, p. 421.*]

Now according to the surviving accounts of Mary's execution, she presented herself to the executioner with long auburn hair. But after she was beheaded, the executioner picked up the head by the hair, only to reveal that is was just a wig. The years of Mary's confinement and isolation had taken its toll on her. Not only had she aged considerably, but her actual hair was very short and gray. Whatever glamour she had once had as the Queen of the Scots had been lost during her nearly two decades of confinement. [*NOTE: This transcript will use the British spelling of 'glamour' in order to maintain consistency of spelling.*]

And speaking of *glamour*, it's a word that also has close ties to Scotland and close ties to grammar. It is in fact a Scots variation of the word *grammar*. I actually mentioned this etymology way back in Episode 95, but it's a good time to re-visit that fascinating linguistic connection. And to understand this linguistic connection, we need to delve a little deeper into the history of the word *grammar*.

As I noted earlier, *grammar* is ultimately a Greek word. It passed through Latin and French and then into English in the 1300s. But in the Middle Ages, the word was really only used in regard to Latin. It was the study of the structure of Latin, and also the pronunciation and spelling of Latin. Remember that grammar was one of the three subjects of the trivium – the three basic courses that were taught to all students in the Middle Ages. Those subjects were grammar, logic and rhetoric. All instruction was conducted in Latin, and English wasn't really taught at all. Through this process, grammar became synonymous with Latin. And since Latin grammar was one of the main subjects taught in primary schools, those schools came to be called 'grammar schools.'

And when children went to study at those grammar schools, which were mostly Church schools at the time, they acquired the ability to speak Latin – this revered language of the church and of scholarship and a language that most of the common people of England couldn't understand. It was almost like a secret code. Some people thought that the ability to speak that language was acquired through some type of magic or astrology. It was similar to healers who recited special charms, and spells, and incantations. So the word *grammar* started to acquire this broader sense in some places. It not only referred to a knowledge of Latin, it also referred to a knowledge of magic, witchcraft and astrology.

That was the sense of the word that developed in the north in Scotland. There the 'gr' sound at the front the word *grammar* evolved into a 'gl' sound. I talked about the connections between the 'r' and 'l' sounds a few episodes back, and how those sounds sometimes switch back and forth. And that's how *grammar* produced the variant *glamour* in Scotland. And *glamour* took on that sense of 'magic or a spell.' In fact, if you're a fan of stories about vampires, you've probably encountered that usage before. When a vampire casts a spell over a person, the victim is said to be 'glamoured.'

Over time, that sense of the word *glamour* spread throughout Britain, and eventually the sense of the word shifted to the magical spell-like qualities of someone who is very beautiful. People tend to be enchanted by someone who is beautiful and dressed up in elaborate clothing, and that led to the modern sense of *glamour* and *glamorous*.

So the ultimate connection between *glamour* and *grammar* has to do with the mystery and enchanting nature of Latin in the Middle Ages – an enchantment that was later extended to fashion.

Well, as late as the year 1586, the year that the Babington Plot was uncovered, the word *grammar* was still synonymous with the study of Latin. But it was in that same year that the first attempt was made to apply those rules of Latin grammar to English. And it gave us the first English grammar book.

Now I should qualify that statement a little bit. The grammar book was composed by a printer named William Bullokar. He apparently composed two books on English grammar. One was a larger volume called 'Grammar at Large,' which has been lost to history. The other was a smaller companion volume which was intended as a summary of the main book. That shorter companion work is generally known today as Bullokar's 'Bref Grammar of English.' And it is detailed enough to stand on its own as the oldest known grammar of English. [*SOURCE: Making Sense, David Crystal, p. 38-9.*]

I should also note that this particular book is mainly important because it was the first of its kind. But other than being the first, it didn't really have much of an impact on the language itself. It wasn't all that widely read at the time, probably because it was written in a special code. Now the code wasn't the cipher used my Mary Queen of Scots and her collaborators, but it was a code that was difficult to read. Bullokar's code was actually a phonetic alphabet that he had devised a few years earlier.

As we've seen in prior episodes, many scholars during the Elizabethan period thought that English spelling should match the way the words were pronounced, and several of them invented their own phonetic alphabets to make that happen. Well, William Bullokar shared that sentiment. Six years earlier in 1580, he had composed a book in which he outlined his ideas on phonetic spellings. He called it 'Booke at Large, for the Amendment of Orthographie for English Speech.' I didn't mention that book in those earlier episodes because it didn't really break any new ground. It largely followed in the footsteps of those earlier spelling reformers like John Hart and Sir Thomas Smith. Bullokar actually mentioned that he had read the works of Hart and Smith, and he suggested that their phonetic alphabets had not caught on because they were too much of a departure from the traditional alphabet. So he proposed a phonetic alphabet that was a little more conservative.

He stuck to the letters of the regular alphabet. So unlike Hart, he didn't use Greek letters like theta, and he didn't reintroduce Old English letters like eth and thorn. For sounds not represented with a specific letter like /ch/ and /th/ and /sh/, he used the conventional approach and spelled them with two letters – [ch], [th], and [sh], respectively. Also, unlike Hart, Bullokar treated [u] and [w] as distinct letters, and he did the same with [y] and [i] as well. So, all in all, his system looked a bit more like regular English writing. But strictly phonetic spellings were still difficult to read. He rejected spellings based on etymology like the [b]'s in *debt* and *doubt*. And he rejected the use of a silent [-e] at the end of a word to mark a long vowel sound and the use of doubled consonants to mark a short vowel sound. The differences in vowel sounds were represented with accent marks above the vowel letters. [*SOURCE: The History of English Spelling, Christopher Upward and George Davidson, p. 295.*] He also used accent marks to distinguish the soft and hard sounds of letter [g], as well as the two sounds of letter [c].

So even though his spelling system wasn't a radical as those that came before, it was still a significant departure from the spelling system that most people were accustomed to, and it was probably difficult for most people to read it. But despite the problems, he stuck with it, and he chose to use that same phonetic alphabet in all of his subsequent works. So that is part of the reason why his works never really acquired much an audience.

But Bullokar did have some interesting things to say about spelling in the 1500s. For example, in his description of the English letters, he mentioned that the last letter of the alphabet had two different names. He said that some people called it 'zed' and some people called it 'zee.' Of course, he was noting a difference that has come to distinguish American English from other forms of English. Americans call the letter 'zee,' and most other English speakers call it 'zed.' 'Zed' is a shortened version of the Greek name 'zeta.' Well, Bullokar confirmed that both pronunciations were common in England in the late 1500s, and his book on spelling was one of the first references we have to that 'zee' pronunciation. In fact, he even recommended that the letter be called 'zee' to make the pronunciation consistent with most of the other consonant letters which also ended with the 'ee' sound like B, C, D, G, P, and T. Of course, American English eventually settled on that pronunciation, while British English stuck with 'zed,' and from there, 'zed' spread to most of the other colonial dialects of English. But Bullokar shows us that both names once existed side-by-side.

Bullokar's book on spellings also indicated something very interesting about English grammar. As I noted earlier, many of those Old English inflectional endings had disappeared by the Elizabethan period, but a few still survived like the [-s] or [-es] suffix at the end of plural nouns and at the end of verbs in third person singular. Those suffixes had once been pronounced as distinct syllables. So *leaves* would have been 'leave-es,' and *sings* would have been 'sing-es.'

Well, those suffixes had been worn down over time, and in many words, they were no longer being pronounced as a distinct syllable. So they were pronounced more like today. And the phonetic spellings of this period confirm that. Bullokar specifically wrote that the [e] was not pronounced in the plural suffix in words like *words*, *cares*, *minds*, *bones*, and so on. John Hart's phonetic spellings had indicated the same thing since he often spelled those types of words with a simple [s] and no [e] in the suffix. A couple of episodes back I talked about Richard Mulcaster who rejected phonetic spellings and gave us some of the spelling conventions we use today. Well, he also made a similar comment in his book on spelling. He wrote that words that end in silent [e] are made plural by adding an [s] "without encrease of syllabs," which meant 'syllables.' [*The Elementarie, Richard Mulcaster, p. 113*.] He gave examples like *times*, *wives* and *pipes*, which were all pronounced like today as single syllable words.

Of course, there are exceptions where the [-s] ending is still pronounced as a separate syllable. Specifically, where the word ends in certain sibilant sounds like /s/, /z/, or /sh/. So that gives us words like *buses*, *houses* and *wishes*. We have to keep that extra syllable in those types of words to distinguish the [-s] suffix from the sibilant sounds at the end of those words. Otherwise, the sibilants would bleed together and the plural suffix would be lost.

But the important thing to take from all of this is that the modern pronunciation of the [-s] suffix was largely in place during the Elizabethan period. And those spellings confirm that the few lingering Old English inflections were still being worn down from a distinct syllable to a mere sibilant sound.

Five years later, Bullokar produced his next major work, which was a collection of Aesop's Fables. And again, he composed it using the phonetic spelling system he had created. And once again, it didn't sell all that many copies. But the following year was 1586 – the year of the Babington Plot which led to the execution of Mary, Queen of Scots. And in that year, Bullokar published his grammar book. And again, it was composed and published with those same phonetic spellings, which probably limited its potential audience.

We can view this first English grammar book as part of a larger movement that was taking place throughout Europe at the time. From the Mediterranean to the North Sea, scholars were trying to standardize the languages that were spoken across the continent. In fact, just four years earlier in 1582, an academy was established in Italy to standardize the Italian language. Three decades later, French scholars did the same thing for French creating the Academie Francaise in 1612. That academy still regulates the French language to this day.

A century later, in the 1700s, there were proposals to establish a similar academy for English, but the idea never really caught on. So we have to view this first grammar book in that context. It was part of a burgeoning movement that was trying to standardize languages throughout Western Europe.

But why had it taken this long to produce a grammar book about English? I mean, we're almost in the period of Shakespeare, and no one had ever tried to analyze the way English sentences were put together. So why was there such a delay? Well, the answer lies in the concept of grammar and the erosion of all of those Old English inflectional endings.

It's important to understand that English is somewhat unique in the extent to which it has lost so many of its inflectional endings. Most other European languages have a lot more of those endings than English does. If you have ever tried to learn Spanish or French or German, you will have encountered all of those endings. And Latin and ancient Greek worked the same way. And that's because the original Indo-European language also had those same kinds of suffixes. I actually talked about that way back in Episode 8 when I looked at Indo-European grammar. And those inflectional endings had been passed down to the various daughter languages over the centuries.

Well, people in the Middle Ages and the early Modern period didn't understand the full linguistic history of those languages, but they knew that Latin and ancient Greek had a highly developed system of inflectional endings, and most other European languages had a similar system. So they thought that that was the way grammar was supposed to work. The study of grammar was really the study of the way in which a word varied in a sentence to convey some important information. It was the study of the endings that were placed on a noun to indicate whether it was the subject or the object of the sentence, whether it was masculine or feminine, and whether it was singular

or plural. It was also the study of the endings that were placed on a verb to indicate whether the action was happening in the present, or the past, or the future, and whether it was describing an on-going action or a completed action. It was also the study of endings placed on other parts of speech to convey other information in a sentence. Modern linguists use the term *morphology* to describe the ways in which a word can vary in a sentence to indicate some bit of grammatical information. And that's really what a student learned when studying Latin grammar because that's how Latin grammar worked. Grammar was morphology – the study of suffixes and prefixes, and other word variations.

There was a sense that Latin was a 'proper' language because it had that sophisticated system of suffixes. And there was also a sense that other European languages in the 1500s had deteriorated from that early pure state. Some languages had started to simplify their inflectional systems, and had started to replace some of those endings with a specific word order. And there was no more obvious example of that than English.

When English started to abandon many of its inflectional endings in Late Old English, speakers had to come up with a new way to convey the information that was normally conveyed with those endings. So they adopted the modern approach of conveying that information with a fixed word order. Today, the subject of the sentence typically comes before the verb, and the verb typically comes before the object. And it does that because we no longer have the suffixes that told you which noun was the subject and which noun was the object. So today, that information is largely conveyed by the placement of the words.

The ordering of words in a sentence is called syntax. So in linguistic terms, Modern English grammar relies heavily on syntax or word order, whereas Latin relied more on morphology or changes in the word forms. Of course, English uses both today, but word order conveys most of the grammatical information in a sentence.

If I give you a sentence like "saw in the man wearing the woman a hat the bus," it makes no sense. But if I re-order the exact same words, we get "The man in the bus saw the woman wearing a hat." Now it makes sense because the words are ordered in a way that conveys the information we need. We know that the man was the one looking because *man* comes before the verb *saw*, and we know that the woman was being seen since *woman* comes after the verb. And we know that the man was in the bus because 'in the bus' is a prepositional phrase and it comes immediately after the word *man* ('the man in the bus'), and we know that the woman was wearing a hat because the phrase 'wearing a hat' comes immediately after *woman* ('the woman wearing a hat'). But if I were switch *man* and *woman* around, the sentence still makes sense, but now it's the woman who was in the bus, and she saw the man wearing a hat. Again, the words themselves don't change at all. We let the word order do the work.

But in Latin and in Old English, we wouldn't necessarily need to put those words in any specific order because those key words would have had suffixes that conveyed that information. That's the basic difference between the syntax and morphology. And even though I'm simplifying things, that is the basic difference between Modern English grammar and Latin grammar.

Well, since Latin grammar focused on those suffixes and inflections, it was thought that that was the way grammar was supposed to work. And since English has lost most of its inflections and replaced them with word order, it was thought that English had become corrupted and tainted. It no longer had a 'proper' grammar. It didn't work the way it was supposed to work. Of course, that was a Latin-centric world view, but it explains why no one had really bothered to apply the concepts of Latin grammar to English. Why waste your time trying to analyze and describe something that was broken?

Well, in 1586, William Bullokar gave it a shot. And as we might expect, his first attempt at an English grammar was really a Latin grammar imposed on English. He simply took those Latin concepts – the parts of speech, the terminology, and the overall approach – and he applied it to English. And in doing so, he established the model that most later grammarians followed well into the twentieth century. Time and again, grammarians tried to fit the English square peg into the Latin round hole, even though the languages were fundamentally different in many ways. But it was all based on that notion that English had become corrupted, and it needed to be purified by bringing it in line with Latin.

For much of the 1500s, students in England had learned Latin grammar by using a textbook composed by William Lily. I mentioned him a couple of episodes back. He was the grandfather of the poet John Lyly. Well, William Lyly's Latin grammar book had been authorized by Henry VIII, and it was known to just about every student in England. So Bullokar basically took Lily's textbook, and he applied the same concepts to English. And as we'll see, it was an approach that came with limitations. If you going to describe English in terms of inflectional endings, you're eventually going to run into problems.

Now you may be wondering why Bullokar didn't just start from scratch – why he didn't just try to describe English based on its own terms without regard to Latin. Well, that's a very modern view. Today, most linguists try to describe the way languages work in an objective and non-judgmental way, but that approach is largely a product of the twentieth century. Before that, the focus was more about identifying perceived problems and correcting them. And in terms of grammar, that meant viewing English through the lens of Latin and purifying some of its corrupt elements.

Now right out of the gate, Bullokar ran into a problem. Pretty much every grammar book begins by identifying the various parts of speech. But not everyone agrees on that. And it's even more of a problem if you're trying to apply Latin parts of speech to English.

Now this raises an issue that has perplexed grammarians for centuries, and it continues to be a source of some debate among modern scholars. Just how many parts of speech are there? And how do you categorize them? Well, that depends on who you ask. It is possible to break down sentences and analyze the component parts in various ways. So depending on the grammarian and the language being analyzed, the total number of categories can vary a bit.

The ancient Greeks were the first people in the western world to write about parts of speech. They settled on eight parts of speech for ancient Greek. Then when Roman writers looked at Latin, they also came up with eight parts of speech, but they weren't the same eight parts of speech that the Greeks had used. For example, one of the Greek parts of speech was articles – words like *a* and *an* and *the* in English. Well, Classical Latin didn't have articles, so the Roman writers replaced that category with interjections, which are spontaneous statements like *Wow!* and *Ouch!* and *Oops!* in English. So Latin just substituted interjections for articles.

And that had also been the approach used by William Lily in his textbook on Latin grammar used in schools throughout England. Remember that was the textbook that William Bullokar had used as the model for his English grammar. So Bullokar used the same approach. He identified eight parts of speech – nouns, pronouns, verbs, adverbs, prepositions, conjunctions, interjections and participles. So let's look at little closer at each of those.

Nouns, pronouns and verbs are pretty straight-forward. Most everyone agrees on what those are and that they are basic parts of speech. Every basic sentence involves someone or something doing something. So the someone or something is the noun or pronoun, and what they are doing is the verb. But what about all of the other words in a sentence? How do you classify them?

Well, that's where things start to get a bit complicated. Over the centuries, some English grammarians have argued that there really shouldn't be any other categories. In the late 1700s, an English grammarian named John Horne Tooke argued that nouns and verbs are the only fundamental parts of speech in English, and everything else just modifies or substitutes for those two things. A similar idea was expressed in the 1800s by another English writer named William Stevens Balch. He said that English grammar consists of things and actions, so nouns and verbs, and everything else is just a subclass of those two things. [*SOURCE: Taming the Tongue, Bryan A. Garner, p. 183.*] But most grammarians recognize that words other than nouns and verbs are distinct parts of speech, though again, they don't always agree how to categorize them.

William Bullokar followed the traditional Latin approach. After recognizing nouns, and pronouns and verbs, he recognized adverbs, which are words that describe or modify verbs and sometimes other parts of speech. In subsequent centuries, English grammarians would continue to debate the nature of adverbs. Some English scholars didn't include adverbs as a separate part of speech in the 1700s and 1800s, and even Noah Webster – founder of Webster's Dictionary – argued that adverbs should not exist as a separate part of speech in English. But today, they are almost always included as a distinct part of speech in English.

Bullokar then recognized conjunctions, which are terms that link words and phrases together like *and* and *but*. Again, later English grammarians sometimes omitted that category. Bullokar also recognized interjections like *Wow*! and *Ouch*! since traditional Latin grammar also recognized that part of speech. But again, later English grammarians sometimes omitted that category.

Bullokar continued to follow the Latin model by also recognizing prepositions as a distinct part of speech. Prepositions show the relationship between two or more nouns like *in*, *to*, *beside*, *under*, *over*, and so on. Most English grammarians through the centuries have continued to recognize prepositions as a separate part of speech.

The final category that Bullokar took from Latin was participles. And participles are a good example of how these parts of speech sometimes blend together and are not as distinct as we might think they are. A participle is a verb that is used as an adjective. Like the verb *dancing*. We use it as a verb when we say 'She is dancing." But we can also use it to describe a noun like a 'dancing bear.' When we use it that way, it's called a participle. Now Latin had specific participle forms that we don't have in English, and again, participles were treated as a specific category in Latin, so Bullokar maintained that category for English. In later centuries, some English grammarians omitted participles as a separate category. Given their nature, they can also be treated as a subclass of verbs or adjectives.

So that was the eight basic parts of speech recognized by William Bullokar in his first English grammar book. But if you're really into grammar, you might have noticed that some parts of speech were left out. For example, he didn't include articles like *a*, *an* and *the* as a separate category. They play an important role in English, but remember that Classical Latin didn't have articles. So since Latin omitted them, Bullokar did as well. Again, most modern English grammar books include them.

And there was one other really important category that Bullokar didn't mention – adjectives. Adjectives are words that describe or modify a noun or pronoun like *big*, *smart*, *fast*, *pretty*, and so on. Now obviously, that seems like a really important category, but it wasn't included. As I noted, Bullokar did include participles, which are verbs that function as adjectives, but he didn't have a separate category for adjectives. So why was that?

Well, again, it was because Latin didn't treat adjectives as a distinct part of speech. And that may sound crazy, but Latin placed adjectives under the general category of nouns. But why? Well, as I just noted, adjectives describe or modify nouns, so they sort of go together. But the ultimate answer has to do with those Latin inflectional endings. The inflectional endings used for an adjective had to match the gender, number and case of the ending used on the noun it was describing. So in the mind of Latin grammarians, adjectives and nouns were fundamentally linked together, so it made sense to treat them together as the same part to speech. But of course, since English doesn't work that way, that connection didn't really make sense. And later English grammarians had to create a separate category for adjectives.

So I hope you can start to see the problems that arise when you try to describe English grammar using the general framework of Latin. The two don't always go together.

Now Bullokar recognized that nouns and adjectives needed to be distinguished in English, so he adopted an approach that other grammarians also adopted to deal with this issue in Latin. He divided nouns into two sub-categories – 'nouns-substantive' and 'nouns-adjective.' The former just meant regular nouns and the latter meant adjectives. So he essentially recognized the modern

distinction between nouns and adjectives, but he did it within the larger category of nouns. As more and more writers wrote about English grammar, they gradually distinguished them as completely separate parts of speech.

And to illustrate how these categories are somewhat arbitrary, many modern grammarians lump together certain kinds of adjectives, some pronouns and the articles into a general category called 'determiners.' So again, there are many different ways of thinking about these various parts of speech and how they relate to each other and work within a sentence.

Now in Bullokar's grammar, his first detailed discussion of the parts of speech was reserved for nouns. He wrote that a noun was anything that may be seen, felt, heard, or 'understanded.' Today, we would say *understood*, but *understanded* was common in the late 1500s before it gave way to *understood*.

Having defined what a noun was, a typical Latin text would then talk about the grammatical gender of nouns. I've talked about grammatical gender before, and if you've ever studied other European languages, you know what I'm talking about. It is the idea that every noun is classified as either masculine, feminine or neuter, and that classification is a factor in determining what kind of suffix is to be used with the noun. Most Indo-European languages have grammatical gender because the original Indo-European language had it. And Latin had it too. And so did Old English. But English lost those distinctions in early Middle English, so it didn't really make sense for Bullokar to discuss grammatical gender in his grammar book. As a result, he simply skipped over that topic.

But with respect to nouns, the suffixes used in Latin were not just based on grammatical gender. They were also based on other factors. One of those factors was number – so whether the noun was singular or plural – so whether we are talking about one of something or multiple units. In Latin, there were different inflectional endings for singular nouns and plural nouns, so Latin grammar books discussed that distinction. Of course, English has also retained a suffix to make that same distinction. As I noted earlier in the episode, we use an [-s] or [-es] suffix to indicate plurality in Modern English. So that is one of the rare inflectional endings that has survived in English.

Old English was more like Latin in that it had a lot of different suffixes to indicate if the noun was singular or plural. The plural [-s] suffix that we use today is derived from one of those old suffixes. It became the general plural suffix over time, and the others disappeared.

I should also mention that Middle English also had an [-en] suffix to show plurality, which still survives in words like *oxen*, *children* and *brethren*. Very few words use that suffix today, but during the Elizabethan period, a lot of other words used that suffix. If you look through the works of Shakespeare or other writers in the late 1500s, you'll find many examples of that [-en] plural suffix like *eyen* for *eyes*, *peasen* for *peas*, *housen* for *houses*, and *hosen* for *hose* like you wear on your leg. It was also common to find *kine* for *cows* and *shoon* for *shoes*. In fact, Shakespeare used both *shoon* and *shoes* in Hamlet, so that shows how those plural suffixes often existed side-by-side at the time.

Now, as I said, number was a factor in determining what inflections were used on nouns in Latin, but it wasn't the only factor. The suffixes also depended on how the noun was used in the sentence – whether it was the subject of the sentence, or a direct object, or an indirect object, or if it was showing possession like the word *dog* in 'the dog's collar.' There was also a specific set of Latin endings that applied when the noun was used in some other unique ways that don't really apply to English. Each of those situations were called 'cases,' and Latin had fancy terms to describe each of those situations.

When the noun was used as the subject of the sentence, it was called the nominative case, and when it was used as the direct object, it was called the accusative case, and when it was used as an indirect object, it was the dative case, and so on. And again, the suffixes varied in each of those cases.

Well, of course, English nouns don't work that way. For the most past, they don't change, no matter how they're used in a sentence because again, English relies on word order, not suffixes. So in the case of the word *dog*, when it is used as the subject, it is *dog*. "The dog barked at the moon." When it is a direct object, it is also just *dog*. "The man petted the dog." And when it is an indirect object, it is still just *dog*. "I gave the dog a bone." In Old English, the word would have had a different suffix in each of those sentences, but those suffixes have disappeared over time.

So when William Bullokar got to that point in his discussion about nouns, he could have just disregarded all of those Latin cases – the nominative, the accusative, and the dative – because they don't really affect the way nouns work in English. But he went there anyway. He did modify the categories a little bit, but he still talked about how nouns were used in English based on how they were used in Latin. Again, he was trying to make English fit into the Latin box.

So I hope you can start to see the problem with using Latin concepts to describe English grammar. Sometimes it worked, and sometimes it didn't. Bullokar continued that same approach as he examined verbs, participles and other parts of speech.

As I noted earlier, the English grammarians that followed Bullokar maintained that same general approach. In fact, the next two major works on English grammar in the 1600s not only continued to apply Latin concepts to English, they were actually written in Latin. That was the case with a grammar book composed by Alexander Gil in 1621 and a separate grammar book composed by John Wallis in 1653. [*SOURCE: A Biography of the English Language, C.M. Millward, p. 243.*]

The application of Latin concepts to English was so strong that later grammarians actually tried to change English to make it fit the Latin model better. That's how we got a lot of the frustrating rules that still plague us to this day. For example, English grammar has a formal rule that says a sentence cannot end in a preposition, and that's because Latin sentences could not end in a preposition. It's right there in the Latin word *preposition* – or 'pre-position' if we break it down. It's called that because that part of speech took its position before the noun it introduced. As the name indicates, it could only occur before a noun. In Latin, it couldn't exist by itself at the end of a sentence like "Do you know what I'm taking about?" If we were strictly governed by Latin grammar, we wouldn't say that. We would say, "Do you know about what I am talking?"

Latin also gave us the rule that says you cannot split an infinitive in English because a Latin infinitive was a single word . So you couldn't divide it in Latin. But an English infinitive is two words – 'to' plus the verb like 'to say,' 'to be,' or 'to go.' Again, according to those later grammarians, you are not supposed to split up an infinitive like 'to go' by putting a word in the middle, but English speakers had a long history of doing just that. Star Trek begins with the well-known tag line 'to boldly go where no man has gone before.' Not 'to go boldly where no man has gone before.' So the 'split infinitive' rule is a completely arbitrary rule that was imposed on English by grammarians in order to make English work like Latin.

But that Latin-based approach to English grammar did eventually meet with resistance in the late 1800s and 1900s. In England, schoolteachers eventually pushed back against the Latin rules that were being imposed on English. There was such a concern over the way that grammar was being taught that the English government directed elementary schools to stop teaching grammar in 1890.

Twenty years later, a circular was issued by the government that was called 'The Teaching of English in Secondary Schools.' It read in part, "In the past the formal teaching of English grammar was based on Latin grammar. It is now recognised that this was a mistake founded on a whole set of misconceptions."[*SOURCE: Making Sense, David Crystan, p. 219-20.*]

Then, a separate report was issued which recommended a brand new approach to teaching grammar in schools. It read, "What this structure is we are only now beginning to find out. It is possible that future text-books on English grammar will wear an air very strange to those brought up on 'cases,' 'declensions,' 'conjugations,' etc., that we shall hear of new parts of speech and much of 'word order,' 'token words,' and the like." [*SOURCE: Making Sense, David Crystal, p. 221.*]

That more modern approach did eventually gain acceptance, and modern English grammar books are less inclined to use that old Latin terminology. But as modern grammarians try to explain how English works in its own terms, they don't always agree on the specifics. The concepts and terminology of English grammar can still vary quite a bit from one grammar textbook to another. So we might say that English grammar is still a work in progress.

As we move forward with the story of English, we're going to focus more on these grammatical developments. We'll encounter some of the greatest writers and some of the most well-known pieces of literature composed in the English language. And as we go through some of those works, we're going to pay particular attention to the way the writers used their words. That will include not only their word choices, but also the way they put their words together. So we'll see how the grammar of the Elizabethan period was different from today, and how speakers of that period used their words differently.

For example, speakers of that period would not have contracted "It is" into *it's* like we do today. Instead of dropping the 'I' in *is*, they would have dropped the 'I' in *it.* So they would have said *'tis* instead of *its*. "Tis the season to be jolly," not "It's the season to be jolly."

Of course, we have a different word *its*, which we use to show possession, as in "The tree lost its leaves." But early Elizabethan writers didn't have that word yet. They had *it*, but not *its*. The possessive form of *it* was actually *his*. So they would have said, "The tree lost his leaves." The word *its* didn't appear until around the year 1600.

And speaking of *his*, Elizabethan speakers often used *his* to show possession in a way that seems very strange to us today. They would say things like "Jack his house" rather than "Jack's house." And "the king his throne" rather than "the king's throne."

Of course, Elizabethan writers also used *thou*, *thee*, *ye* and *you*, where we would just use *you* today. They used verb forms that ended in [-st] and [-th] like *speakest* and *speaketh*, which we no longer use today.

And Elizabethan writers would have used the pronoun *which* in places where modern speakers would use *who*. So for example, the Lord's Prayer reads "Our father which art in heaven," whereas today, we would probably say "Our father who is in heaven."

Again, these differences reflect changes in grammar over the past few centuries. And we'll explore those types of changes as we go through the Shakespearean period and the period that followed. In fact, by exploring the differences between Elizabethan grammar and modern grammar, it may help us to better understand the works of Shakespeare because much of the challenge of his language is in the way he put words together. So this is really an important part of the story as we move forward.

But before we get to Shakespeare, we have one more important development to explore. And that was England's war with Spain and the arrival of the Spanish armada in the late 1580s. So next time, we'll explore that important historical event, and we'll see how it impacted the history of English.

Until then, thanks for listening to the History of English Podcast.