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# The HUGE presence of Lindley Murray<sup>1</sup>

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An illustration of the scope of Lindley Murray's authority on all things prescriptive

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## 1. Introduction

The grammarian Lindley Murray (1745–1826), according to Monaghan (1996), was the author of the best selling English grammar book of all times, called *English Grammar* and first published in 1795. Not surprisingly, therefore, his work was subjected to severe criticism by later grammarians as well as by authors of usage guides, who may have thought that Murray's success might negatively influence the sales figures of their own books. As the publication history of the grammar in Alston (1965) suggests, Murray was also the most popular grammarian of the late 18<sup>th</sup> and perhaps the entire 19<sup>th</sup> century, and this is most clearly reflected in the way in which a wide range of 19<sup>th</sup>- and even some 20<sup>th</sup>-century literary authors, from both sides of the Atlantic, mentioned Lindley Murray in their novels. Examples are Harriet Beecher Stowe (*Uncle Tom's Cabin*, 1852), George Eliot (*Middlemarch*, 1871–2), Charles Dickens, in several of his novels (*Sketches by Boz*, 1836; *Nicholas Nickleby*, 1838–9; *The Old Curiosity Shop* 1840–1; *Dombey & Son*, 1846–8); Oscar Wilde (*Minor and Minor Poets*, 1887) and James Joyce (*Ulysses*, 1918) (Fens-de Zeeuw, 2011: 170–2). Another example is Edgar Allan Poe, who according to Hayes (2000) grew up with Murray's textbooks and used his writings as a kind of linguistic touchstone, especially in his reviews. Many more writers could be mentioned, and not only literary ones, for in a recent paper in which Crystal (2018) analysed the presence of linguistic elements in issues of *Punch* published during the 19<sup>th</sup> century, he discovered that '[w]henver *Punch* debates grammar, it refers to Lindley Murray'. Murray, according to Crystal,

'is the only grammarian to receive any mention throughout the period, and his name turns up in 19 articles' (Crystal, 2018: 86). Murray had become synonymous with grammar prescription, and even in the early 20<sup>th</sup> century, he was still referred to as 'the father of English Grammar' (Johnson, 1904: 365).

The grammarian Lindley Murray has been the focal point in my research activities for over a decade now (cf. Fens-de Zeeuw, 2011), so for this paper I decided to have a look at his presence in the Hyper Usage Guide for English (HUGE) database (Straaijer, 2014), which was compiled within the context of the Bridging the Unbridgeable project, precisely for the purpose of doing this kind



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of research. HUGE comprises 77 usage guides published between 1770 and 2010 (see Straaijer, 2018 for a detailed discussion of its contents), and I decided to find out whether Murray is referred to in any of these works, and, more specifically, how his views on linguistic correctness are dealt with by their authors.

## 2. Lindley Murray: Quaker and Grammarian<sup>2</sup>

From his *Memoirs* (1826), we know that Murray was born in 1745, in Swatara, a small village in Lancaster county in Pennsylvania, as the eldest of 12 children. A few years before his birth, his father and mother, who were from Scottish and Irish descent, respectively, had moved to America. His father initially owned a small flour mill, but ambitious as he was, he decided to try and make his fortune in New York. Murray was brought up as a Quaker, and although the family was not extremely strict in its adherence to the faith, the Quaker religion had a considerable impact on Murray's view on life and language use – which he was sometimes mocked for by other grammarians. After his school years, at around the age of 15, Murray initially worked for his father's business in New York, but he was not happy doing so, and a few years later he started to study law. Shortly after being admitted to the bar, he married Hannah Dobson (1748–1834), but they did not have any children. While he also kept himself engaged with various business enterprises, Murray practised law for a few years, until, as he wrote in his *Memoirs*, 'the troubles in America' began, by which he referred to the events leading up to the American Revolution. Murray appears to have made quite a fortune during those years, which has led to speculations on possible Loyalist wartime activities on his part. In any case, by the time the American War of Independence ended in 1783, Murray was able to 'retire from business', as he put it himself. Around that time, too, his health became a serious issue, and in 1785 doctor's advice brought him and his wife to Holdgate in Yorkshire (England), a county which at the time was 'a stronghold of English Quakerism' (Bell, 1951: 253).

From his letters – which I collected, transcribed and analysed for the purpose of studying his grammar (see Fens-de Zeeuw, 2011) – it appears that Murray's outlook on life changed drastically at this point. From a wealthy businessman and gentleman of leisure, he turned into a frugal but

charitable man, as well as a valued member of the Quaker community in York: he became a Quaker Minister in 1791. He was, moreover, active in William Wilberforce's (1759–1833) anti-slavery campaign, and became an avid supporter of the establishment of a humane system of treatment in mental hospitals. It was not until Murray reached the age of 42 that he started writing – religious works, at first, but in 1795 his first textbook was published, *English Grammar*. Though intended for a local girls' school, it became an immediate hit. Several other textbooks followed; for an overview of his many publications, some twenty altogether, see Barr (1996).

Most of his books did extremely well. Between 1801 and 1840 in Britain alone an estimated 15,000 copies were sold of each edition of the *English Grammar*; and by 1832 52 editions had been published there (Fens-de Zeeuw, 2011). Altogether, at least 69 numbered editions appeared. Likewise, in the United States in the early decades of the 19<sup>th</sup> century Murray was the most widely sold author of literacy textbooks. And worldwide, by 1850, of the *English Grammar* alone possibly two million copies had been sold, including a special edition for the blind with embossed characters. Publication was not restricted to the English-speaking world; the grammar was translated into many languages (see Alston, 1965: 96), including Gujarati, and it even served as the basis for a Maori grammar, published in New Zealand in 1842 (Fens-de Zeeuw, 2011: 162–3). The *Abridgment* of the grammar, first published in 1797, sold even more copies. According to Monaghan (1996: 27–44), the sum of all Murray's publications sold together equals some fourteen million copies – no mean achievement. His success as a writer, however, was overshadowed by a progressing and debilitating illness, which kept him increasingly confined to his home. He died on February 16, 1826, at the age of almost 81.

## 3. Murray in the HUGE database

From the usage guides included in the HUGE database, a selection was made of primarily grammatical usage problems; these are features showing divided usage or usage preferences, such as the placement of *only*, the dangling adjunct and the question of whether it should be *data is* or *are*. Altogether, the database includes 6,330 entries. Doing a full-text search in the database for Murray's name produced 131 references to Murray or his grammar in only five usage guides, which often included multiple references per

entry: Brown (1851) (57), Moon (1868) (17), Crystal (1984) (1), *Webster's Dictionary of English Usage* (1989) (54), Burchfield (1996) (2) and the third edition of Fowler's *Modern English Usage* (1926). Batko (2004), too, came up, but the two items in question were merely example sentences containing the name 'Murray' (*Surely it didn't bother Murray that I rung the bell 30 times?*). Since HUGE only comprises entries that relate to a selected list of usage problems for the database (123 items in all), Murray's name may in fact occur far more often in these five usage guides. To illustrate this, in Chapter 3 of Brown (1851) alone, which bears the title 'Of grammatical success and fame', Murray's name occurs as often as 30 times. To place these findings into a slightly wider perspective, I substituted Murray's name with that of his predecessor Robert Lowth (1710–1787) – another 'icon of English prescriptive grammar' (Tieken-Boon van Ostade, 2006: 541) – which produced only 91 hits against Murray's 131, though they were scattered over more usage guides (11), which ranged over a longer period of time as well: from Hurd (1847) to Heffer (2010). Murray may have had a numerically larger presence in HUGE than Lowth, but Lowth's was longer lasting.

Not infrequently, both grammarians, but also others such as Priestley, Campbell, and Goold Brown, are mentioned and compared to one another in entries retrieved from the HUGE search, as in the following one from *Webster's Dictionary* (1989):

The tradition [i.e. earlier views on the use of absolute adjectives that do not allow for comparison] seems to have originated in the 18th century. **Lowth** 1762 says, 'So likewise adjectives, that have in themselves a superlative signification, admit not properly the superlative form superadded,' and he cites as examples *chiefest* and *extremest*. **Lowth** found these in poetry, and is inclined to be tolerant of them in that medium. **Priestley**, revised ed., 1798 also comments on the subject: '... yet it is not uncommon to see the comparative or superlative of such words; being used, either through inadvertency, or for the sake of emphasis.' **Priestley's** approach also seems tolerant.

But Lindley Murray 1795 is not tolerant. **Murray**, who compiled his grammar from many earlier works including those of **Lowth**, **Priestley**, and **Campbell**, and here uses examples from all three, takes **Lowth's** remarks from their original position in a footnote and elevates them to the status of a rule; he also adds 'or comparative' to **Lowth's** 'superlative form.' He labels all the examples 'incorrect.'

**Murray's** *English Grammar* was widely popular and widely imitated. As **Murray** had elaborated on the rules he took over from **Lowth** and **Priestley**, so later grammarians elaborated on **Murray**. Where **Lowth** mentioned two adjectives, **Murray** lists six (plus an *etc.*); **Goold Brown** 1851 reproduces the list of Samuel Kirkham, *English Grammar in Familiar Lectures* (1825), which contains 22 adjectives and concludes with 'and many others' ... (1989: 6–7) (bold type used for emphasis throughout this paper)

*Webster's Dictionary* would obviously have nothing to lose from a favourable discussion of Murray, unlike more contemporary writers like Brown (1851) and Moon (1868). Treating Murray's work critically, as done by these 19<sup>th</sup>-century writers, served a deliberately harmful purpose,<sup>3</sup> even though by this time Murray's popularity was already on the wane: within a few years his grammars would no longer be reprinted.

Five usage guides in the database that mention Murray, two from around the middle of the 19<sup>th</sup> century and three from the late 20<sup>th</sup>, is not a lot by all accounts. For all that, it is worthwhile looking at the way in which these works treated him. I shall start with *Webster's Dictionary* (1989) for the simple reason of the presence of Murray's rival's name Noah Webster (1758–1843) in the title. Murray and Webster, who is designated by Finegan (1980: 36) as a 'devout Anglophobe', were fellow countrymen. Webster's *Grammatical Institute of the English Language* (1784) had been the most popular grammar in America until the first American edition of Murray's *English Grammar* appeared in 1800 (Alston, 1965: 93). In an attempt to fend off his potential competitor, Webster made the accusations that Murray's grammar contained errors (see Ikeda, 1999 for a detailed discussion of this), and had plagiarised his own grammar. Murray attempted to account for the way in which he had made use of his predecessors' work in a letter to his brother John, who had looked after Murray's affairs in America after he had moved to England:

Whoever writes a Grammar, must, in some degree, make use of his predecessors' labours: and I think I have made an ample apology for so doing, in the Introduction to my Grammar: I have applied two paragraphs on that subject. (Murray to John Murray, December 2, 1815; Swarthmore College: Lindley Murray papers RG5/198 S1 F19)

Murray was, however, no less interested in Webster's grammar than Webster in his. In another

letter to his brother John, Murray asked him to send him a copy of a new edition of Webster's grammar which had recently appeared, specifying exactly which edition he wished to have: 'Please to send me Noah Webster's Grammar of that edition, which was published since 9<sup>th</sup>. mo: 1802: **no other**' (Murray to John Murray, September 5, 1803; Swarthmore College: Lindley Murray papers RG5/198 S1 F15). A few years later, Murray once again asked his brother to send him a copy of a newly published edition of Webster's grammar (Fens-de Zeeuw, 2011: 185).

Despite the name in the title, *Webster's Dictionary* (1989) bears no relationship with Noah Webster's dictionary. The work is, moreover, not a dictionary but a usage guide, described by Pullum (2005) as 'the best usage book I know of right now'. It contains a large number of references to Lindley Murray and his grammar: 54 to be exact, in 22 entries retrieved from the HUGE database. In contrast to Noah Webster's references to Murray in his grammar, the majority of those in *Webster's Dictionary* are of a neutral nature, such as: 'Murray's grammar was widely popular' (1989: 7), and 'Lindley Murray based his grammar on that of Lowth, Priestley and others' (1989: 363). Some remarks are somewhat critical, such as 'Murray is, in fact, only half right here' (1989: 662), 'Murray was notoriously strait-laced', and, taking Lowth into its stride, 'even a bishop could not put a preposition at the end of a clause and satisfy Murray' (1989: 763). On the use of *whose*, Murray is said to be 'of two minds' (1989: 960). The one really negative comment I found was in the entry on 'absolute adjectives' (e.g. *chief*, *extreme*) already cited, which reads that 'Lindley Murray 1795 is not tolerant' when it comes to the use of superlatives of such words (*chiefest*, *extremest*) (1989: 6).

Another American rival of Murray was 'that learned but cantankerous Yankee pedagogue', as Moody (1976: 36) describes him, Gould Brown (1791–1857). Brown's *Institutes of English Grammar* (1823) – not included in HUGE since it is a grammar, not a usage guide, but still published during Murray's lifetime – contains numerous unfavourable references to Murray's grammar (Fens-de Zeeuw, 2011: 175). Most of the preface, too, is devoted to a criticism of the grammar, with Brown noting that he did not intend 'to impute to Murray any thing . . . except for those inaccuracies and deficiencies which still disgrace the work as a literary performance'. Brown continued his critical observations on Murray's grammars in an article published several years later, writing:

... [Murray,] to avert the charge of plagiarism, disclaim[ed] almost everything in which any degree of literary merit consists; suppose[d] it impossible to write an English grammar the greater part of which is not a compilation; acknowledge[d] that originality belongs to but a small portion of his own; persuade [d] himself that it is scarcely necessary to tell whence he took any part of the rest. (Brown, 1832: 562)

Not all Brown's references to Murray were unfavourable though. In Chapter 3 of the Preface to his grammar he remarked that 'Murray was an intelligent and very worthy man, to whose various labours in the compilation of books our schools are under many obligations', only to add that 'in original thought and critical skill . . . [he] fell far below "most of the authors"' to whom his grammar was indebted, i.e. 'Harris, Johnson, Lowth, Priestley, Beattie, Sheridan, Walker, Coote, Blair, and Campbell' (Brown, 1823: x). Brown, moreover, according to Downey (1982: xiv), called Murray's work 'dull'. He not only criticised Murray as a grammarian, but also objected to Quakers in general for not sticking to 'their customary mode of forming the verb in connection with the pronoun *thou*, in familiar discourse' (Brown, 1823: 72). 'Some of the *Friends*,' he added, '(perhaps from an idea that it is less formal) misemploy *thee* for *thou*, and often join it to the third person of the verb instead of the second. Such expressions as, *thee does*, *thee is*, *thee has*, *thee thinks*, &c., are double solecisms; they set all grammar at defiance' (Brown, 1823: 73). Murray's popularity must have stung, the more so because nearly ten years after the initial publication of his own grammar, Brown still had to admit that '[t]here are, upon the subject of English Grammar, no publications more extensively known, than those of Lindley Murray' (Brown, 1832: 557).

With 57 references produced by my search in HUGE, Murray's name indeed comes up quite often in Brown's *Grammar of English Grammars* (1851). Although Brown also mentions other grammarians, such as Lowth (4 times) and Priestley (11 times), he appears to have made a thorough study of Lindley Murray's grammar in particular: not only did he examine various editions of the *English Grammar*, including the 'Octavo Gram.' (as he referred to it), published in 1808, he also consulted 'Murray's Key' (*A Key to the Exercises*, 1797), 'Murray's Introductory Reader' (*The English Reader*, 1799), 'Murray's Exercises' (*English Exercises*, 1797), and 'Murray's Sequel' (*Sequel to the English Reader*, 1800) (see Barr, 1996 for publication details of these works).



When Brown discussed what he called the ‘rules of agreement’ for ‘[t]he article *a* or *an*’, for instance, it is Murray who gets singled out as the representative of all grammarians who presented mistaken information on the subject:

Among all the works of earlier grammarians, I have never yet found a book which taught correctly the *application* of the two forms of the indefinite article *an* or *a*. Murray, contrary to Johnson and Webster, considers *a* to be the original word, and *an* the euphonic derivative. (Brown, 1851: 246)

Brown then added Murray’s explanation from the *English Grammar*, and though in his view a ‘clumsy’ one, ‘broken, prolix, deficient, and inaccurate as it is, both in style and doctrine’, it was nevertheless ‘copied and copied from grammar to grammar’. In thus criticising Murray’s grammar, Brown set the tone for his own work, especially insofar as it concerned Lindley Murray. He even used the grammar as a – negative – benchmark for others: ‘Some later grammarians are **still more faulty** than Murray, in their rules for the application of *an* or *a*’ (Brown, 1851: 247).

17 years later, in 1868, George Washington Moon’s (1823–1909) *The Bad English of Lindley Murray and Other Writers* came out: the name in the title confirms the poor regard in which Murray’s grammar was held by this time. Like Brown before him, Moon drew attention to the errors of many grammarians who preceded him, and, as suggested by the title of the book, Murray was targeted in particular:

Well, it is the pupil’s turn now; and, notwithstanding that the old grammarian was a personal friend of my family’s, I cannot resist the temptation to take up the pen against him, and to repay him for the terror of his name in my school days, by showing that, in the very volume in which he laid down his rules, he frequently expressed himself ungrammatically. (Moon, 1868: 2)

In his book, Moon attempted to expose Murray’s inability (and that of other grammarians) to follow his own grammatical rules, but Reibel (1996: xx) argues that although Moon’s book was certainly ‘entertaining reading’, he ‘pushes the principles of strict grammatical construction to even more ridiculous limits than did Cobbett’, another popular 19<sup>th</sup>-century grammarian, whose grammar had been published in 1818.

How did Moon expose what he perceived as Murray’s linguistic inabilities? When discussing the indicative mood, for instance, he argued that

Murray’s practice diverged widely from his own precepts:

When there is either contingency without futurity, or futurity without contingency, the verb must be in the indicative mood; as Lindley Murray himself says, on page 307. But, observe how widely his practice diverges from his precepts. (Moon, 1868: 7–9)

Two pages down, he continued his criticism, even honouring Murray with a separate heading (as he did in several other places):

LINDLEY MURRAY.

From the consideration of Lindley Murray’s errors in the use of verbs, let us now turn to his errors in the use of adverbs. He says, on page 290;—‘Adverbs, though they have no government of case, tense, etc. require an appropriate situation in the sentence’. Undoubtedly they do; and that situation, as we learn from page 445, is, as near as possible to them. But has Lindley Murray uniformly placed his adverbs in appropriate situations? Certainly not. (Moon, 1868: 11)

Moon, then, presented a few examples of Murray’s so-called errors, adding his own corrections, and ending the section with: ‘This is very simple; but it is a matter that has been quite overlooked by Lindley Murray ... Lindley Murray’s practice, however, is not uniform’ (Moon, 1868: 11–12). Eager to be comprehensive in his adverse treatment of Murray, Moon continues ten pages further down: ‘Having considered some of Lindley Murray’s errors in the use of verbs, adverbs, and adjectives; we will now consider some of his errors in the use of pronouns’ (1868: 21–2). He further commented on Murray’s improper use of the indefinite article *a/an* (just like Brown before him), and finally discussed ‘Murray’s errors in the use of conjunctions’ (Moon, 1868: 34–5). Searching the HUGE database yielded 17 references to Murray in the eight entries from Moon, a relatively small number when compared to the 91 references to Murray which I counted in the entire book – hardly surprising in view of the fact that a critical approach to this grammarian forms the main topic of the book.

Other usage guides in the HUGE database are the various editions of Fowler’s *Modern English Usage*, first published in 1926, long after Murray’s grammars had disappeared from people’s radars. A second edition came out in 1965, edited by Sir Ernest Gowers, and a third in 1996, by R. W. Burchfield. The fourth edition, by Jeremy Butterfield (2015), came out too late to be included in the database (see Straaijer, 2018). HUGE also

includes the *Pocket Fowler's Modern English Usage* (1999). Any critical remarks in the different versions of Fowler's work, therefore, cannot have been intended to further the original author's or the later revisers' own interests at the cost of Murray's reputation. Searching for Murray's name in these books, however, only produced two hits, i.e. in Burchfield's edition (1996).<sup>4</sup> The first one occurs in the entry on double negatives (Burchfield, 1996: 226–7), where Burchfield writes that in present-day English in some cases 'closely placed self-cancelling negatives are eminently acceptable', whereas 18<sup>th</sup>-century grammarians, including Lindley Murray, condemned the use of double negation: 'Two negatives, in English, destroy one another, or are equivalent to an affirmative' Murray wrote (1795: 121) – in effect reproducing Lowth's words here (1763: 139–40) (Tieken–Boon van Ostade, 2011: 12). The second reference to Murray is found in the entry headed 'perfect' (Burchfield, 1996: 585). The entry discusses the unacceptability of ungradable modifying intensifiers like *perfect* or *absolute* with *very*, and it adds that though eighteenth-century grammarians like Murray would have agreed with this, applying such a rule today would be considered 'mere pedantry'.

The usage guide in the HUGE database that pays least attention to Murray is Crystal's *Who Cares about English Usage?* (1984). The only reference found occurs in the section called 'Is this something up with which we must put?' (Crystal, 1984: 58–63), which deals with the question of the acceptability of preposition stranding, a much debated issue in prescriptive writings. Having referred to Dryden, who is often associated with the origin of this contested feature, Crystal continues:

It wasn't long before the issue caught the attention of other grammarians. In particular, it impressed Lindley Murray, who was the author of a grammar book used in British schools in the late eighteenth century. He put a recommendation about the matter into his rules of grammar, and other writers followed his lead. Generation after generation of schoolchildren were taught the rule, and it became part of the linguistic state of mind of most educated adults. (1984: 59)

Phrased like this, the passage seems to suggest that the origin of the stricture against preposition stranding lay with Murray. Since 1984, however, when Crystal's book was published, considerable research has been done on the subject, particularly

by Nuria Yáñez–Bouza, who has shown that the issue occupied many 18<sup>th</sup>-century grammarians well before Murray entered the scene, or even Lowth, from whom Murray copied this stricture as well (Yáñez–Bouza, 2008; see also Tieken–Boon van Ostade, 2011: 115–16). All the same, it is interesting to see that it was Murray's name which appears to have stuck here; no doubt, this was due to his reputation, which, as the references in the HUGE database have shown, lingered on well beyond his status as an eminent grammarian had come to an end.

#### 4. 'Alas! poor Lindley Murray!'

As mentioned above, Crystal (2018) found that Lindley Murray was the most frequently cited grammarian in *Punch* magazine, in the issues published between 1841 and 1901. But Murray, or his grammar, was not satirised in *Punch* alone: there is, for instance, a cartoon from 1884 – when there were presidential elections in America – which appeared in the American political magazine *Harper's Weekly*.<sup>5</sup> The accompanying caption, 'Alas! poor Lindley Murray!', is a reference to Hamlet's 'Alas! poor Yorick!', and the image shows two men, one of them representing senator John Logan, vice-presidential candidate, who had a reputation for poor grammar, and the other the presidential candidate, James Blaine, known for his critical attitude to the British government. Logan is addressed by Blaine, who says: 'By jingo [Blaine's nickname], I cannot do it! Take this [a dagger], Logan; it comes natural [naturally] to you.' In the background we see 'The English', represented by the Big Ben. *Harper's Weekly* published various jokes and anecdotes featuring Murray and his grammar, an example of which may be quoted in full here:

In some English town – the exact location of which the report does not state – a company of Spiritualists met one evening to hold communications with unseen worlds. A gentleman was asked if he should like to call a spirit. 'I should,' the gentleman replied. 'Whose?' asked the medium. 'Lindley Murray's'. Lindley Murray's ghost appeared erect right through the table. The gentleman shuddered. All trembled. The medium was visibly affected. 'Are you the spirit of Lindley Murray?' asked the gentleman, astonished at his own courage in addressing a visitant of the lower world. 'Yes, I am!' boldly responded Lindley Murray's ghost. Poor Lindley Murray! (anon., 1866: 427)

Satire is usually resorted to in order to show that someone's popularity is a thing of the past, and

this is reflected no less in the critical treatment Murray received from writers like Brown and Moon, who wanted to secure a piece of the popular grammar pie for themselves as well. But so is parody: we find parodies of Murray's grammar from the 1840s onwards, such as *The Comic English Grammar* (1840) attributed to Percival Leigh (1813–1889) (Noordegraaf, 1996), *The Pictorial Grammar* (Crowquill, 1842; see Reibel, 1996) and *The Comic Lindley Murray; or, The Grammar of Grammars* (anon., 1871). The appendix to Crystal (2018) lists items from *Punch* called 'Law and Lindley Murray' (1854), 'Londonderry and Lindley Murray' (1854), 'Ladies' Maids and Lindley Murray' (1859), and 'A "Rider" and Foot-note to Lindley Murray' (1894) (for which, see also Fens-de Zeeuw, 2011: 171–2). These represent a series of brief columns on what were referred to as 'grammatical defects' (anon., 1859: 66) that were encountered in English society at the time, all bearing variations upon the title '[...] and Lindley Murray'. According to Noordegraaf (1996: 114), Percival Leigh 'worked for *Punch* from 1841 until his death' in 1889, so it is not unlikely that he was the author of at least some of these columns.

## 5. Conclusion

Compared to *Punch* or *Harper's Weekly*, Murray's scant presence in the HUGE database, while unexpected, is significant. Though Lowth was not so much the object of grammatical criticism, attention paid to him in the usage guides included in the database may be called more substantial. Not only did it span a longer period of time – covering more usage guides that mention him than in Murray's case – a larger variety of topics was dealt with in which Lowth's authority was invoked rather than criticised, as had happened in the case of the treatment of Murray by Brown (1851) and Moon (1868). These two writers had something to gain by aiming to kill Murray's reputation, even though the grammar's popularity was no longer at its height at the time. Lowth, too, was treated critically towards the end of the life-span of his popularity: as Tiekē–Boon van Ostade (2014) has shown, there was one grammar, called *The Grammatical Art Improved* and published in the same year as Murray's grammar (1795), whose author, Richard Postlethwaite, went out of his way to show that he could do a better job than Lowth. (The grammar, however, was never reprinted.) But unlike Murray, Lowth was never satirised or parodied. He was merely plagiarised,

and by Murray in particular, who drew on Lowth as one of his main sources (Vorlat, 1959). Murray's problem, if it can be called that, was that he was far more conspicuous to the public than Lowth, whose 34,000 copies of his grammar towards the end of his life (Tiekē–Boon van Ostade, 2011: 66), enormous though this figure may have seemed at the time, pale to insignificance in comparison with Murray's two million or so copies produced worldwide. Lowth and Murray may both have been icons of prescriptivism, which is how their presence in the HUGE database can be explained, but their different treatment in the 19<sup>th</sup>-century press suggests the different status they eventually obtained in the eyes of the public: the one as a grammarian who, as Tiekē–Boon van Ostade (2011) demonstrates, is wrongly blamed today for introducing prescriptive rules like the split infinitive, and the other as a symbol of all things prescriptive. As Crystal (2018) concludes, during the second half of the 19<sup>th</sup> century, Murray was "'the name" for all matters of usage, regardless of whether the point was grammatical or not'.

## Notes

- 1 I am grateful to Ingrid Tiekē–Boon van Ostade for her contribution to this paper.
- 2 The biographical account in this paragraph is based on my study of Murray and his grammar (Fens-de Zeeuw, 2011).
- 3 See Straaijer (2018), who classifies the usage guides from this period as 'polemical' in their approach.
- 4 An additional hit proved to be an example sentence, as in the case of Batko (2004) mentioned above, while another refers to a quotation from K. M. Elisabeth Murray's biography of the editor of the Oxford English Dictionary, James Murray.
- 5 See <<http://www.harpweek.com/09Cartoon/BrowseByDateCartoon.asp?Month=August&Date=2>> (Accessed November 11, 2016).

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