



Grammar and their diffusion reflects wide regional differences within Europe in the speed with which Humanist Latin was incorporated into the Latin taught in schools. This selection of grammars reflects a wide range of attitudes to the language of law, learning and religion, and how it varies chronologically and regionally throughout Europe.



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INCUNABULA: THE PRINTING REVOLUTION IN EUROPE, 1455-1500

Units 29, 30 & 40: Grammar

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Units 29, 30 & 40: *Grammar*

Introduction and selection: Dr Kristian Jensen (Head of Incunabula, the British Library)

15th-Century Grammars

The selection of grammars printed in the 15th century consists mainly of Latin grammars; some grammars of classical Greek and a few vernacular grammars are also included. This reflects the important position of the Latin language for the literate and book-owning groups of society. In the Middle Ages, Latin was the international language of secular and ecclesiastical administration, of diplomacy, of liturgy, and of the educational institutions where students were prepared for positions in these spheres. Despite fundamental changes, humanist Latin represents a development of both the forms and functions of medieval Latin. In the 15th century, Latin remained the language of the educated and, if not of the ruling, at least of the governing classes. The teaching of Latin was therefore of great importance.

The new Latin of the humanists began to emerge in the late 14th century in Italy among men in the highest ranks of ecclesiastical or civil administration. In the 14th and 15th centuries, “studia humanitatis” was a name newly recovered from antiquity for a well-established activity — teaching Latin grammar, Latin poetry and Latin rhetoric. The “Studia humanitatis” constituted a didactic programme which aimed at changing how schoolchildren were taught to read, write and speak Latin. Active use of Latin was to imitate closely the Latin written by authors from ancient Roman times. By the end of the 15th century, humanist Latin as it was taught in Italy, had become the unquestioned aim for western European schools. Although the linguistic ideals first formulated in Italy were realised with greater or lesser success by individual schoolmasters and by individual writers, the effects are easily discernible in all Western European countries. The Latin language of the late 15th century is instantly recognisable as being different from late medieval Latin, not only as it was used by the famous authors of humanist literature, but also as used by authors whose literary achievements were modest.

In the grammar books, which were available in print in the 15th century, we see the reflection of the complex struggle of a society in the process of changing its language in profound ways. It is not a question of an easy rectilinear change. Works representing many

different approaches to language were available at the same time. Grammars from the late antique period co-existed with late medieval grammars. Grammars written by contemporary authors were influenced in different degrees by humanist thought on language and often reflected significantly differing regional traditions. Some works, normative grammars, aimed to give rules for practical use; others were engaged with questions concerning the nature of language as such, philosophical grammars. Although the low survival rate of elementary grammatical work has made it impossible to obtain reproductions of all the desired items, the aim of this collection of microfiches is to indicate the whole range of books used for teaching or understanding grammar.

Highlights of *Grammar*

- Classical grammarians and their medieval adaptations: Priscian’s “Institutiones”, and “Regula: Dominus quae pars”, Donatus’s “Ars Maior” and the “Ianua”
- Medieval grammars: Alexander de Villa Dei’s “Doctrinale” and the numerous commentators on the text
- Philosophical grammars: Thomas of Erfurt’s “De modis significandi”
- Humanist grammars: Perottus’s “Rudimenta grammatices”, the most successful of modern grammars, and Aldus Manutius’s “Institutiones grammaticae”
- Classical works on metrics such as the works of Terentianus Maurus and humanist works such as Antonius Mancinellus’s “Versilogus”
- Greek grammars: Constantinus Lascaris’s “Erotemata”, the first book printed entirely in Greek, and the “Grammatica introductiva” by Theodorus Gaza, the most successful of humanist grammars of Greek

Unit 29: 261 fiche, 128 titles

Unit 30: 259 fiche, 71 titles

Unit 40: c. 90 titles

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