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Migrant Voices in Multilingual London, 1560–1600

John Gallagher ⓘD

University of Leeds, Leeds, UK
Email: j.gallagher1@leeds.ac.uk

Abstract

Early modern London was multilingual, and early modern urban life was shaped by linguistic diversity. This article draws on the multilingual archives of Elizabethan London's 'stranger churches' – Protestant congregations which catered to the needs of French-, Dutch- and Italian-speaking migrants (among others) – to explore how linguistic diversity shaped social relations. These sources offer insights into the everyday multilingualism of the early modern city. They demonstrate London's migrant communities' intense interest in what people said and why, and show how different languages and their speakers interacted on the streets and in the spaces of later sixteenth-century London. By charting how linguistic diversity was part of the lives of ordinary Londoners in this period, including close examination of incidents of multilingual insult, slander, and conflict, this article argues that the civic and religious authorities relied on the stranger churches' abilities to carry out surveillance of speech in languages other than English, and that urban social relations and urban spaces were shaped by multilingualism. It ends by arguing that linguistic diversity played an essential but understudied role in the social history of early modern cities.

Keywords: multilingualism; migration; London; strangers; orality; insult; scandal; polyglossia; translation; urban history

Introduction

In London, in October 1571, Alixe le Roy told a story about an argument with her daughter-in-law, Philipine Seneschal. Alixe recounted how, in the middle of the street and in the middle of the day, Philipine had called her a murderer and a thief. Philipine believed that Alixe had had her son imprisoned, and so she took her revenge by telling her mother-in-law that she would shame her, crying out in the street that she should hang. Lots of their neighbours had heard the argument, among them a Flemish woman named Franchoise Sero and an

Englishwoman called Alice Jones ('Aelles Joanes' in the source's spelling). Both women agreed that they remembered the argument well – they had heard Philipine cry 'hang, hang', along with the other insults, and they said that the quarrel had gone on for a long time. They also recalled that the insults thrown by Philipine at her mother-in-law were delivered in a mixture of French and English.[1] This was a multilingual argument in a multilingual city.

Alixe le Roy and Philipine Seneschal were both members of London's community of 'strangers', one of the terms by which migrants to early modern England were known.[2] Both Protestants, it is likely that they were among the many French-speakers who had come to England to flee the violence and religious persecution of the French Wars of Religion, which rumbled on between 1562 and 1598. In the same period, London – and England – became home to significant numbers of Dutch- and Flemish-speaking Protestants who fled the havoc and persecution of the Eighty Years War in the Low Countries, as well as smaller numbers of Italian, Spanish and other Protestant migrants who feared the threat of the inquisitions in their home countries.[3] These strangers arrived in a city which had long been multilingual.[4] In London, the different varieties of English spoken by migrants from other parts of the realm mingled with the languages of other migrant groups, from Irish and Welsh to the languages of indigenous Americans and Africans, as the world beyond Europe made its presence more felt in England.[5] This was a city which ran on talk, where an only partially literate population understood that words had the power to make or break reputations and relationships.[6] The Elizabethan period represents a migration moment in London's history, a time when a significant number of migrants were arriving in a relatively short period of time. And it is a moment for

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[1] Anne M. Oakley, *Actes du Consistoire de l'Eglise Française de Threadneedle Street, Londres*, ii: *1571–1577* (1969): this account of Alixe and Philipine's case draws on pages 24–5, 27, 29–30. In this article, I have generally chosen to use the spellings used in the sources rather than attempting to standardise them.

[2] I use 'stranger' and the more modern term 'migrant' interchangeably in this article, in part because these are broader terms which make no assumptions about whether an individual is (for instance) a refugee, exile, a more temporary visitor or an 'economic migrant'. A superb guide to early modern English vocabulary around migration is Nandini Das, João Vicente Melo, Haig Z. Smith and Lauren Working (eds.), *Keywords of Identity, Race, and Human Mobility in Early Modern England* (Amsterdam, 2021).

[3] Key works on these migrations include Andrew Pettegree, *Foreign Protestant Communities in Sixteenth-Century London* (Oxford, 1986); Laura Hunt Yungblut, *Strangers settled here amongst us: Policies, Perceptions and the Presence of Aliens in Elizabethan England* (New York, 1996); Nigel Goose and Lien Luu (eds.), *Immigrants in Tudor and Early Stuart England* (Eastbourne, 2005); Ole Peter Grell, *Dutch Calvinists in Early Stuart London: The Dutch Church at Austin Friars 1603–1642* (Leiden, 1989); Robin D. Gwynn, *Huguenot Heritage: The History and Contribution of the Huguenots in Britain* (1985).

[4] Ardis Butterfield, *The Familiar Enemy: Chaucer, Language, and Nation in the Hundred Years War* (Oxford, 2009), 201–233; Jonathan Hsy, *Trading Tongues: Merchants, Multilingualism, and Medieval Literature* (Columbus, OH, 2013), 1–26.

[5] Laura Wright, 'Speaking and Listening in Early Modern London', in *The City and the Senses: Urban Culture since 1500*, ed. Jill Steward and Alexander Cowan (Abingdon, 2007), 61–4; Coll Thrush, *Indigenous London: Native Travelers at the Heart of Empire* (New Haven, 2016); Imtiaz Habib, *Black Lives in the English Archives, 1500–1677: Imprints of the Invisible* (New York, 2008).

[6] Laura Gowing, *Domestic Dangers: Women, Words and Sex in Early Modern London* (Oxford, 1998).

which we have substantial multilingual archival evidence – rich records in French, in Dutch, and in Italian, as well as in English – made by members of these stranger communities and which attest not just to their presence and their activities in the city, but to their voices and words.

The importance of the spoken word to these strangers and the communities in which they lived should not be underestimated. Because some members of the stranger churches were extraordinarily well educated and had significant cultural impact, it is easy to lose sight of something highlighted by the first minister of the French church in 1561, when he wrote that 'this church is small, and consists for the most part of illiterate people'.[7] That many members of the congregations were deeply religious does not mean that they were confidently literate – many were reliant on sermons and oral catechising to learn the principles of their faith. These were largely communities of artisans, not scholars, even though those who kept their records, represented the community to the English, or made their literary or intellectual mark on English society were often highly literate and multilingual.[8] Literacy was not a precondition for being multilingual: early modern people could be confident speakers of multiple languages without being able to read a word in any of them. The stranger churches' records allow us to listen in on speech and oral culture, and to think about the meanings and practices of multilingualism for a wide social range of people, many of whom were either partly or not at all literate. The 'speechscape' of early modern London was multilingual, and people's experiences of the city were shaped by the languages they used and heard, by words they understood and words they did not.[9]

This article uses the consistory records of London's French, Dutch and Italian churches in the latter half of the sixteenth century to show how social relations in early modern London were shaped by the city's multilingualism. Whereas the rich scholarship on orality in early modern England has generally focused on speech in English, I make the case here that London's oral culture was multilingual, and that attending to the city's diversity of languages and how they interacted offers new perspectives on community, conflict and urban space.[10] By charting sixteenth-century London's everyday multilingualism, this article first argues that language shaped ideas of community and belonging in the Elizabethan city. It then makes the case that the civic

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[7] 'ceste eglise est petite, & consiste la plus part de gens non lettrez': Nicolas des Gallars, *Forme de police ecclésiastique, instituée à Londres en l'Eglise des François* (n.p., 1561), B3r.

[8] The essential account of Dutch in early modern England is Christopher Joby, *The Dutch Language in Britain (1550–1702): A Social History of the Use of Dutch in Early Modern Britain* (Leiden, 2015). See also A. D. M. van de Haar, 'The Linguistic Coping Strategies of Three Netherlanders in England: Jan van der Noot, Lucas d'Heere, and Johannes Radermacher', *Early Modern Low Countries*, 5 (2021), 192–215.

[9] On 'speechscapes' in the early modern city, see John Gallagher, *Learning Languages in Early Modern England* (Oxford, 2019), 171–2; *idem*, 'Language-Learning, Orality, and Multilingualism in Early Modern Anglophone Narratives of Mediterranean Captivity', *Renaissance Studies*, 33 (2019), 647.

[10] The most comprehensive work on English oralities in this period remains Adam Fox, *Oral and Literate Culture in England 1500–1700* (Oxford, 2000); see also Adam Fox and Daniel Woolf (eds.), *The Spoken Word: Oral Culture in Britain 1500–1850* (Manchester, 2002).

and religious authorities relied on the stranger churches' abilities to carry out surveillance of speech in languages other than English, and that the city's spaces were shaped by the languages its people spoke. It ends by arguing that multilingualism's role in shaping early modern urban life demands historians' closer attention, not only in London but in cities throughout the early modern world. The early modern city was not just made up of buildings and people – it was shaped by words and voices which themselves created urban spaces and urban society.

Language and belonging

Alixe and Philipine were both members of London's French church, located on Threadneedle Street in the east of the city. Edward VI had given permission for the foundation of a church for strangers in 1550, and the period after Elizabeth I came to the throne in 1558 saw the emergence of three distinct stranger churches in London: the French church in the chapel of St Anthony on Threadneedle Street, the Dutch church at Austin Friars and the Italian church whose congregation worshipped in Mercers' Hall on Cheapside. These communities followed the more austere Calvinist strand of Protestantism, rather than the faith and practices of the church of England, and they catered to the city's growing numbers of strangers, made up of those fleeing persecution, those who had been resident in London since earlier in the century, and those who came to England primarily to practise their trade.[11] The stranger churches were, at least to some degree, communities bounded by language. Their services were held and their records kept in the main language of each church, though Latin remained as a language of study and communication: some Latin was used interchangeably with Dutch in the records of the Dutch church in the early 1560s and remained a medium of written and oral communication between the different stranger churches and with the English religious authorities.[12] When the three stranger churches met in a body known as the 'coetus', the language they used for their records was French.[13] The stranger churches played host to Latin language lessons as well as theology classes and sermons in the language, counted language teachers among their members and hosted multilingual performances, as in November 1560, when the ministers and elders of the French and Dutch churches met at Austin Friars to hear a sentence of excommunication pronounced in Dutch and probably in French, followed by the Bishop of London's exhortation in English from the pulpit.[14]

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[11] Pettegree, *Foreign Protestant Communities*; Lien Bich Luu, *Immigrants and the Industries of London, 1500–1700* (Abingdon, 2005); Steve Rappaport, *Worlds Within Worlds: Structures of Life in Sixteenth-Century London* (Cambridge, 1989), 104–5.

[12] A. A. van Schelven (ed.), *Kerkeraads-Protocollen der Nederduitsche Vluchtelingen-Kerk te Londen 1560–1568* (Amsterdam, 1921); Joby, *Dutch Language in Britain*, 93.

[13] The language of coetus records is French from at least 1575 onwards, but may first have been Latin: O. Boersma and A. J. Jelsma, *Unity in Multiformity: The Minutes of the Coetus of London, 1575 and the Consistory Minutes of the Italian Church of London, 1570–91* (1997), 19.

[14] Elsie Johnston (ed.), *Actes du Consistoire de l'Eglise Française de Threadneedle Street, Londres*, I: *1560–1565* (1937), 16.

But questions of language remained contentious, particularly when it came to baptism and marriage. In 1573, the deacons of the Dutch church had ruled that it was improper for English people with no knowledge of Dutch to act as godparents for children baptised in the church, while a colloquy of England's French churches in 1587 warned 'those of the French language who do not understand English at all' not to serve as godparents to an English child, and not to ask English people who did not understand French to serve as godparents to their own children.[15] When the Flemish goldsmith Martin van de Zande asked the Italian church, of which he was a member, if he might present his son to be baptised in the Dutch church, since the godparents did not understand Italian, his request was approved.[16] Similar requests occur around weddings: there are a number of requests to the Dutch church consistory like that made by Olivier Brassen, who asked for permission to be married in an English church 'since his bride was an Englishwoman and understood no Dutch'.[17] An agreement drawn up in French and Dutch in 1581 stated that the French church would take in any new arrivals who spoke 'the French or Walloon language', while the Dutch church would welcome those 'of the High Dutch [meaning German], Low Dutch, or Flemish language'.[18] These communities organised and defined themselves on broad linguistic lines, accepting speakers of a variety of different but related languages in a way that suggests that the ability to communicate with each other was the essential principle at work. These cases also show that social and romantic relationships between strangers and the English were relatively normal, even if the English did not speak the strangers' languages, which suggests that the new arrivals were often quick to forge new relationships in the language of their host nation.

So these were communities in which language and belonging were linked, but they still remained linguistically diverse – even to refer to the Dutch or French Churches as Dutch- or French-speaking, for instance, elides the diversity of languages and varieties spoken by their members. Many individuals would have been partially or entirely bilingual in Dutch and French, while the varieties of each language spoken by different members with different backgrounds would have been noticeable (and indeed are, in some cases, in the churches' archives).[19] At one point the French church auditioned a new Flemish preacher, only to turn him away because 'He doesn't have the proper

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[15] A. J. Jelsma and O. Boersma (eds.), *Acta van het Consistorie van de Nederlandse Gemeente te Londen 1569–1585* ('s-Gravenhage, 1993), 313; Adrian Charles Chamier (ed.), *Les Actes des Colloques des Eglises Françaises et des Synodes des Eglises Etrangères refugiées en Angleterre 1581–1654* (Lymington, 1890), 12. On the dispute over godparents which especially divided the Dutch church, see Silke Muylaert, *Shaping the Stranger Churches: Migrants in England and the Troubles in the Netherlands, 1547–1585* (Leiden, 2021), 65–7; Pettegree, *Foreign Protestant Communities*, 243–7.

[16] Boersma and Jelsma, *Unity in Multiformity*, 146.

[17] 'dewijle zijn bruut een Ynghelsche was ende gheen Duytsch en verstondt': Jelsma andBoersma, *Acta*, 64.

[18] 'du Language francoise, ou Wallon'/'van fransche ofte walsche spraeke'; 'de Langage allemande, bas alleman ou flamen'/'vande hooghduytsche, Nederduytsche, ofte vlaemsche Sprake': London Metropolitan Archives, CLC/180/MS07410, 12–13.

[19] Joby, *Dutch Language in Britain*, 14–16 and *passim*; *idem*, 'French in Early Modern Norwich', *Journal of French Language Studies*, 27 (2017), 431–51.

tongue for French at all.'[20] That he spoke French well enough to deliver a sermon in it was immaterial when it was not the right kind of French. In 1572, the Genovese merchant and elder of the Italian church Antonio Giustiniani explained to the consistory of the French church how the Italian congregation contained a number of Spanish people who understood their language; by 1598, when the Italian church could not find an Italian-speaking minister to serve them, their members were advised to join either the Dutch or the French church, depending on which language was more familiar to them.[21] While each stranger church was linguistically diverse, the ideal of a shared language shaped them as communities. In making this argument, I differ from Charles Littleton, who argues that in London's sixteenth-century French church, 'the consistory was in fact not concerned with creating a Francophone national or linguistic identity among its members', but that '[i]t was above all concerned with defining the boundaries of a supranational godly community of the elect'. Littleton argues that '[t]he commonality of all these members [of the French church] was not ethnicity or even a common first language, but their Protestantism and devotion to its cause throughout Europe'. While Littleton is correct to emphasise the importance of theology and ecclesiastical discipline in the creation of community, this reading of the churches' approach to language and belonging shows that these were multilingual communities in which the idea of a common language nonetheless served practical and symbolic purposes.[22]

The stranger churches were not insulated from English. They had English members and were frequented by English-speakers who were curious about their ways of worshipping or simply seeking to burnish their language skills.[23] The consistories regularly questioned English-speakers, and we can assume that in at least some of these cases, English-language testimony has been silently translated into the language of their records. The scribes who kept their records often transcribed English place names and terms phonetically, so that we find the Dutch recording an incident in 'een eylhuyss' in 'Holeway' (an alehouse in Holloway) and the French noting events in 'ungne aele houys in Temstrytt' (an alehouse in Thames Street).[24] The accounts of the Dutch church in the early seventeenth century show the language changing to English where they need an entry to be read and signed by an English craftsman, while some bills that were presented to the church for payment were then annotated in Dutch.[25] The archives often contain English where the words themselves matter, especially in situations of insult or conflict, such as when Bernard Lure and Guillaum Nourry complained that Gabriel Heymon's wife had called their wives 'pocking houre'. When Pieter de Bert reported having heard Englishmen

[20] 'Il na point la lange propre pour le francois': Johnston, *Actes 1560–1565*, 69.

[21] Oakley, *Actes 1571–1577*, 91; Boersma and Jelsma, *Unity in Multiformity*, 110. On London's Spanish Protestant community, see Paul J. Hauben, 'A Spanish Calvinist church in Elizabethan London, 1559–65', *Church History*, 34 (1965), 50–6.

[22] Charles Littleton, 'Ecclesiastical Discipline in the French Church of London and the Creation of Community, 1560–1600', *Archiv für Reformationsgeschichte*, 92 (2001), 232–63.

[23] John Gallagher, *Learning Languages in Early Modern England* (Oxford, 2019), 3.

[24] Jelsma and Boersma, *Acta*, 667; Oakley, *Actes 1571–1577*, 155.

[25] London Metropolitan Archives, CLC/180/MS07402/07, item 22.

mocking a very drunk Jan the bookseller as 'Droncken Vlaminck', we are reminded that an English-speaker would not necessarily need to know Dutch to understand some terms of abuse.[26] When a dispute arose between some weavers who were members of the Dutch church and the Weavers' Company, the representatives sent by the consistory to discuss the problem reported back that their admonitions had been met with abuse: the act book of the consistory recorded that the weavers had said to them 'Goe your wayes knefs [knaves]'.[27]

If, for recently arrived migrants, a shared language could be an indicator of belonging to a stranger church, rejection of that shared language could indicate separation from the community. English was sometimes used in the consistory by strangers who wanted to signal their distance from or reject the authority of the stranger churches. In 1560, a schoolteacher named Gilles Berail said angrily that he did not wish to be subjected to the authority of the French church, since he already paid tax in his English parish, 'and that he understands English as well as French'.[28] When Denis de Restingam was questioned about why he had not attended the Lord's Supper for two years, he said that he had left the church after accusing the consistory of misusing funds that had been collected for the poor. De Restingam's questioners noted that he had said this to them and others, among other accusations, in English.[29] In 1572, Ollivier le Neveu was called in to be admonished for his words against certain women, and got into a heated exchange with the minister. Le Neveu wanted to speak, and tried to interrupt the minister, who told him to wait, to which le Neveu responded 'I don't know if I will wait, since you speak so evilly.' The minister told him to step outside for a moment, at which point le Neveu 'rising suddenly and leaving said, "god boye"'. With those parting words in English, he left and refused to return in spite of the minister's urging.[30] As time went on, English had other troubling implications for belonging: in 1580, one former member of the Dutch congregation wrote to their minister to say that he had lived in England so long that he had nearly lost his Dutch entirely.[31] In the seventeenth century, as the stranger churches' congregations dwindled and were increasingly made up of children and

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[26] Oakley, *Actes 1571–1577*, 22; Jelsma and Boersma, *Acta*, 212, 217. My assumption is that the insult was delivered in English as 'drunken Fleming', but it would have been mutually intelligible to speakers of either English or Dutch.

[27] Jelsma and Boersma, *Acta*, 213. On tensions relating to stranger weavers, see Luu, *Immigrants and the industries of London*, 204–7; on strangers and citizenship, see Rappaport, *Worlds Within Worlds*, 54–60.

[28] 'et quil entend aussy bien lenglois que le francois': Johnston, *Actes 1560–1565*, 20.

[29] The consistory noted that this had taken place 'when the search [la queste] was taking place in St Martin's, they being part of the search among others', suggesting that the French Church representatives were accompanying English officials in their work. Johnston, *Actes 1560–1565*, 102; Littleton, 'Ecclesiastical Discipline', 257.

[30] 'Luy voulant parler et interrompre le propos. Le ministre luy dit attendes un peu et laisses oy achever. Luy respondit je ne scay si jattendray car vous parles trop sinistrement. Le ministre luy en dit sortes donc un peu dehors, luy se levant subitement et sortant dit, god boye. Le ministre luy dit ne vous en alles pas du tout, mais il narresta point': Oakley, *Actes 1571–1577*, 74.

[31] Jan Hendrick Hessels (ed.), *Epistulae et Tractatus Ecclesiae cum Reformationis tum Ecclesiae Londino-Batavae Historiam Illustrantes: Ecclesiae Londino-Batavae Archivum,* II.2 (Cambridge, 1889), 659.

grandchildren of first-generation migrants, their linguistic role shifted to one of defence and preservation of their shared language in the face of English.[32]

Policing strangers' speech

The ruling body of each stranger church was called the consistory, and the role of this all-male body was to oversee the government of the church and the behaviour of its members. Each church elected elders and deacons, each responsible for one of twelve *quartiers* or *wijken* – meaning districts – of the city.[33] In his 1561 text on the organisation of London's French church, the minister Nicolas des Gallars wrote that it was important that the elders should come from different parts of the city, 'in order to have eyes everywhere'.[34] In the French church, new elders swore an oath promising that:

> I will keep an eye on all those who are members of the church, and especially on those who are committed unto my charge ... I will prevent scandals, procure the peace and unity of the whole church in general, and of everyone in particular ... I promise to keep and maintain ... the honour and profit of this Kingdom.

They further swore to inform the Bishop of London of anyone who might seek to trouble the peace and unity of England.[35] Like London's livery companies, the stranger churches took a role in policing their members' speech, working to keep their disputes out of the city's courts and to maintain harmony among their congregations and between strangers and their neighbours.[36] This fits with the pattern outlined by Raingard Esser, who argues that urban authorities and the leaderships of England's stranger churches practised 'shared authority' which devolved some of the responsibility for the control of crime and illicit activity onto stranger communities' leaders.[37] Consistory records are complex

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[32] Grell, *Dutch Calvinists in Early Stuart London*, 8; Joby, *Dutch Language in Britain*, 97–8, 127.

[33] On the London stranger church consistories and social discipline, see Pettegree, *Foreign Protestant Communities*, 182–214; Susan Broomhall, 'Authority in the French Church in Sixteenth-Century London', in *Authority, Gender and Emotions in Late Medieval and Early Modern England*, ed. Susan Broomhall (2015), 131–50; Littleton, 'Ecclesiastical Discipline'. On consistory records, see Andrew Spicer, 'The Consistory Records of Reformed Congregations and the Exile Churches', *Proceedings of the Huguenot Society*, 28 (2007), 640–63.

[34] 'àfin d'avoir l'oeil par tout': des Gallars, *Forme de police*, B4r.

[35] '[J']auray l'oeil sur tous ceux qui sont du troupeau de ceste Eglise: & principallement de ceux qui me seront commis & baillez en charge ... [J'] empecheray les scandales, procureray la paix & union de toute l'Eglise en general, & d'un chacun en particulier ... Tiercement je promets de garder & maintenir en tant qu'en moy sera, l'honneur & le profit de ce Royaume': des Gallars, *Forme de police*, C6v–C7v.

[36] Jennifer Bishop, 'Speech and Sociability: The Regulation of Language in the Livery Companies of Early Modern London', in *Cities and Solidarities: Urban Communities in Pre-Modern Europe*, ed. Justin Colson and Arie van Steensel (2017), 208–24.

[37] Raingard Esser, '"They obey all magistrates and all good lawes ... and we thinke our cittie happie to enjoy them": Migrants and Urban Stability in Early Modern English Towns', *Urban History*, 34 (2007), 64–75.

sources: created by a disciplinary body, they record conflict more reliably than peaceful coexistence, and represent the perspectives of elders whose status in the community – as well as their level of education – was likely to be higher than that of the average member.[38] But at the same time, they offer rare opportunities to eavesdrop not just on the spoken word in these communities, but also on the voices of members across the spectrums of social status and literacy.

The stranger-church consistories sought to uphold their oaths through the rigorous policing of their members' speech. When the French church admonished Martin Fontaine's wife for her tendency to swear, she admitted that she had insulted one of her accusers but that beyond sometimes saying 'by my faith' she was not guilty of any swearing.[39] Admonition was one of the means of disciplining members available to the consistories; they could also demand that an offender do penance either before the consistory or before the whole congregation, depending on the nature of their crime, or bar them from participation in the eucharist. As part of a long investigation into the conduct of the silk-worker Gasparo de'Gatti, the Italian consistory found that 'the said Gasparo argues almost every day with his wife and with others of his household and, what is worse, ordinarily does nothing but blaspheme'.[40] The policing of women's speech by the consistories is evident throughout their records, and their concerns over women's tongues seem sometimes equal to their condemnation of men's more serious crimes, as in the case of Pierre Fouré, who was admonished for beating his wife while drunk; in the same breath, the consistory admonished his wife 'for not knowing how to contain her tongue against her husband'.[41]

In order to police the speech of their congregations rigorously, the consistories needed to have ears in many places. When the Dutch elders took an interest in the parentage of Sandryne Srijcken's child, they gathered evidence 'from the mouth of a woman who came from overseas' and 'from the mouth of an Englishman', while also taking the testimony of a woman who had been present during Sandryne's labour, who had joined the midwife in urging her to say the name of the child's father.[42] They sought oral information of this kind because it was key to understanding ungodly and scandalous behaviour among members of their congregations. But at the same time, the consistories sought to control and quell rumours which spread within and beyond their communities. In early modern societies, rumour was thought of as an almost irrepressible force – it was characterised as 'running' between speakers and hearers, and its spread was cause for concern among authorities throughout

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early modern Europe.[43] Rumours could bring scandal on the congregation, so the consistories commonly asked members to account for what was being said about them, as when Tanneken de la Noy answered the consistory's queries by admitting 'that evil rumours had followed her, which were untrue, and that she was ready to answer for herself against her accusers, if they would appear'. In de la Noy's case, the accusation was that she had become involved with a young man during her husband's absence from London, and that they had been caught together by the local constables.[44] While the interest in rumour is something we see elsewhere in early modern Europe, it was especially important in these mobile communities of migrants, many of whom had been uprooted from their former lives and found themselves in England. The consistories expended significant effort in trying to find out if they were being told the truth about people's pasts, regularly investigating whether those who claimed never to have been married were telling the truth, or if they had spouses and families beyond the seas.[45] Strangers were pursued by rumours and stories and the economy of reputation and honour stretched beyond London's walls and England's borders.

Consistories were careful to monitor illicit speech in part because they were targeted by it. Their records are rich in moments when the members of the stranger churches attacked their elders and deacons – comparing them to the Spanish inquisition,[46] accusing them of treating congregants worse than 'heathens and Turks',[47] and signalling their displeasure at the consistory's decisions by yelling 'Pope, Pope', in order to accuse them of papistical tyranny.[48] Some strangers were aggressive in their denunciation of the churches and their refusal to live under their rule, like Barbara Michiels, who told the deacons 'I don't want to come to the church or to the consistory, since there is no justice for the poor there',[49] or the woman named Lijsken who said 'I'd rather live with a devil than with people like those from the church.'[50] They were especially concerned with incidents where grumblings against the consistory came to the ears of those outside the community, such as when Maerten

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[43] Jeanice Brooks, 'Gossiping to Music in Sixteenth-Century France', *Renaissance Studies*, 30 (2016), 17–18.

[44] 'datter quade geruchtten achter haer gaen dewelke onwarachtich sijn, ende sij berreyt was haer te verantworden teghen haere beclaghers, so ie tevoorschijne quamen': Jelsma and Boersma, *Acta*, 288.

[45] Jesse Spohnholz, 'Instability and Insecurity: Dutch Women Refugees in Germany and England, 1550–1560', in *Exile and Religous Identity, 1500–1800*, ed. Jesse Spohnholz and Gary K. Waite (Abingdon, 2015), 111–25; Broomhall, 'Authority in the French Church'.

[46] Hans Stel told the Dutch consistory that 'Het gaet hier tewercke ghelijck mette Spaensche inquisitie': Jelsma and Boersma, *Acta*, 114.

[47] Loys Thiery complained to the Dutch consistory 'dat men dus tusschen heydenen ende Turcken niet en handelde': Jelsma and Boersma, *Acta*, 119.

[48] These were the words of Guillaume Cocq against the Dutch consistory: Jelsma and Boersma, *Acta*, 175.

[49] 'Ic en wil daeromme in de kercke ofte in de consistorie niet commen, want aldaer gheen recht voor den aermen en was': Jelsma and Boersma, *Acta*, 387.

[50] 'Ic hadde liever metten duvel te woonen dan met zulck volck van de kercke': Jelsma and Boersma, *Acta*, 389.

van Dale accused the Dutch minister of preaching false teachings 'not only among the Dutch but also among the English nation'.[51] The French church hauled Nicolas Wilpin before the consistory on multiple occasions because he 'will not stop spreading scandalous words against the consistory throughout the city'.[52] We get a sense of how these words might have slipped between the different communities in the account given to the Dutch consistory of Pieter Noppe's saying that the elders and deacons of the church were 'drunkards, whoremasters, and usurers'; Noppe's words were spoken in the crowded Three Horses in Mile End Green.[53]

The oath taken by the elders of the French church revealed a concern with scandal which is threaded through stranger church consistory records. In August 1571, the French consistory admonished a hatmaker named Piere de la Mare, also nicknamed Le Brave, accusing him of haunting taverns, and citing an incident in which he put a knife in a pot and sought to make others drink from it. De la Mare's drunken misbehaviour was bad enough, but the consistory was especially concerned because this was a cause for scandal among those who were not members of the church, and who said among themselves 'behold the people of the church, behold the Reformed people'.[54] The consistories of the stranger churches were painfully aware that their members' presence in England and their rights to worship in a way that differed from the English church were both conditional. Even before the congregations came under significant direct pressure from Archbishop Laud in the 1630s, they were frequently reminded by the English authorities of the precarity of their position and of the religious liberty they enjoyed.[55] As such, the stranger church consistories viewed with particular concern any scandals which threatened to draw the eye of the English community and the English authorities. In November 1569, the Dutch consistory admonished Hendrick Cnoop for his drunkenness and 'unchristian rudeness', which had redounded 'to the great scandal of the congregation and the English nation'.[56] The consistories needed to restrain their members from engaging in the disputes of the English church, as when Willem Fogghe informed the Dutch consistory in the summer of 1571 that there were many members of the same church 'who speak evilly and scandalously about the square cap which the English ministers wear', words which risked dragging an already precarious community into the ongoing controversy over ministers' garments, which was a source of much rancour among

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[51] 'niet alleen bij de Duitsche maer ooc bij de Inghelsche natie': Jelsma and Boersma, *Acta*, 249.

[52] 'ne cesse de semer par tout la ville parolles scandaleux contre le Consistoire': Johnston, *Actes 1560–1565*, 29.

[53] 'drunckards, hoererers ende woeckeraers': Jelsma and Boersma, *Acta*, 654.

[54] 'Dont les scandal en sont suruenu aux aultres qui ne sont de leglise en dissant voilla les gens de leglise voila les gens Reformez': Johnston, *Actes 1560–1565*, 52.

[55] Grell, *Dutch Calvinists in Early Stuart London*, 224–48.

[56] 'Verscheen Hendrick Cnoop. Wiert hem vertoocht hoe dat hij hier tevooren eens vermaendt was gheweest bij der consistorie van zeker dronckenscap ende onchristelicke insolentien bij hem begaen ende nu nieuwelinghe wederomme ververscht, ter grooter scandale van de ghemeinte ende de Ynghelsche natie': Jelsma and Boersma, *Acta*, 16.

English Protestants.[57] Even more concerning were those moments when internal church disputes spilled over into the wider anglophone community, something which happened more than once amid disputes in the Dutch church about the minister Gottfridus Wingius (Godfried van Winghen). One member of the church, Jacob Caert, described Wingius as 'a false heretic' while drunk in the shop of Loys le Seigneur. When members of the consistory went to Caert's house to admonish him, he had more insults to share, saying that 'those from the consistory are all monks'. The consistory noted that these words were all said in English.[58]

Strangers and neighbours

In the autumn of 1579, the stonemason Vincent de Coninck – known to his English neighbours as Vincent King – was living with his wife Lisken in the parish of St Leonard in Aldersgate ward, just a few minutes' walk from St Paul's Cathedral.[59] The pair knew another couple from the Low Countries, Hans and Peryne Montenaken, who lived across the city in Aldgate Ward.[60] By this point, the relationship between the four had evidently become strained, since Vincent had warned Hans not to show his face at Vincent's shop because Lisken was angry with him, but Hans ignored the warning and came anyway. Once at the shop, Hans whistled and used slanderous words, including calling Lisken a whore. His wife, Peryne, added her own insults to the mix, calling Lisken and Vincent 'a false whore and a false thief'.[61] The couple had apparently come to challenge Lisken and Vincent about what they had been saying behind their backs. Vincent and Lisken gave as good as they got, and at some point they switched the language of their comebacks to English:

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[57] 'die qualick ende schandaleuselick spreken van de viercante bonnette die de Enghelsche ministers draghen': Jelsma and Boersma, *Acta*, 216.

[58] 'Loys le Seigneur zeght leden es ontrent twee jaeren, jij in zijne wyncle hoorde eenen Jacob Caert spreken dese ofte ghelijcke woorden, dat Godfridus Wingius een valsch ketter was ... Ende als hij hem zeyde dat men hetzelve der consistorie zoude te kennen gheven, andwoorde daerup: Dat men mij daer ontbiede, ic zal noch vele meer zegghen, want het al munneken waren die van de consistorie zijn. 'tZelve gheschiede al tusschem heml. in Ynghelsche taele': Jelsma and Boersma, *Acta*, 370–1.

[59] In a 1571 Return of Aliens were listed as living in St Leonard's Parish in Foster Lane 'Vincent Kinge, dennyzein, and stonecutter, bornne in Andwarpe, and Elizabeth his wyfe, have byn in Englande v yeares, and cam for thencrease of there lyvinge, and are of the Douche churche': R. E. G. Kirk and Ernest F. Kirk (eds.), *Returns of Aliens dwelling in the City and Suburbs of London from the Reign of Henry VIII to that of James I, part II, 1571–1597* (Aberdeen, 1902), 49. In 1576, 'Vincent Kinge' was listed as a stranger living in the same place, while in 1582–3, 'Elizabeth King, wedowe, late wief of Vincent King, stonne cutter' was noted as a denizen, still living in Aldersgate ward: *ibid.*, 183, 284.

[60] Hans Montenaken is probably 'John Montenakers of Lucklande Marchaunte', listed in the return for Aldgate ward in 1583; Peryne shows up in the parish of St Katherine Coleman (in the same ward) as 'Perina Montenaken' in 1585: Kirk and Kirk, *Returns 1571–1597*, 319, 382.

[61] 'een valsche hoere ende een valsch dief': Jelsma and Boersma, *Acta*, 528. This paragraph reconstructs the argument from the testimony given by all four participants across a number of consistory sessions in September and October 1579: Jelsma and Boersma, *Acta*, 528–9, 532.

Lisken cried out in English that Peryne Montenaken and her husband were 'people who wanted papistry to be brought back in here'.[62] Peryne told the consistory that Vincent and his wife had shouted loudly, again in English, 'Look what kind of people they are, such people are not worthy to be tolerated here.'[63] Vincent's wife insulted Hans with a variety of insults, calling him a knave, a thief, and saying that it would be better he were hanged at Tyburn. As the argument escalated, it drew an audience – not only the English gentleman who was present in the shop when it kicked off, but also people in the street outside who had stopped to listen and gawk.

If we reconstruct this four-way argument from the consistory records, the picture that emerges from the different participants' testimonies is of a set of decisions. Hans and Peryne came to Vincent's shop as a semi-public space where they could challenge him and his wife; they would have known that others might be present, and that an argument could be audible outside in the street. Lisken and Vincent's choice of English for their retorts, and the kind of accusations they made – that Hans and Peryne were actually Catholics who wanted to overturn the English religious settlement, that they did not deserve the toleration shown to Protestant refugees, that Hans should be punished at London's famous execution site – seem like a deliberate performance to their (at least partly) English audience, using the English language and playing on typically English prejudices. Paul Griffiths notes the power of insults which referenced places and instruments of punishment in early modern England.[64] They cemented this impression when, after Peryne and Hans refused to leave, they called the constable to have them arrested. Vincent and Lisken implicated English customers, passers-by and representatives of the city authorities in a multilingual argument between strangers. They demonstrated a common feature of these records: evidence that strangers, regardless of their levels of literacy or education, had a sophisticated understanding of how insult, slander and reputation worked, and could switch between languages to make their use of insult and accusation as effective as possible, often in ways that demonstrate a real knowledge of how space, sound, and the distinction between the public and the private worked in the early modern city.[65]

These encounters between speakers of different languages were unavoidable in the context of London's housing and the circumstances in which many strangers lived. Bishopsgate, a ward which housed a high proportion of the city's strangers, was described by the antiquarian John Stow in his *Survey of London* as featuring many houses which were 'of late time too

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[62] 'Vyncents wijf daertegen riep uut in Engels, seggende onder anderen, dese waren luyden die wilden dat de papisterie wederom hierin gebrocht werde': Jelsma and Boersma, *Acta*, 529.

[63] 'Ende Vincent ende sijn wijf in Engels luyde uutriepen: Syet wat volck dat dit is, sulck volck en is niet waert hier gedoocht te sijn': Jelsma and Boersma, *Acta*, 529–30.

[64] Paul Griffiths, 'Punishing Words: Insults and Injuries, 1525–1700', in *The Extraordinary and the Everyday in Early Modern England: Essays in Celebration of the Work of Bernard Capp*, ed. Angela McShane and Garthine Walker (Basingstoke, 2010), 66–85.

[65] On honour, reputation and insult in early modern London, see Gowing, *Domestic Dangers*; Eleanor Hubbard, *City Women: Money, Sex and the Social Order in Early Modern London* (Oxford, 2012).

much pesterd with people (a great cause of infection)'.[66] In 1593, a doggerel poem which came to be known as the 'Dutch church libel' was pasted against the wall of the Dutch church at Austin Friars. This anonymous screed drew on a variety of well-worn anti-immigrant stereotypes, accusing the strangers of taking work from English labourers, faking their religious beliefs while being secretly in the service of the Spanish enemy, and manipulating the English markets and currency to the detriment of English subjects. Among the accusations levelled by the libel's author was one which touched on this question of overcrowding: the author wrote that 'In Chambers, twenty in one house will lurke', and that the stranger presence in the city's accommodations was the cause of 'Raysing of rents, was never knowne before', while 'our pore soules [i.e. the English], are cleane thrust out of dore'.[67] The Returns of Aliens which documented the city's stranger population attest to households and buildings where speakers of different languages lived in close quarters. Laura Gowing has written about how '[t]he tensions engendered by London's combination of high mobility and crowded living' could find an outlet in insult, often sexual in nature.[68] In areas with higher numbers of stranger inhabitants, and those where overcrowding of this kind was commonly complained of, such as some of the city's eastern wards, the multilingual speechscape would have been especially audible. In this context of cheek-by-jowl living, of porous walls and shared staircases, strangers' words and languages were audible beyond the boundaries of the household, meaning that neighbours and passers-by were commonly implicated in conversations and arguments.

Noise and insults troubled the boundary between the public and the private. In March 1572, the Dutch consistory called in Gheeraert Arthus to address the rumours that were swirling around his relationship with his wife and his maid – they claimed that the 'great strife and disagreement' between them was 'not private but public'. Arthus claimed that since their arguments had taken place in the couple's home, they were private, but a queue of neighbours was ready to testify to the words and the violence that they had been able to overhear.[69] Dieric Schaep, Arthus's neighbour, said that their English neighbours had heard it too, and that they had said among themselves 'that is an honest man who is beating his wife'.[70] 'Honest' is not a Dutch word (more

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[66] Charles Lethbridge Kingsford (ed.), *A Survey of London by John Stow reprinted from the text of 1603*, I (Oxford, 1908), 165; Rappaport, *Worlds Within Worlds*, 65–7.

[67] Arthur Freeman, 'Marlowe, Kyd, and the Dutch Church Libel', *English Literary Renaissance*, 3 (1973), 50; Lien Bich Luu, '"Taking the bread out of our mouths": Xenophobia in Early Modern London', *Immigrants and Minorities*, 19 (2000), 1–22.

[68] Gowing, *Domestic Dangers*, 22. See also Lena Cowen Orlin, *Locating Privacy in Tudor London* (Oxford, 2007), 152–92.

[69] Arthus was questioned 'dewijle daer een openbaer gheruchte es gheweest datter grooten twist ende oneenicheyt zij gheweest tusschen henleer, 'twelcke niet privaet maer publycq zoude zijn.' He claimed it was not public but private, 'te weten binnen den huuse; ende daer en conde niet ghehoort zijn dan eenen schreeu'. Jelsma and Boersma, *Acta*, 262. Compare Tessa de Boer, Ramona Negrón, Jessica den Oudsten, '"Good evening, you hag": Verbalizing Unhappy Marriages in Eighteenth-Century Amsterdam', in *Ordinary Oralities: Everyday Voices in History*, ed. Josephine Hoegaerts and Janice Schroeder (Berlin, 2023), 31–47.

[70] 'Dat es een honest man die zijn wijf slaet': Jelsma and Boersma, *Acta*, 264.

common in the consistory records is 'eerlick', or 'eerlijk' in modern Dutch), so there is a sense here of Schaep or the consistory scribe specifically echoing an English vocabulary of moral judgement, even though the strange statement attributed to the English neighbours is hard to parse: is it sarcastic, disapproving, or something else?[71] Rumours about what was going on in the Arthus household seem to have gone back and forth between the Dutch- and English-speaking communities: Gabriel Bart's wife told the consistory that she had heard rumours of what had happened from the English, and had then gone to ask Gheeraert Arthus's wife if what she had heard was true, while Dieric Schaep's wife testified that Arthus's wife had told the English of her plight herself. The consistory even recorded the response of the English neighbours in a note: 'And the English said they had never thought that Geeraert would have been such a man.'[72] Susan Amussen writes that in early modern England, '[t]he acceptance and expectation that neighbours would watch events in a family, and intervene if necessary, made domestic violence a public issue'.[73] The case of Gheeraert Arthus, his wife and their neighbours shows how dealing with domestic violence could require the negotiation of linguistic boundaries as well as spatial ones.

Strangers' neighbours were more than just witnesses to incidents of insult, argument and violence. The English and other non-members of the churches could be called to the consistories as witnesses, and when a dispute was settled by the consistory, it was common for them to insist that those who had witnessed it be informed of the outcome. Loys Creton and his wife Dyna were said to have 'scandalised' their neighbours by their arguments and their 'bad way of living'; the French consistory insisted that they be reconciled in the presence of their neighbours from the church, 'present Jehan du Molin, Spanish, and the other neighbours from the Barbican'.[74] In October 1570, the Dutch consistory ordered one member to explain to his English neighbours that he had been incorrect when he had accused another member of being a thief.[75] A public dispute between Michel du Crocq and Jacques Boulenger was brought to reconciliation by the French consistory, with the pair 'promising to make their reconciliation apparent to the English their neighbours', some of whom had had stones thrown at them by Michel in the course of

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[71] Alexandra Shepard, 'Honesty, Worth and Gender in Early Modern England, 1540–1640', in *Identity and Agency in England, 1500–1800*, ed. Henry French and Jonathan Barry (Basingstoke, 2004), 87–105. On neighbours and neighbourliness, see Hubbard, *City Women*, 148–88; Griffiths, *Lost Londons*, 268–76; Ian Archer, *The Pursuit of Stability: Social Relations in Elizabethan London* (Cambridge, 1991), 74–82; Tim Reinke-Williams, *Women, Work and Sociability in Early Modern London* (Palgrave, 2014), 127–35.

[72] 'Ende de Inghelschen zeyden, ze en dochten noyt dat Geeraert sulcs en man zoude gheweest hebben': Jelsma and Boersma, *Acta*, 268.

[73] Susan Dwyer Amussen, '"Being stirred to much unquietness": Violence and Domestic Violence in Early Modern England', *Journal of Women's History*, 6 (1994), 70–89.

[74] 'tous les voisins quy sont de leglise qui ont este Scandalizes de leurs debats et de leur mauuais vie'; 'present Jehan du molin espagnol et les autres voisins de barbacaine': Johnston, *Actes 1560–1565*, 88.

[75] 'Franchois Simoens beloofde te verclaren voor zeker Yngelschen, zijn ghebeuren dat hij Baillys met quaeder cause dief gheheeten hadde': Jelsma and Boersma, *Acta*, 139.

the argument.[76] The stranger consistories took seriously the work of explaining, understanding and reconciling disputes which crossed the boundaries of language and community. This work was a kind of translation: it required the decisions of the consistory to be communicated to members of the multilingual and multinational communities in which their neighbours lived.

The bad words and misbehaviour of strangers could come to the attention of the English authorities as well as the consistories of the stranger churches. London's constables, who policed sexual morality alongside other misdemeanours, were frequent sources of information passed to the consistories.[77] When the shoemaker Hans Willems was rumoured to be the father of an illegitimate child, the story came to the Dutch church via a chain of hearsay which began with Adriaenthen Seneschael, who told a constable in the Minories named Laurence Thomas, who told the elders Mattheus Lull and Hans Gast, who brought the information to the consistory.[78] In 1571, just a few days apart, two members of the French church separately got themselves put in the stocks (one in Aldgate, the other in Whitechapel) for their drunken words to the watch.[79] The consistories engaged with figures ranging from the archdeacon of St Paul's to aldermen, justices of the peace and 'een meester van Bruytwel' ('a master of Bridewell').[80] Sometimes strangers helped the English authorities with their enquiries, as when members of the of Dutch church were ordered to act as translators in an investigation into supposed Anabaptists by the Bishop of London.[81] These encounters show two things: firstly, that many strangers had the linguistic knowledge and flexibility to communicate effectively in the linguistically diverse city, whether that was to help the authorities with their enquiries or to get their own back on their neighbours. And secondly, it shows that London's civil and ecclesiastical authorities had to work multilingually too, finding ways to surveil and manage the speech of the stranger communities. The authorities' ability to hear what was being said in the city – from disorderly words to heresy – relied on multilingual surveillance, translation and communication by members of the stranger communities. The consistories were important mediators here, translating between the strangers and those who ruled over them, especially when migrant voices came to the attention of the city's own systems of surveillance and punishment. The situation of London's migrant communities was not a simple one of inclusion or exclusion, but demanded a complex array of listening, surveilling and

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[76] 'La remonstrance faicte furent reconciliez euz promettant de faire apparoir leur reconciliation aux Anglois leurs voisins': Oakley, *Actes 1571-1577*, 201–2.

[77] On constables, beadles, informers and London's policing apparatus, see Griffiths, *Lost Londons*, 291–331 (and 296 on the expectation that stranger householders would serve as constables); Archer, *Pursuit of Stability*, 215–56.

[78] Jelsma and Boersma, *Acta*, 517.

[79] Oakley, *Actes 1571-1577*, 13, 14. Paul Griffiths notes that in 1563 '[a] merchant's servant got 'a dossyn good lashes with a rodde' for not owning up to being a Frenchman and telling Aldgate's deputy to 'serche also his tayle and to kysse it' when he made house-to-house searches in 1563': Griffiths, *Lost Londons*, 322.

[80] Jelsma and Boersma, *Acta*, 680.

[81] Hessels, *Epistulae et Tractatus*, ii.2, 704.

translating, which required stranger communities, stranger churches, and the urban and ecclesiastical authorities to listen and speak one to another.

Space and speech

Strangers' voices were heard all over the city. Clement Wouters's wife was heard complaining of her husband's drunkenness and violence in a Westminster street.[82] Claerkin Corbeels was seen assaulting and speaking threateningly to a woman on London Bridge.[83] There was gossip being spread about the troublemaker Jacob Caert at Leadenhall market.[84] Jehan Bocquet's crimes crossed the city – he got into a brawl with an Englishman at a tavern in Bishopsgate; later, he would be heard uttering 'villainous statements and insults mixed with swearing and blasphemies' in Southwark.[85] Public spaces, where people gathered to trade, share news and information, or just hang around, were ideal spots for a row or an accusation. The consistories heard from the widow Verslote how Passchier Fleurken had called her a 'perjurious whore' in the Guildhall, and how a group of Dutch women had traded insults outside the door of the French church.[86] When Melken van Asch made statements against Peter Tryon in Mercers' Hall (where the Italian church was located, too), the Dutch church was so concerned about the controversy it had caused among the English and among strangers that it made the participants go and explain themselves to all the witnesses.[87]

Language shaped urban space. You did not have to be multilingual or even literate to hear London's other languages when passing through its streets. Some spaces were characterised by their linguistic diversity, becoming sites where informal and oral translation helped news, gossip and slander spread through the urban speechscape. And space shaped language, too: the meaning and the force of words could change depending on the place where they were uttered. Londoners were experts in the fine art of making a scene, and there were few better places for a multilingual showdown than London's Royal Exchange. Finished in 1568, the Exchange was a site of international and multilingual trade and information brokerage. Visiting in 1598, the German traveller Paul Hentzner remarked on 'the stateliness of the building', 'the quantities of merchandise' and 'the assemblage of different nations'.[88] In John Eliot's

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[82] Jelsma and Boersma, *Acta*, 199.

[83] *Ibid.*, 424.

[84] *Ibid.*, 379.

[85] 'villains propos et injures mesles de juremens et blasphemens': Oakley, *Actes 1571–1577*, 23, 142.

[86] The widow Verslote told the consistory 'dat Fluerken huer in Guylhall angheseit heeft, dat se eene meyneedighe hoere was met meer andere injurieuse woorden, waerof zou kennesse ghenomen heeft' – that mention of other 'injurious words' which were heard but not recorded by the consistory is intriguing, and suggests that some terms may have been considered too offensive to write down: Jelsma and Boersma, *Acta*, 145. On the Dutch dispute outside the French church, see Jelsma and Boersma *Acta*, 725–6.

[87] Jelsma and Boersma, *Acta*, 422–5, 428.

[88] Quoted in Ann Saunders, 'The Building of the Exchange', in *The Royal Exchange*, ed. Ann Saunders (1997), 45.

Ortho-Epia Gallica, a semi-satirical French conversation manual published in London in 1593, one character suggests a walk 'To the Exchange, to heare the newes out of France'. Later, a character says 'I will be below in the Change, either walking among the Italians, or troking with the French, or pratling amongst our English, or carroussing with the Flemings at the Cardinals hat', and the text contains the multilingual greetings of the Exchange's international traders, including an Italian's 'Buon Giorno e buon anno Signori' and a Castilian's 'Buenos dias ayan vuestras merçedes'.[89] The playwright Thomas Dekker wrote that in the Exchange 'They talk in severall Languages, And (like the murmuring fall of Waters) in the Hum of severall businesses: insomuch that the place seems Babell, (a Confusion of Tongues.).'[90]

This Babel was a place where strangers came to trade, to share information, to gossip and to socialise. It provided an audience for arrests, arguments and accusations that ranged from debt to sexual assault. The Exchange was witness to political and religious argument between and beyond the members of the stranger churches. It was a site where their collective reputation could easily be damaged by wayward words or actions, as when the Dutch church became frustrated with the news that a number of their members were meeting at a silversmith's by the Exchange, where they formed a 'college of drunkards' and caused trouble.[91] The Exchange was meant to be a male-dominated space, but women made their voices heard there.[92] In 1579, the Dutch consistory heard a complaint from an Englishman named Matthew Field, who had had a Dutchman named Jan Pauwels imprisoned in the King's Bench prison due to an outstanding debt. Field reported that Pauwels's wife had come to find him at the Exchange, where she had followed him to the shop of a man named Jeffrey Ducket, all the time loudly accusing him of unjustly imprisoning her husband.[93]

While the Exchange was the cause of frequent frustration for the elders and deacons of the stranger churches, it was also a rich resource for their own investigations. In 1581, the Italian church sent two members of the consistory to the Exchange to gather information about the life and behaviour of the silk-worker Gasparo de'Gatti. De'Gatti was reported to have told listeners at the Exchange that the Italian minister was 'a mercenary idiot

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[89] John Eliot, *Ortho-Epia Gallica. Eliots Fruits for the French* (1593), 25–6.

[90] Quoted in Julia Gasper, 'The Literary Legend of Sir Thomas Gresham', in Saunders, *Royal Exchange*, 101.

[91] 'een zeker collegie van dronckaerts tot eenen silversmit bij de bursse': Jelsma and Boersma, *Acta*, 263. On Anglo-Dutch encounters at the Exchange, see Marjorie Rubright, *Doppelgänger Dilemmas: Anglo-Dutch Relations in Early Modern English Literature and Culture* (Philadelphia, 2014), 162–88.

[92] Jean E. Howard, *Theater of a City: The Places of London Comedy, 1598–1642* (Philadelphia, 2009), 32. See also Laura Gowing, '"The freedom of the streets": Women and Social Space, 1560–1640', in *Londinopolis: Essays in the Cultural and Social History of Early Modern London*, ed. Paul Griffiths and Mark S. R. Jenner (Manchester, 2000), 143–4. On the complex relationship between gender, space and defamation, see Fiona Williamson, 'Space and the City: Gender Identities in Seventeenth-Century Norwich', *Cultural and Social History*, 9 (2012), 169–85. For a recent historiographical perspective, see Danielle van den Heuvel, 'Gender in the Streets of the Premodern City', *Journal of Urban History*, 45 (2019), 693–710.

[93] Jelsma and Boersma, *Acta*, 496.

and a rogue'.[94] Digging into witness testimony, the Italians learnt that Gasparo's insults against the minister had been spoken in the presence of Hans Montenaken, whom we last met insulting Vincent and Lisken de Coninck in Vincent's shop, and were reported by Francisco Marquina, an Italian school-teacher and member of the Dutch church who moonlighted as a translator and court interpreter in cases involving participants who did not speak English. Marquina went on to tell the consistory that he had heard Gasparo say that brothels were good and necessary in a republic, and that the authorities should allow them.[95] Gasparo was a repeat offender, and was investigated on another occasion for having dealt with a problem with his cauldron by seeking the help of a woman in Rochester who may or may not have been a witch. This had sparked a debate among the Italians at the Exchange over whether this was Christian behaviour or not, and the consistory carefully compiled the testimony of all those who had participated in the conversation.

One case handled by the Dutch consistory gives a sense of the verbal and linguistic strategies that strangers used in this most public – and multilingual – of London's spaces. In August 1579, the Dutch consistory first heard a rumour of a dispute which had occurred between Lowys Thiery and Paschier van der Mote: Lowys had apparently had Paschier arrested without going through the consistory first, and there had been public insults and fights between the two men. A version of the story can be pieced together from the two men's statements to the consistory and from the accounts given by witnesses. Paschier, it seems, had approached Lowys on the Exchange and accused Lowys of having tried to have him arrested. As they argued, one of Lowys's creditors had appeared, and in his hearing Paschier had called Lowys a number of insult-ing names, including 'knave and bankrupt knave, with many other evil words'.[96] Now, this is already interesting from a linguistic point of view. The consistory recorded Paschier's words as 'knaif ende banckeroet knaif', but 'knaif' is a word that does not exist in early modern Dutch, suggesting that this is an attempt to note without quite translating the exact English term that Paschier had used. 'Knave' was an actionable term in English, and Paschier – like the scribe who kept the record of the argument – knew the power that he wielded when he used it.[97] So we already have the sense of a conversation that is happening on the border between languages, and then we hear that turning to Lowys's creditor, Paschier said that Lowys was a

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[94] 'che altre volte in bolsa il detto Gasparo haveva detto che il nostro ministro era un mercenario idiota e forfante et altre iniurie': Boersma and Jelsma, *Unity in Multiformity*, 183.

[95] *Ibid.* Marquina appears as 'Francis Maquin' and 'Francois Macquin' as an interpreter or 'inter-rogator' in a 1592 separation case between Anne Clemens and Gervase Le Page: London Metropolitan Archives, DL/C 214, p. 258. I am grateful to Laura Gowing for sharing multilingual cases like this one with me. What language Gasparo was speaking, to be witnessed by both Francis and Hans (who was from Liège), is unclear.

[96] 'knaif ende banckeroet knaif, met vele andere quaede woorden': Jelsma and Boersma, *Acta*, 526.

[97] Gowing, *Domestic Dangers*, 62–7. Dutch does have 'knecht', though as the act books suggest this did not carry the same pejorative power. A closer Dutch equivalent (and one which appears regularly as a term of insult in the consistory records) is 'schelm', which can be translated as 'rogue' or 'knave'.

bankrupt, and said – at this point Lowys was clear that these words were in English – 'Don't you owe me thirty pounds?'[98] When it came time for Paschier to give his side of the story, he would agree on these key details – that he had said that Lowys owed him money, and that Lowys had responded by saying 'You lie like a knave [een boef], and similar insults in Dutch and English.'[99] When Lowys tried to walk away to another part of the Exchange, Paschier followed him, continuing to insult him. Lowys went home and began an action against Paschier, whom he caused to be arrested.

The use of English, which both Lowys and Paschier attested to in their statements to the consistory, seems to have been intentional on the part of both parties. They knew they had an audience: Jan Godschalk, Claude Dotigny, Jan Selot and Rafael van den Put would all attest to having witnessed the arguments and to have heard some of the words exchanged, as well as the physicality – Lowys attempting to walk away, Paschier pulling him by his coat – and they could situate it in the Exchange, too, with van den Put and others testifying that this had happened under the gallery at the noon Exchange.[100] The switch to English for the exchange of insults meant that their dispute would be comprehensible – and the scandal attached to the terms they used, of bankruptcy and moral degeneracy – would be understood by Lowys's creditor, with likely financial consequences for Lowys, as well as the wider anglophone public gathered at the Exchange at its busiest time of day. Scholars of migrations past and present have considered questions of assimilation, charting how (and how far) migrant communities integrate into their host societies over time. What we see in these moments of multilingual insult and reputation management in early modern London is a number of different kinds of knowledge at work – knowledge of which languages to use, and how to use them, knowledge of the social dynamics of a multilingual public space, and an understanding of how honour, credit and reputation worked in the multilingual city. We also glimpse how strangers made spaces multilingual – how their voices and languages became part of the urban speechscape, to be heard and interpreted by Londoners in all their diversity.

Conclusion: towards a history of the multilingual city

Early modern London was multilingual. In fact, it was much more multilingual than this article has been able to show. Not far from where Philipine Seneschal and her mother-in-law insulted each other in French and English, two men named Manteo and Wanchese were teaching their Algonquian language to Thomas Hariot.[101] London's migrants spoke Welsh and Scots and Portuguese

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[98] 'Item dat hi seyde tegen den crediteur: Betrowt ghi desen banckeroetier, hi is mijselve £30 stx. schuldich. Item segge (in Engels): Bistu mij niet £30 schuldich': Jelsma and Boersma, *Acta*, 526.

[99] 'Ghi lieght als een boef, ende diergeliken scheltwoorden in Duyts ende Engels': *ibid.*, 527. 'Boef' can mean 'boy', though it could be used insultingly in a manner equivalent to the English 'knave' – see the usages in *De Geïntegreerde Taalbank* v2.0 (2018), https://gtb.ivdnt.org/iWDB/search?actie=article&wdb=WNT&id=M009616&lemma=boef&domein=0&conc=true.

[100] Jelsma and Boersma, *Acta*, 547–8, 551.

[101] Coll Thrush, *Indigenous London: Native Travelers at the Heart of Empire* (New Haven, 2016), 33–6.

as well as French and Dutch.[102] One commentator described the city as England's 'third universitie', where you could learn Chaldean, Syriac and Arabic, as well as Polish, Persian and Russian, among 'divers other Languages fit for Embassadors and Orators, and Agents for Marchants, and for Travaylors, and necessarie for all Commerce or Negotiation whatsoever'.[103] The stranger churches' records testify to the presence in London of Turks and Swedes, Spaniards, Germans and Greeks. The voices of the city's small but growing African population no doubt brought new languages to London's streets, even if we lack the detailed and linguistically rich archives of their experiences which we are lucky to have for other groups of strangers.[104]

But that London was multilingual should not come as a surprise. What I really want to argue is that London was multilingual for everyone who lived there. It did not matter if you did not socialise with merchants, ambassadors and translators; it did not matter if you were illiterate; it did not matter if you only spoke English: London was multilingual for everyone. Languages other than English could be heard on the streets and in the public spaces of the city, through the walls of homes and the doors of shops. And native Londoners, if we can use that crude term, experienced and engaged with other languages and with the information they carried in ways that were active, not passive.[105] When the bookseller Thomas Harris stopped his French neighbour Jehan de Savoye in the street, it was because he wanted to know what had been said in the noisy French-language row he had overheard.[106] It was not necessary to speak or understand another language to be part of this multilingual urban culture: your rowing neighbours might switch languages to ensure the cause of the trouble was made clear, or the offender might show up on your doorstep in the presence of an elder of their church to explain and apologise. In a fast-flowing argument in a language you did not understand, you might pick up a recognisable word or two – like 'knave' or 'honest' or 'Tyburn' – which gave some sense of what was going on, or draw your own conclusions by observing gesture, body language or physical violence. Translation was a part of everyday life, from the interpersonal to the institutional level.

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[102] Emrys Jones, 'From Medieval to Renaissance City', in *The Welsh in London 1500–2000*, ed. Emrys Jones (Cardiff, 2001), 37–41. Among the Italian community, Girolama, the widow of Agostino Boas, had a Welsh servant named Maria Jones, while the silk-worker Gasparo de'Gatti had a young Welsh woman ('del paese de Veles') serving him as an apprentice: Boersma and Jelsma, *Unity in Multiformity*, 160, 193–4. For Scots in the consistory records, see Jelsma and Boersma, *Acta*, 729–30 and Oakley, *Actes 1571–1577*, 195–7, 199. Edgar Samuel, 'London's Portuguese Jewish Community, 1540–1753', in *From Strangers to Citizens: the integration of Immigrant Communities in Britain, Ireland and colonial America, 1550–1750*, ed. Randolph Vigne and Charles Littleton (Brighton, 2001), 239–40.

[103] George Buck, *The Third Universitie of England* (1615), 983.

[104] Habib, *Black Lives in the English Archives.*

[105] The complexities of language and identity which emerged especially in the second and third generations of these migrant communities are reflected in the account of John Anderton, who fled prosecution for theft in 1603, and was described as speaking 'like a stranger but an Englishman borne': Griffiths, *Lost Londons*, 255. See also Jacob Selwood, '"English-born reputed strangers": Birth and Descent in Seventeenth-Century London', *Journal of British Studies*, 44 (2005), 728–53.

[106] Johnston, *Actes 1560–1565*, 26.

Because so much of what we know of multilingualism in early modern Europe focuses on the multilingualism of elites, it is easy to fall into the trap of believing that early modern multilingualism was an elite phenomenon. From educational travel to literary translation, we have a well-documented and thoroughly studied understanding of how those who were wealthy and literate lived, thought, read and wrote multilingually. Accounts of elite multilingualism tend to privilege the textual, too. The records of London's stranger churches remind us that multilingualism was not – and is not – an elite experience. Nor was it one which is captured in accounts of linguistic diversity which focus on the literate and the literary. The multilingualism of the early modern city was everyday, and it was oral. Our understanding of linguistic diversity in the early modern world – and specifically of its implications – is still at a relatively early stage, especially when it comes to linguistic diversity as it was experienced and practised beyond elites. In a study of multilingualism in the early modern Mediterranean, Eric Dursteler has argued that:

> [as] the heirs of linguistic nationalism, it is difficult for us to conceive of a context in which multilingualism was the norm, where there were no efforts to impose linguistic homogeneity, and in which language was a marker of identity but not to the exclusion of other elements. The early modern world was a linguistically richer and more complex age than our own, and this was accepted and even celebrated as the norm, rather than being perceived as disorientating.[107]

This is true – even somewhere like England, often thought of too simply as effectively monoglot. Histories of early modern migration have too often treated language as an afterthought where they discuss it at all, leaving a range of questions to be asked about how the experience of communicating across linguistic barriers shaped migrant mobilities and the polyglot communities in which they settled.

And London was not unique – far from it. A hundred miles north-east, in the second city of sixteenth-century England, Norwich's stranger population was much bigger as a proportion of the city's inhabitants than London's, and it has been described as working as a functionally trilingual city.[108] Around the early modern world, urban life was shaped by linguistic diversity. In Venice, a panic spurred by multilingual migrants led to a crackdown on blasphemy and illicit speech.[109] In Granada, the relationship between Arabic and Spanish shaped the post-conquest city.[110] In Algiers and other cities of the early modern Mediterranean, a pidgin language emerged which facilitated

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[107] Eric Dursteler, 'Speaking in Tongues: Language and Communication in the Early Modern Mediterranean', *Past and Present*, 217 (2012), 77.

[108] Peter Trudgill, *Investigations in Sociohistorical Linguistics: Stories of Colonisation and Contact* (Cambridge, 2010), 49.

[109] Elizabeth Horodowich, 'Civic Identity and the Control of Blasphemy in Sixteenth-Century Venice', *Past and Present*, 181 (2003), 3–33.

[110] Claire Gilbert, 'A Grammar of Conquest: The Spanish and Arabic Reorganization of Granada after 1492', *Past and Present*, 239 (2018), 3–40.

conversations between Christians and Muslims.[111] In Lima, notaries pondered how to establish new systems of trust and legality in the context of the interaction between Spanish and the indigenous languages of America.[112] A city like Manila was a place where Tagalog, Chinese and Spanish were spoken alongside each other, and its urban archives were the result of inescapable processes of translation.[113] Many more examples could be adduced from a variety of global contexts to show that linguistic diversity was a key component of urban life in the early modern world. Early modern cities like London were places which shaped 'standard' or 'correct' language but were themselves profoundly multilingual. Cities were engines of language change and standardisation, but at street level they were places where languages shaped social relations, and where urban authorities had to learn how to listen to multilingual speech.[114]

Histories of migration and of the city have long recognised the importance of diversity and difference in early modern cities, but need to look much more closely at the role of language and multilingualism in these often crowded and noisy environments.[115] We need a global, comparative conversation which will explore how cities made modern languages and how linguistic diversity shaped a city at a crucial moment in its history. Even where cities' archives are often monolingual, as London's are, we need to listen for the multilingual voices which shaped them. In the latter decades of the sixteenth century, the languages of London's strangers were an audible and important part of the urban speechscape, shaping a multilingual oral culture which had to be navigated by strangers and Londoners alike. How they lived and communicated in a multilingual city has implications for our understandings of assimilation and honour, of community and coexistence, of neighbourhood and order, of xenophobia and identity. To listen more closely to linguistic diversity may be to rethink what we know of the social history of the early modern city.

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[111] Jocelyne Dakhlia, *Lingua franca: histoire d'une langue métisse en Méditerranée* (Paris, 2008).

[112] Kathryn Burns, 'Notaries, Truth, and Consequences', *American Historical Review*, 110 (2005), 350–79.

[113] Jonathan Gebhardt, 'Microhistory and Microcosm: Chinese Migrants, Spanish Empire, and Globalization in Early Modern Manila', *Journal of Medieval and Early Modern Studies*, 47 (2017), 167–92.

[114] Christopher Joby has argued for greater consideration to be given to London's (and Norwich's) role in shaping Dutch: Christopher Joby, 'The Role of London and Other English Cities in the Development of Early Modern Dutch Language and Literature', *Dutch Crossing*, 38 (2014), 4–19.

[115] Jacob Selwood, *Diversity and Difference in Early Modern London* (Farnham, 2010).