Levelt, S. (2019). Book Review: Gallagher, John, *Learning Languages in Early Modern England*. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2019. 288 pp. £60.00. ISBN: 9780198837909 (hb). *Renaissance Studies*.
<https://doi.org/10.1111/rest.12647>

Peer reviewed version

Link to published version (if available):
[10.1111/rest.12647](https://doi.org/10.1111/rest.12647)

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Review of John Gallagher, *Learning Languages in Early Modern England*. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2019. 288 pp. £60.00. ISBN: 9780198837909

‘English in the early modern period was the little-known and little-regarded language of a small island out on the edge of Europe’, John Gallagher writes in the introduction to his inspired and inspiring book, *Learning Languages in Early Modern England*. English, being a language of little international prestige, held little interest to people abroad, and it was therefore a necessity for English-speakers who wanted to travel abroad, trade beyond England, or even just move within certain circles inside England, to lead multilingual lives. *Learning Languages in Early Modern England* is a study of the ways in which people acquired the linguistic skills to facilitate such lives, and of the set of competences such learning aimed to bestow on learners. Throughout, Gallagher’s concepts are clearly defined and arguments well-developed, and his examples are all apposite and regularly entertaining. *Learning Languages in Early Modern England* is a significant contribution to scholarly conversations about historical multilingualism, education, language acquisition, and intellectual economies and networks; it will be found of much interest and importance not just to the student of English cultural history, but to anyone with an interest in textual production and/or social interactions in the early modern period, who will be inspired by its arguments about the role of languages and learning in people’s lived experience in the period, and aided by its clarity of thought and organization.

The book consists of four chapters, framed by an introduction and conclusion. Chapter 1 describes the ‘extracurricular economy’ of language learning in early modern England. Gallagher presents a nuanced picture of settings, teachers and learners, and the development of an economy of language learning, primarily outside the established centers of learning, from which new ideas about teaching, learning and language emerged.

Chapter 2 studies the burgeoning trade in printed conversation manuals, ‘bi- or multilingual text[s] which usually included some material on pronunciation, orthography, vocabulary, and grammar, and which had at [their] heart material that mimicked speech and could be employed in conversation by the reader’ (56). The chapter surveys the history of production of conversation manuals including English and one or more other European languages printed between 1480 and 1715, also drawing out how political developments may occasionally have impacted on the market for such works (a useful handlist is included in the bibliography, 249–63), and analyzing the evidence how various such manuals were or could have been used. Gallagher proposes new ways of reading the genre, exploring the texts in their context of multilingual encounters, where orality, aural and textuality intersect.

Following on from this description of the trade and functionality of these conversation manuals, in Chapter 3, Gallagher proposes a nuanced view of what early modern language learning consisted of – more than mere acquisition of a new vocabulary and grammar, learners of a new language aimed to become ‘language[d]’, and this included the acquisition of multiple ‘linguistic competences’, a repertoire of varieties of language suited to different social contexts. As such, conversation manuals did not merely present linguistic materials, but also models of behaviour, and examples of what could happen if the codes of proper conduct broke down. In this context, Gallagher also treats how the manuals set out to control behaviour, particularly that of female language learners, but also that of immigrant learners of English, who are taught to speak highly of England’s food, and warned not to criticize its beer (153).

Whereas the first three chapters are focused on language learning in England, in Chapter 4, educational travel is addressed, primarily through accounts from travelogues, and through letters written home from abroad, often in the new languages being acquired. The chapter further expounds on the concept of linguistic competence, as well as its non-written components, including gesturing. As Gallagher describes the origins and development of the Grand Tour in sixteenth- and seventeenth-century conceptions of educational travel, he proposes that a central aim of such travel was the acquisition of ‘conversable knowledge’ in languages – a set of skills that

was social as much as linguistic, and included vocabulary and grammar, but also oral aspects such as accent, physical elements such as gesture, an awareness of culturally contingent social situations, the ability to employ silence as appropriate, and even a capacity for dissimulation when required. In his conclusion, Gallagher returns to the observation that early modern England was more multilingual, and its language more limiting on its speakers than is often appreciated.

The low prestige of English, however, did not stop all foreigners from wishing to learn the language – although it did complicate such language acquisition. In 1586, the Dutch poet and lawyer Jacob Walraven described how he, never having set foot in England, had learned English. No schools in the Netherlands offered instruction in English, so he had had to make do, learning the basics first second-hand, through informal teaching from Dutch acquaintances who had learned the language previously, and subsequently by convening a study group with several friends under guidance of a native speaker. Walraven urged his readers to learn English in order to not miss out on commercial opportunities, and to be prepared for meetings with dignitaries such as the Earl of Leicester, who had recently been appointed Governor-General of the United Provinces. The similarity between Dutch and English, Walraven argues, should make learning English child's play, particularly for those who already know some Latin and French. Much of the language could be acquired by using existing language aids such as vocabularies, and by reading texts that were available in both languages – Walraven recommends English Psalms and Gospels, which, he says, are widely available in the Netherlands. For English pronunciation, however, instruction from a native speaker remained a requirement – Walraven recommended his readers to find themselves 'any young man, servant or English soldier, who pronounces the A B C as well as the rest to you, so that by copying, you can eventually learn it. They do this happily, as I myself experienced with two noblemen at my home, if I also pronounced the Dutch to them, which they eagerly pursue. Thus one hand washes the other.'

I include this description here to illustrate how *Learning Languages in Early Modern England* provides a new, coherent and comprehensive framework to read and appreciate descriptions of multilingualism and language learning such as Walraven's in their full richness of detail. Gallagher sets up an inviting framework to enter into dialogue with: Walraven never visited England, and his comments on learning English are therefore not included in Gallagher's book, as it deals with native English speakers learning languages other than English, as well as non-native speakers learning English in England itself. Nevertheless, Gallagher's study provides a set of keys to reading descriptions such as Walraven's. His elaborate justification of the utility of learning English, for example, receives new depth by Gallagher's locating of English as peripheral to the other European languages. Further, as suggested by Gallagher about conversation manuals, Walraven also shows recent political developments being a motivator for language learning. Additionally, his description indicates such learning, in the mind of the people involved, to be connected to an awareness of social standing, and the provision for language-learning to be supplied both by the 'extracurricular economy' of printed vocabularies and other linguistic aids, but also by informal, personal networks of acquaintance, and by make-do solutions such as the acquisition of texts that were available in both languages. An added advantage for Dutch speakers in the Netherlands learning English, in contrast to the concerns surrounding educational travel as described in Gallagher's study, was that between Dutch and English, religious texts could handily be found in confessional forms that would not give rise to any of the religious tensions that could be inherent to educational travel of English speakers to, for example, Catholic Italy. The methodological tools and historical contexts which Gallagher provides for reading descriptions of multilingual interactions such as Walraven's will be of much use to both historians and literary scholars studying the polyglot early modern world.