

Speech

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Chapter 6 “Speech”

In his 1607 exploration of humoral psychology, Thomas Walkington rejects the idea that external appearances give reliable information about a person’s inner character. Instead, he claims, “our usual saying is, that the tongue is the hereauld of the minde” (D2r).¹ To really understand a person, Walkington suggests, you must listen to them speak. This is perhaps unsurprising coming from a clergyman who spent a good deal of his life preaching. Walkington embodied the importance of orality in the period, and the centrality of the spoken word to religious, political and social life.² Walkington’s aphoristic language (“our usual saying”) implies that the link between tongue and mind is common knowledge. This chapter probes the implications of this assumption and its corollaries: that different ways of speaking were seen to reveal different kinds of person, and that these categorisations were hierarchised. Speech is both a socially-inflected phenomenon and a technique of physical embodiment (see St Pierre 2012, 11). Its acquisition and expression are thus intimately linked to the interplay between the unique embodiment of an individual and their specific cultural context. This chapter therefore uses the social model of disability to explore the exclusionary effects of Renaissance ideas about who should speak and how.

Codes around speech, then as now, reflected wider ideologies of gender, race, and class, intersecting with each other and with individuals’ unique embodiment. These factors also interacted with larger historical forces in the period that affected the way in which speech and language were constructed and understood. Most notably, these included the spread of technologies of printing, which sped up the means by which ideas could be communicated; the development of scientific experimentation which offered challenges to received ideas and which began to supplant humoral models of the human body and mind; and the large increase in global trade, resulting in contact between language groups and forms that had been previously much more isolated from each other.

¹ In early modern quotations, spelling is original, though i/j and u/v have been regularised.

² He even published a sermon on the topic of effective speech in 1608, titled in full *Salomons sweete harpe consisting of five words, like so many golden strings, toucht with the cunning hand of his true skill, commanding all other humane speech: wherein both cleargie and laitie may learne how to speake*.

To be educated in Renaissance Europe meant to be able to read and speak Latin and Greek. Educated speakers in the Renaissance also had access to a large body of advice about effective speech in the form of rhetorical handbooks. Their words were being heard in the context of widespread awareness of the techniques of effective - or perhaps even manipulative - public speaking, both in formal legal situations, and also popular sermonising. Thus, alongside a confidence in the capacity of speech to give access to truth was a concomitant suspicion that speech could be used to deceive. Such contradictory positions were characteristic of the ways in which speech and speaking differently were understood in the Renaissance.

To help us understand what might have constituted non-normative speech patterns in the period, this chapter begins by outlining a range of theological contexts which shaped Renaissance assumptions about speech and language, most notably by creating an ideology in which language variation was seen as a problem, and in which certain forms of language were privileged over others. The chapter then moves on to considering the ways that speech was related to body and mind in contemporary medical discourse by looking at definitions of speech 'defects' in the later part of the period, as well as discussing some ways in which humoral theory might have accounted for variations in speech. This is followed by a section focused on the implications of rhetorical discourse for understanding non-normative speech. Rhetorical theory about effective and ideal forms of speech reveals some of the underlying assumptions about speaking that provided a basis for the legal disqualification and disenfranchisement of certain groups of people. In this way, the chapter shows how those who were unable to speak in particular ways were effectively excluded from personhood in the period. The last part of the chapter considers dramatic representations of non-normative speech, focusing mainly on early modern English drama, after a short consideration of Italian stage representations. The emergence of drama as a newly-professionalised genre in the Renaissance is in itself a telling piece of evidence of the continued importance of orality and oral forms in the period. Performed drama is constituted through both body and word, meaning that the drama of the period furnishes us with evidence for the importance and effect of speaking well or ill in the cultural imagination of the Renaissance.

This contextual material does not present a coherent or unified picture of how speech was understood in the period, because such a thing would be an oversimplification. Instead it provides a confluence of conflicting ideas that shaped expectations about normative kinds of speech, about who was permitted to speak and how, and what speaking itself meant, creating a context in which those who spoke in different ways would be heard - or ignored. The chapter will show that, despite the increasing importance of the written word, speech - and speaking rightly - were highly valorised in the period. As Carla Mazzio has pointed out, in the so-called “age of eloquence”, the inability to speak well, or to perform one’s speech correctly, was a disabling position (Mazzio, 2009). The ability to express oneself in spoken language was so central to the age of humanism’s conceptualisation of being human, that to lack speech was to lack personhood.

Theorising speech difference: theological positions

The etiology of speech difference in the Renaissance is too varied to be succinctly summarisable, but one thing is clear: that speaking differently is described as a ‘defect’ or ‘imperfection’, and sources which discuss speech utilise this language of falling away from a norm. In some ways, this was a microcosm of the widespread notion in Christian Europe that the world is a fallen and imperfect place more generally, deriving from a theology in which all human beings are defective because of original sin. Thus a notion of generalised insufficiency provides an important backdrop for discussions of all forms of human frailty in the period. For example, when George Gascoigne (1576) complained that “none serve God, but only tongtide men” (C3v), he was participating in a tradition of complaint that takes as understood a fallen world of inevitably inadequate human effort. Nevertheless, the implication of this statement is also that serving God adequately would mean *not* being tongue-tied, making speaking an integral part of the ideal godly life.

Having said that, it must be remembered that devotional vows of silence as a spiritual practice formed an important element of many if not all major monastic rules in the period, including the Benedictine and Domenican orders. Such complete prohibition of speech is perhaps extreme, but forms the logical extension of an association of verbosity with worldly turpitude. Samuel Gardiner, for example, who published a commentary on the story of the prodigal son, was deeply suspicious of

language and rhetoric. He asserts that “The holie spirit of God taketh a great grace, in shrowding and cowching matters of maine moment under the fewest words that may be. It is the fashion of the world in their fabulous discourses to use tedeous circumstances” (S4r). This statement is somewhat ironic, given the length and detail of Gardiner’s extensive examination of every aspect of the parable he is discussing.

Gardiner also makes clear that the manner of speech is an important tool for judging the speaker, not just what is said. Through attending to the way a person speaks, Gardiner suggests, a listener can estimate the identity, cultural background, and moral state of the speaker. Gardiner cites scriptural authorities to argue that

The mind of this man is known by his words, his mouth bewraieth what maner of man he is. As the Ephramites were knowne to bee Ephramites by their kinde of speech, being not able to pronounce Shibboleth: as the Damsell that kept the doore knewe Peter by his voyce, that hee was a man of Galilee: so commonlie mens workes are knowne by their wordes to be good or evill. [...] as golde that hath not a good sound may be thought to be counterfeit: so the man that hath not a good sound cannot be perfect. *He that is of the earth speaketh earthlie*: and the mouth of a foole (sayeth the wisdome of *Salomon*) blurteth out foolishnesse. As a man by his blistered and exulcerate lippes is knowne to have an Ague: so by our swelling and corrupt wordes we are knowne to have an inward and spirituall Ague (B8r-v).

Gardiner’s extraordinary sequence of similes pathologises language, making speech into an expression of physical disease and moral degeneracy. Foolish speech is indicative of a foolish mind. Gardiner’s examples also show that speech is connected to geographical or ethnic identity. In particular, his invocation of the story of the slaughter of the Ephramites from Judges 12 frames speech difference in a context of potentially fatal consequences. The King James Bible of 1611 renders the story thus:

And the Gileadites took the passages of Jordan before the Ephraimites: and it was so, that when those Ephraimites which were escaped said, Let me go over; that the men of Gilead said unto him, Art thou an Ephraimite? If he said, Nay;

Then said they unto him, Say now Shibboleth: and he said Sibboleth: for he could not frame to pronounce it right. Then they took him, and slew him at the passages of Jordan: and there fell at that time of the Ephraimites forty and two thousand (Judges 12, 5-6).

Gardiner is not interested in the rights and wrongs of this massacre, merely that the story provides an example of the close link between the aural quality of a person’s voice and the ability of a listener to accurately judge their identity.

Another foundational myth for Renaissance conceptualisations of speech and language is that of the Tower of Babel, which presents the entire existence of language variation as a symptom of fallen humanity's failure to live according to God's wishes. For example, Godfrey Goodman (1616) suggests that the "confusion of tongues first began at Babell, and is now generally spread over the face of the whole world" (292). Goodman makes clear that he considers language diversity (tellingly termed "confusion") to be a punishment, preventing humanity from learning easily from one another. Furthermore, he claims that language is still under an ongoing process of degenerating, and laments that languages like Hebrew, Greeke, Latin, Syriac, and Chaldaic, are no longer widely spoken (in his experience). Instead, Goodman finds that the tongue is

confounded with many base and barbarous languages, some of them very harsh in pronunciation, that a man must wrong his owne visage, and disfigure himselfe to speake them: others without gravitie or wisdome in their first imposition, consisting only of many bare, and simple tearmes, not reduced to any certaine fountaines, or heads, which best resembleth nature: Many of them hindring mans thoughts, and wanting a sufficient plentie of words, cannot significantly expresse the quicknes of invention or livelily expresse an action (293)

Although Goodman laments all language variation as being part of God's punishment, there emerges a clear hierarchy here. Some languages, Goodman suggests, require the speaker to contort their face, and this alone is enough to condemn them as "base" and "barbarous". Other languages do not appear to Goodman to have the capacity to express complex or precise concepts. Patricia Palmer (2001) traces the ways that judgements about language were characteristic of European colonial exploration and conquest, both in Spanish encounters in the so-called New World, and in English relations with Ireland. Palmer argues that "the link forged between reason and eloquence implied a consequent equation between defective tongues and defective thinking" (30). Certain kinds of speech, therefore, rendered certain peoples less than human, supposedly justifying their conquest and subjugation. As Palmer notes, for example, Edward Topsell's 1607 *The Historie of Foure-Footed Beastes*, a catalogue of animals, included an entry categorising pygmy people as apes because "though they speak [,] yet is their language imperfect" (cited in Palmer 2001, 220).

While global trade and expansionism meant that linguistic chauvinism had international consequences, commentators like Goodman also acknowledged that language varied on a more local

scale, noting that “in the same tongue you shal observe a great diversitie of dialects” (294). Models of linguistic difference explained this by literally mapping them onto regions. For example, Paul Cohen (2003) notes how Guillaume Bouchet’s 1598 description of linguistic diversity in France attributes differences in pronunciation, tone, and facility to climate and geography:

the more the people are in the south, the more they speak from within the stomach, and with heart, and with a voice full of consonants, without vowels, brusly [sic] pronounced, and with many aspirations: because of the force and nature of the spirits, which are very present there, and from the impetuosity of the intense heat. But those who inhabit the southern hemisphere ... and the Midi, who have their body heat tempered, and their minds weakened, pronounce softly ... Language even takes on certain characteristics of water, which alters voices and languages, so that those who live near rivers, are more likely to stutter (Cohen’s translation, 9)

The idea that local conditions produced permanent bodily changes matches contemporary climate theories of race, which linked variation in the physiology of human populations, for example in skin tone, to the region in which they lived, that is, hotter or cooler areas of the globe (see Floyd-Wilson, 1998). Such differences in local conditions, Bouchet suggests, also changed the physical capacity for language of the people who lived in different areas.

Speaking bodies

The consistently metonymic use of “tongue” in Goodman and in other English sources to mean both a language and the way in which it was spoken reflects a conceptual conflation of speech and body that demonstrates the way that speech is indeed a combination of social context and physical capacity. The tongue’s role in speaking was examined more literally by Helkiah Crooke in his *Mikrokosmographia*. First printed in 1615, this monumental work offered a new way of looking at many aspects of medicine and disease through an encyclopedic tour of the human body. Crooke includes a discussion of the anatomy of the tongue and offers an explanation for a range of speech difficulties. Crooke suggests that the tongue

is faulty sometimes in magnitude, sometimes in the very substance together with his muscles. For if it be bigge it filleth up the spaces of the mouth and the Chops, and then it cannot moove so deliverly or nimbly as otherwise it would, and such men are called *blaesi* and *balbutientes*, that is Lispers and Stutters, especially if (as it happeneth most what) it bee also too soft or moyst. (626)

The Latin terminology cited by Crooke was still in common use. As Marc Shell points out, the etymological link between *balbutientes* and barbarians reveals that

both also refer to “those people who, although they *do* speak our language, do not speak it ‘in our way.’ ” It does not matter much whether these people speak English with a foreign “accent,” domestic “dialect,” or more general speech “impediment.” (73)

Crooke suggests that speech impediments can also result from “the muscles being little” with the result that the tongue “is mooved too swiftly and so implicateth or doubleth the speach and maketh the words come hudling together” (626). He also describes what is now commonly referred to as tongue-tie:

The Tongue also sometimes is too short when the *Bridle* thereof is not enough cut, so then it is hindered that it cannot apply it selfe on every side to the Mouth (626)

Crooke also draws emphatic attention to what he sees as the connection between ears, palate, nose and throat. For example, somewhat alarmingly, he suggests that “if you goade the Tympane of the eare with a Pen-knife it will presently cause a drie Cough” (701). Crooke goes on to claim that

Those which be halfe deafe do speak but stutteringly and their voyce is made through their Nose. Againe, those who from their Birth are deafe, are in like manner *ἀλαλος*, that is, are dumbe.

Crooke’s hugely successful handbook influenced anatomy and surgical practice, but it also shows the increasing physicalisation of medical discourse. No longer relying on references to venerable sources, Crooke provided anatomical drawings giving an unflinching portrayal of usually unseen parts of the body.

[Figure 6.1]

This movement towards a kinds of empiricism must be held alongside the scholastic, humoural-based understanding of the voice in the period, though. Indeed, Crooke himself offers humoural explanations when he refers to the levels of moistness of the tongue above. A link with humoral moistness is also put forward by Crooke as the explanation for stuttering’s presence in childhood.

Hence it is that Infants and those children that are moyster then ordinary doe speake slower then others, because of the softnesse and loosenes of their Tongues and the muscles thereof, till when their heate by their age encreasing the over abundant moysture be consumed (626)

Such humoral reasoning seeks to explain bodily symptoms through reference to balance or imbalance in the four bodily humours alongside qualities of dryness, moistness, heat and cold. Although accounts of humoral medicine rarely agree on the causes and cures of the ailments they describe, this ancient system for understanding the human body and mind persisted in popularity through the Renaissance period.

The basic principles of humoral theory were often invoked as common knowledge in descriptions of speech. For example, William Painter's story of "A Ladie Falslie Accused" in Tome 1 of *The Palace of Pleasure* offers two examples of tongue-tied speakers, whose difficulty in getting their words out come from opposing emotional states. The first is the wicked steward, whose plot to implicate the virtuous lady of the house is the core of the tale. As his lies take hold, he finds himself temporarily unable to speak:

the Traitour, whose sense was so confounded with gladnesse, that thinkyng to beginne his tale, his wordes so stucke in his mouthe, as he was not able to utter a worde (fol. 120)

This villain's joy at his success creates a block that temporarily prevents him from speaking.

Eventually, he manages to convey his story to the master of the house, a jealous man who is only too ready to believe the lies he is told about his wife:

The lorde hearyng these pitifull newes, which perced his harte more depe, then any two edged sworde, at the first was so astoned, that he could not tell what to saie or doe, savyng the ardente furie of Cholere, made hym distill a certaine Melancholique humor into his eyes, whiche received the superfluous vapours of his braine. At length breaking that forthe, whiche troubled hym within, and grindyng his teethe for furie, with stuttering and uncertain voice, fetching sighes betwene, saied. "O GOD what newes bee these that I heare? (fol. 120-1)

In both cases, halting speech is indicative of emotional turmoil. In the latter case, the overflowing brain vapours emerge as tears, spilling out of the lord's eyes uncontrollably. By contrast, his voice is inhibited and a lack of control is denoted by juddering, stuttering speech.

The mixture of choler and melancholy as underlying the lord's response matches the mixed sense of the underlying humoral causes that contemporary sources posit as the cause of inhibited speech. Turning to Robert Burton ([1621] 1989), we find a typically inclusive and encyclopaedic collection of ways in which bodily motions and actions might be linked to emotional states:

Weeping, Sighing, Laughing, Itching, Trembling, Sweating, Blushing, hearing and seeing strange noyses, visions, winde, cruditie, are motions of the body, depending upon those precedent motions of the mind (1.422.12-14)

A person's predominant temperament ("precedent motions") can thus be read through a range of expressive symptoms. Burton goes on to report that a melancholy disposition is indicated by stuttering, that is "*stutting, or tripping in speech*" (1.382.23-4). In extreme cases, further vocalisations are listed amongst the symptoms, which include "laughing, grinning, fleering, murmuring, talking to themselves, with strange mouthes and faces, inarticulate voices, exclamations, &c." (1.382.25-7).

The link between these symptoms and melancholy, Burton reports, is dryness (contra Boorde, below): "they that stutter, and are bald will be soonest melancholy (as *Avicenna* supposeth) by reason of the drynesse of their braines" (1.202.15-7). Francis Bacon agrees that stuttering is caused by dryness, but links this to a choleric disposition, saying "many Stutters (we finde) are very Cholerick Men, Choler enducing a dryness in the Tongue." (Century 4.386). To be fair, Bacon also notes that this is rare, ascribing most cases of stuttering to coldness of the tongue which he suggests can be relieved by a moderate intake of wine.

The relationship between alcohol consumption and speech fluency may have a physiological component that can be observed transhistorically. Drinking a small amount of alcohol has been shown in recent studies to improve pronunciation and fluency in second language speaking (Renner et al, 2017) and to decrease anxiety and enhance self-perception of performance in public speaking (Stevens et al, 2017). The emphasis here is on small, however, and the difficulty of getting the correct dosage is apparent in Robert Heath's "On Stut" (1650):

The more *Stut* strives to speak, he stams the more;
But his cold tongue wel oyld, and hot with store
Of wine, he speaks not like an Oracle then,
But much, and loud, and plain as other men:
Such Eloquence hath pow'rfull wine: but he
Drinks oft til he can neither speak nor see.
The Remedie here is worse then the disaese, [sic]
Better then *none*, a tongue imperfect is (F4r)

The vignette depicted here outlines *schadenfreude* at the sense of frustration experienced by the thwarted speaker, and a mocking tone which matches the comedic stage stutterers discussed below. Above all, however, Heath confirms that to *not* speak is worst of all, and that an "imperfect tongue" is better than none. The poem collapses difference into abjection, the overdose of wine meaning that 'Stut' can now no longer see, nor speak at all, leaving him in sightless silence.

One extremely common explanation for stuttering was in fact imitating a stutterer. The scientist Robert Boyle (1627-91), for example, credited his own stutter to

his acquaintance with some children of his own age, whose stuttering habitude he so long counterfeited, that at last he contracted it; possibly a just judgment upon his derision, and turning the effects of God's anger into the subject matter of his sport (Boyle 1744, 6)

Boyle's account of the origin of his stuttering is placed alongside the death of his mother as one of the two "great disasters" of his childhood, suggesting that his stammer was a source of comparable anguish to him. Although he notes that he was subjected to many attempts to cure him, he does not detail what these were, only to say that they were "tried with as much successlessness as diligence". Nevertheless, his stammer is not mentioned in the subsequent reminiscences of his schooldays at Eton, and although his musical studies were curtailed because of his "bad voice", he reports that he was able to acquire native fluency in both French and Italian during his travels in Europe, minimising the impression that stuttering might have had any impact on his later life.

In addition to the notion that stuttering is contagious, Andrew Boorde (1587) adds two further causes:

one doth come by nature. The other doth come by humiditie of the senewes of the tongue, and the third commeth to be in the companie of a stutter or stamerer (21)

To address the issue of contagion, Boorde suggests avoiding those who stutter (a 'remedy' which may have encouraged those with speech impediments to keep quiet rather than risk ostracisation). For the humidity of the tongue, Boorde recommends a concoction of basil, cowslips and wine, or of figs, honey and "Castorie". For those whose stutter is congenital, however, "it can not be holpen, except it be reformed in youth by some discrete tutor".

Stuttering speech could thus indicate a more generalised and permanent condition, whether there was a consistent humoral explanation for that or not, but equally, it is clear that Renaissance commentators recognised stammering as a localised reaction to particularly emotive circumstances, whether joyful or rage-inducing (as in the example from Painter above). For example, Burton notes Scaliger's point that "*the voice of such as are afraid, trembles, because their heart is shaken*" (I.422.15-16), connecting the trembling of fear with both inner and vocal trembling. The possibility that speech can reveal the emotional state of the speaker thus makes rhetorical training a useful skill,

not only in terms of cultivating a level of control over one's speech, but also in terms of exploiting the signifying power of vocal qualities to create intended effects.

Defining speech: rhetorical and legal positions

Thomas Wilson's *The Arte of Rhetorique* (1553) is one of many textbooks of the period that outline ideal kinds of speech against which readers might measure themselves and aim to remedy their own 'defects' by adopting the writer's advice. The prevalence of such textbooks in the period demonstrates the importance of rhetoric per se, but also a more general importance attached to speech and to speaking 'well'. Wilson describes hemming and hawing as a fault in speech that makes the speaker look stupid, and links it to a broader lack of structure in rhetorical speech. Being an effective orator is possible, he says,

if we orderly observe circumstaunces, & tell one thyng after another from tyme to tyme, not tumblyng one tale in an others necke tellyng halfe a tale, and so leavyng it rawe, hackyng & hemmyng as though our wittes and our senses were a woll gatheryng. Neither shoulde we suffer our tongue to runne before our witte, but with much warenesse sette forthe our matter, and speake our mynde evermore with judgement (fol. 59).

Wilson prizes structure and fluency. An effective speaker, he suggests, plans the order in which to say things, takes their time, and refrains from interjections. To 'hack' and 'hem' is to interject non-semantic sound into one's speech, a habit that is usually represented today with words such as "ah" and "um". Whether intentional or not, this common technique has the effect of giving an improvising speaker time to think without giving the audience the impression that the speech is over. For Wilson, however, such verbal noise makes a speaker appear witless, making clear the link between levels of intellect and kinds of speech that is implied by the idea that the "mind" is revealed through the tongue. Such supposedly inadequate forms of speech are also scorned by Franciscus Junius who in 1638 observed "they are deservedly laughed at, who going about to tell a tale doe nothing but stutte and stammer, belching out some abrupt & pittifully chopt speeches" (315).

The legal consequences of speaking in ways which are unexpected or do not conform to the ideals articulated by writers like Wilson and Junius could be severe. Leonard Cox (1524) claims that disordered speech can be a sign of guilt, for example. Cox notes that an orator can justifiably argue that a suspect willingly did the crime of which they are accused "yf after the dede was done he fled or

els when it was layed to his charge: he blushed or waxed pale or stutted & coulde nat well speke". (E6r). Cox thus states that the manner of speech in a legal case is valid grounds for believing or disbelieving a defendant's claims. Those who stutter in the dock already seem guilty to Cox, whether that stutter is related to their temporary emotional state or a more permanent condition.

Legalistic definitions further demonstrate the ways that language difference was a focus for exclusion in the period. Henry Swinburne's *A Treatise of Spousals* points to the etymology of the word "infant" in order to explain how those underage do not have the right to enter into contracts on their own behalf (in this case, he is interested in marital contracts). Although published posthumously in 1686, Swinburne's views reflect his sixteenth-century training at Oxford in the 1570s and his subsequent legal career in York before his death in 1624. Swinburne suggests that "infants" denotes

those Younglings and Babes which as yet cannot speak, for so this Substantive (*Infans*) an Infant, doth import, being compounded of *in* and *fando*, of not speaking, the Praeposition (*in*) standing for (*non*) (p.18, also cited in van Sant 2002, 48)

Swinburne then goes on to show how the word denoting the life stage of infancy is transferred to denote a particular legal status:

Our Temporal Lawyers no less significantly than usually, do call them Infants which have not attained yet to the Age of One and twenty years, because until that time they are as it were *Tongue-tied*, being unable to speak, at least *effectually*; and though they speak *naturally*, yet do not the Laws understand, or acknowledge their words to be of any force, either for Alienations or other Contracts, more than if they were young Infants, naturally destitute both of Speech and Judgment (19)

The lack of recognition in law of a person's ability to express their wishes and interests effectively silences those who are defined as underage, not to mention, as Ann van Sant points out, women, Jews, male and female religious and any others who do not fit the normative concept of "free and lawful men" (Pollock and Maitland, cited in van Sant 2002, 48). Swinburne's assumptions here bring together the ability to speak and a mental capacity to make judgements. That capacity is, in a circular fashion, conferred by conformity to the social and cultural categorisations outlined in law.

John Rastell is another early modern lawyer who outlines a range of criteria for judging mental capacity. In his glossary of legal terms, he includes the following description:

Ideot is he that is a foole naturally from hys birth, and knoweth not howe to accompt or number twenty pence nor cannot name hys father, or mother, nor of what age hymselfe is, or such like easie and common matters: soe that it appereth he hath noe maner of understandinge

of reason nor government of him selfe what is for his profit, or disprofit &c. (Rastall 1579, S4v-S5r; see also Metzler 2016, 149)

Rastall's prescriptions make clear that the manner in which this capacity is to be judged is through speech. A person must be able to "name" their parents, and this involves speaking aloud. Counting to twenty is also, presumably, a test that requires that the individual speak the numbers aloud. These "easie and common matters" are thus only accessible through speech. To be fair, Rastall also suggests that what he calls "the light of reason" (and thus avoidance of the categorisation of "ideot") can also be assumed to be present in a person who

can reade, or lerne to reade by instruction and informatyon of others, or can measure an elle of cloth, or name the daies in the weeke, or begette a childe

Rastall's prescriptions suggest that individuals are required to demonstrate proof of their worth to society, and that insufficiency in speech places an individual in a liminal category where their worth is to be doubted.

This possibility of doubt in the inherent worth of individuals who fail to conform to normative expectations around speech comes through in the autobiography of Edward, Lord Herbert of Cherbury (c.1582-1648). Although he writes with the confidence of an extraordinarily privileged aristocrat, Herbert nevertheless seems oddly insistent on his linguistic abilities and medical knowledge. In the early parts of the text, Herbert is at pains to emphasise his facility in language-learning, boasting of having taught himself Spanish, French and Italian (in addition to his knowledge of Greek and Latin). He also outlines at length various medical remedies that he recommends and an anecdote in which his intervention cured a family servant who had been given up for dead by doctors. These assertions are telling juxtaposed with his account of speech delay in early childhood.

He describes his infancy as "very sickly", and outlines an inability to speak which he blames on frequent discharges from his ears that he ascribes to epilepsy. There also seems to have been a psychological component here, as he describes having feared saying something "imperfect or impertinent", preferring not to speak at all rather than risk this outcome. When he did speak, he reports asking some precociously philosophical questions which made his nurse and other carers laugh at him. It was because of this, Herbert claims, that his younger self refrained from speaking,

even though he could understand what was said. This had the result that “many thought I should be ever dumbe” (11) and that, because of the “defluction” from his ears, nobody thought “fitt to teach mee soe much as my Alphabet” (13). Herbert’s childhood symptoms placed him in the liminal category outlined by Rastell, not given the opportunity to learn to read until these symptoms ceased, which Herbert reports was at the age of 7. Far from seeing his case as evidence that his early symptoms were not cause to abandon his education, Herbert instead suggests that it shows that hereditary diseases, amongst which he includes epilepsy, must be cured in infancy or not at all. Thus, Herbert is able to distance himself from the outcast ‘infans’ in both senses: he is no longer a child, and he is no longer unable to speak. He is now able to assume his hereditary role as heir to his patrimony, becoming a courtier, diplomat, philosopher and writer.

Herbert’s experiences demonstrate that even those in the most privileged tranches of society were at risk of exclusion from legal personhood if they were unable to speak. His autobiography defensively positions himself as diametrically opposed to this alternative identity that haunted his childhood. Hesitancy in speech, repeating syllables, or unorthodox pronunciation were considered habits that should be left in childhood, as specifically mandated by St Paul: “When I was a child, I spake as a child, I understood as a child, I thought as a child: but when I became a man, I put away childish things” (KJV, 1 Corinthians 13, 11). Herbert prefers to leave his stammering in his childhood and, like Boyle above, once his account reaches his adulthood, he portrays his linguistic abilities as exceptional.³ An expert in medical matters and a confident speaker in several languages, Herbert’s self-portrayal seems defined against the spectre of his former child self, at risk of rejection and neglect.

In contrast to Herbert, Niccolo Tartaglia (c.1506-1557), the renowned Venetian mathematician, seems to have had a lifelong speech impediment, signified by his name, Tartaglia, meaning stutterer. According to Smith, he was reputed to have been injured as a child by a sabre cut to the mouth during the invasion of Brescia in 1512 (Smith 1958, 297). Nevertheless, he was able to participate in learned discourse, reputedly feuding with fellow mathematician Cordano and

³ For a discussion of the relationship between multilingualism and stuttering, see Shell.

contributing significantly to the mathematical advances of the day by showing how to solve the cubic equation. Even for someone of Tartaglia's remarkable mathematical talents, however, difficulty with speech was what gave him his nickname, further confirming the close links between kinds of speech and identity.

Performing speech: words and drama

"Tartaglia" was a nickname denoting stuttering, or some sort of impeded speech. When read in conjunction with European drama history, this does not seem to have been a particularly flattering gesture. The name was also in use for one of the stock characters of the *commedia dell'arte*, the traditional Italian improvised theatre. Tartaglia was usually a minor figure, brought on for a set piece scene. His characteristic stutter was, as Rudlin (2002) points out, an opportunity to generate comedy emphasising rude syllables or the proliferation of synonyms in order to avoid particularly difficult sounds (155). The opportunities presented by this kind of character were extended musically in Italian opera. It is in the very nature of music and song to extend and exploit the sonic properties of language. Syllables are stretched and repeated, and the rhythm of spoken words and sentences is disrupted. In *Il ritorno d'Ulisse* (1639) Monteverdi included a singing stuttering character. The opera retold the myth of Odysseus's return to Ithaca. Monteverdi's version of the story included a character called Iro, based on a figure mentioned only once by Homer. In the opera, Iro's role is expanded, but only as a form of comic relief. As Rosand (1989) points out, he is entirely superfluous to the plot (147). Having been living off handouts from Odysseus's rivals, Iro's livelihood is threatened by the return of the hero. Once his patrons have been killed off by Odysseus, death is apparently Iro's only option. Iro's final aria leading up to his suicide is a bravura vocal display, starting with a howl of anguish and disintegrating into repeated syllables. As Rosand (1995) puts it, Iro "begs for consolation" and receives none, as his language dissolves into meaningless noise (albeit rendered musically). The irony here is that a role which depicts a lack of competence in speaking requires exceptional skill from the speaking (or singing) performer.

In terms of understanding speech in the period, however, it is clear that speaking (or singing) strangely on stage was a source of mockery and entertainment, indicating foolishness and thus a

demand for ridicule. For example, the character of Amoretta in Ford's *The Lady's Trial* (1639), speaks with a lisp, represented by the frequent use of "th" in much of her dialogue in the text. For example, upon hearing music, she exclaims:

“Dentlemen then ye ith thith muthicke yourth, or can ye tell what great manths fidleth, made it tith vedee petty noyth, but who thold thend it” [Gentlemen then ye. Is this music yours, or can ye tell what great man's fiddles made it? Tis very pretty noise, but who should send it?] (H1r)

Although English spelling was by no means regularised in the period, it is clear that the orthography here represents unusual pronunciation. We see a range of potential moments of difference from standard speech. In addition to the "th" sound, there is the "d" sound at the start of 'gentlemen' and in the middle of 'very', and the rendering of "pretty" as "petty". One of her suitors, Futelli, highlights her idiosyncratic way of speaking as a means to flirt with her, saying that, rather than asking futile questions about the music, her "lips are destind to a better use, | Or else the proverbe failes of lisping maids". As Hopkins (2011) explains in her edition of the play, lispng girls were proverbially supposed to be good at kissing (122), and Futelli is playfully suggesting that instead of talking, Amoretta should use her lips for that. This moment brings together a confluence of misogynistic ideas around speech, combining infantilisation of Amoretta as a childishlly lispng maid with sexualisation of her through presenting her mouth as a sexual organ. Furthermore, it also draws on a broader misogynist trope of silencing the garrulous woman, whose mouth is axiomatically talkative and better used for responding to male sexual overtures. Female characters on stage in the period regularly repeat and condone these kinds of stereotypes, even when they do not embody them. The Duchess of Malfi, for example, goes calmly to her death, relinquishing speech and what she describes as the "woman's fault" of talkativeness (*The Duchess of Malfi*, 4.2.218. Anderson 2017, 110). Amoretta seems unfazed by Futelli's banter, telling him to "come behind with your mockth [mocks]".

Of course, these women, imagined by men and played by boys on stage, do not offer us a view of how women actually might have spoken, but these representations do offer us a glimpse of the gendered context in which voices were heard. A grieving Lear describes Cordelia's voice as "ever soft, | Gentle and low, an excellent thing in woman" (*The Tragedy of King Lear*, 5.3.246-7), despite

having disowned her at the beginning of the play for not speaking as fulsomely as his ego had required. At the end of the play, death prevents her from speaking at all. Even when not presented as explicitly having speech impediments, women on stage consistently speak too much *and* too little, and speech in and of itself was an unavoidably gendered act.

Boy actors occupied a liminal state between male and female kinds of speech (children were routinely grammatically gendered neutral with the pronoun “it” in the period). Gina Bloom (1998) speculates about the impact of puberty on boys’ performances as female characters, and suggests that the instability of a breaking voice might be a feature of boy actors’ performances rather than necessarily a problem. Certainly, boy actors were a mainstay not just of commercial theatre, but of civic pageantry and private performances also, making boys’ voices a ubiquitous feature of the sound of dramatic performance in the period. Their ability to inhabit and ventriloquise voices of different genders made them a frequent vehicle for testing ideas of speech.

In *The Lady’s Trial*, Amoretta’s mistaken attitude towards marriage is not explicitly linked to her idiosyncratic speech patterns, but does correspond with the foolishness of her attitudes and helps to establish the necessity of her “reformation” (C3r). The scheme to gull her is meant to cure her of her unreasonable expectations of marriage, and bring her to accept that she must marry someone of comparable social standing to her own (as opposed to the rank to which she aspires). Amoretta’s lisp is not cured along with her unrealistic views,⁴ but her unorthodox pronunciation is clearly meant to complement a sense of her as foolish and laughable. The way she expresses herself is meant to be as ridiculous as the things that she says.

In *The Birth of Merlin*, a magically-induced inability to speak altogether is represented by the Clown’s repeated “hum”. This spelling indicates that the previously-loquacious character is reduced to close-mouthed noise, and his dialogue on either side of his forced muteness suggests we are to imagine that he is trying to say ‘let me speak’ whilst his mouth is forced closed. In this case, the use of hum to represent textually a noise denoting a frustrated desire to speak is clear. The Clown is an example of the way that inhibited speech seems to be often associated with characters who in other

⁴ and thus does not constitute an example of the kind of “narrative prosthesis” theorised by Mitchell and Snyder in their book of the same name

ways are actually extremely - even excessively - eloquent. This showcases a performer's skill in replicating complex and varied speech patterns, as well as perhaps offering potential delight for the audience in unexpectedly seeing an actor who usually plays this kind of role shutting up temporarily.

Captain Tucca of *Poetaster*, for example, is a very verbose character whose aggressive language is part of his 'skeldering' - that is, hustling and swindling. David Bevington suggests in the Cambridge edition that his odd speech patterns are modelled on a historical person, which seems likely given the play's participation in the War of the Theatres. It is when in character as Mars that Tucca is described as stuttering with anger (4.5.69), though there is no textual representation of this kind of speech in the play. Nevertheless, the reference to him stutting brings in the kind of irony alluded to above, where a character's usually active flow of speech has been interrupted by anger or strong emotion.

This is most obvious in Marston's *What You Will*, a play in which the apparently permanent stutter of Captain Albano is a significant driver of the plot and source of comedic action. Albano, supposedly lost at sea, comes home to find his wife about to remarry and everyone he knows mistaking him for someone else. These distressing circumstances do eventually give rise to his signature stutter, but not before he has delivered three fairly long speeches in 3.2. It is of course possible that, in performance, an actor could improvise extra stuttering, but it seems unlikely given the length of the scene. Furthermore, the effect seems rather to be one of extended verbal disquisition on the unpleasantness of what Albano is facing, building up in a kind of crescendo to a climactic spluttering. Albano may be a stutterer, but he is also very talkative.

When plotting to prevent Albano's supposed widow from remarrying, the conspirators, unaware that Albano is indeed alive, select Francisco the perfumer to impersonate him, as he is:

ADRIAN: Exceedingly the strangest nearly like

In voice, in gesture, face, in -

RANDOLPHO: Nay he hath Albano's imperfection too,

And stuts when he is vehemently moved (381-4)

Albano's 'imperfection', his stutter, is something that is a permanent aspect of his character and yet one which only manifests at moments of excitement. It is at one and the same time an idiosyncrasy that marks him out as unique, as clearly as his clothes and other mannerisms do, and yet also

something which enables him to be replicated when he is being impersonated by Francisco.

Francisco's stutter matches Albano's as effortlessly as his face does. As soon as Francisco is wearing the appropriate clothing, the transformation is complete.

When encouraged to "grow in heat and stut" (971) by Jacomo in practice for the trick, Francisco obliges, and his speech excoriates Celia's new suitor as "An odd phantasma, a beggar, sir, a who-who-who-*what you will*, a stragglng go-go-go-gunds, f-f-f-fut -" (972-3). Part of the comedy here surely lies in the potential for suggesting blasphemous or otherwise taboo speech without actually articulating it fully. The repetition of the play's title is also a potentially pleasurable release for the audience, standing in for an unsaid profanity and drawing attention to its own metatheatricity.

In the subsequent scene, Albano repeats Francisco's outburst, again in imagining Celia's suitor. This time, it is in relation to Albano's son who is about to acquire a step-father or

father-in-law, his father-in-devil, or d-d-d-d-devil
f-f-f-father, or who-who-who-who-*what you will* -

The repetition here of the titular phrase *What You Will* reinforces the similarity between Albano and Francisco's speech. It resounds elsewhere in the play, too, occurring six times in the main action and four times in the Induction. As a phrase, it gestures to an unspecified, unsaid thing, and thus draws the play as a whole into a process of avoidance, and of not being able to say what is surely about to be said but never comes.⁵

Albano's experiences leave him in confusion to the extent that he begins to doubt his own identity. As his state of mind deteriorates his speech continues to be represented as fragmented and enraged. The final straw comes when he meets his brothers who mistake him for his own imposter. Albano comes to believe that the rumours of his death must be true, concluding "I was drown'd | And now my soule is skipt into a perfumer". It is language that renders this transformation complete. When a servant addresses him as Albano, he rejects the name on the grounds that if his own brothers think that he is Franciso the perfumer, then he must be. A name is lacking substance and is not

⁵ Marc Shell (2012) describes the tactics used to avoid certain syllables in his account of his own experience of stuttering.

something he “could tast or touch | Or see, or feele” but is only “voice, and ayre”. Instead he concludes he must be Francisco, and as a tradesman, he adopts the catchphrase of a street seller: “What do you lack? what ist you lack right that's my cry.” Language in the form of his name has no power to render identity, but as a performed act, language turns him into the embodiment of Francisco, peddling his perfumes. If speech is the means to know a person’s mind, then Albano’s radical alienation from himself is also accomplished through speaking with a voice that is at once his own and someone else’s. Albano’s misery is untangled by the end of the comedy, and he is restored to his true identity and reunited with his wife. But the play’s exploration of the role of language in creating and confirming identity implies that it requires constant renewal and restatement. To be himself, Albano needs to speak (and be heard by others) as himself.

Conclusion

The power of speech to constitute identity is made most clear in the theatre. Theatrical drama presented a forum through which voices and identities could be ventriloquised, challenged, dismantled and reinforced. Albano’s identity is created within a framework of explicit theatricality precisely so that it can be destroyed and then restored. The theatre is thus a space in which fictional speech can be employed to explore the implications of speaking selves speaking as *other* selves for understanding questions of agency, identity, and moral responsibility. In drama, idiosyncrasies of speech become distinguishing features that differentiate character on stage, but which also come to signify character traits, evidence of inner qualities and of individuality. The consolidation and expansion of professionalised drama in the period thus enabled the repeated demonstration and exploration of the complexities of the relationship between speech and identity.

Drama therefore, by its very nature, stages and makes explicit what the rest of this chapter has shown: that in the Renaissance, performed utterance was legally, historically, and socially the basis of articulating one’s personhood. The alternative and underprivileged speech variants discussed demonstrate how the cultures of a period only just moving to the printed word acted to socially disable those whose utterances were ‘imperfect’. For some, speech defects could be safely explained away as childhood aberrations or emotional outbursts, temporary conditions which bore no

significance for their social identity. For others, by implication, speaking differently could be heard as an irrevocable stamp of difference, of particularities of geographical location and social hierarchy, and of thresholds of mental and intellectual capability that barred entry into social discourse. Although it is no longer possible to hear these lost voices, their traces make clear that in the Renaissance, speaking differently could effectively become not speaking at all.

