



Universiteit
Leiden
The Netherlands

Migrant churches in The Hague - new religious and linguistic opportunities for churchgoers

Alberts, S.E.; Tieken-Boon van Ostade, I.M.

Citation

Alberts, S. E., & Tieken-Boon van Ostade, I. M. (2022). Migrant churches in The Hague - new religious and linguistic opportunities for churchgoers. *Journal Of Multilingual And Multicultural Development*, 1-19. doi:10.1080/01434632.2022.2053691

Version: Publisher's Version

License: [Creative Commons CC BY-NC-ND 4.0 license](https://creativecommons.org/licenses/by-nc-nd/4.0/)

Downloaded from: <https://hdl.handle.net/1887/3308923>

Note: To cite this publication please use the final published version (if applicable).



Migrant churches in The Hague – new religious *and* linguistic opportunities for churchgoers

Elise Alberts & Ingrid Tieken-Boon van Ostade

To cite this article: Elise Alberts & Ingrid Tieken-Boon van Ostade (2022): Migrant churches in The Hague – new religious *and* linguistic opportunities for churchgoers, Journal of Multilingual and Multicultural Development, DOI: [10.1080/01434632.2022.2053691](https://doi.org/10.1080/01434632.2022.2053691)

To link to this article: <https://doi.org/10.1080/01434632.2022.2053691>



© 2022 The Author(s). Published by Informa UK Limited, trading as Taylor & Francis Group



Published online: 29 Mar 2022.



Submit your article to this journal [↗](#)



Article views: 351



View related articles [↗](#)



View Crossmark data [↗](#)

Migrant churches in The Hague – new religious *and* linguistic opportunities for churchgoers

Elise Alberts and Ingrid Tieken-Boon van Ostade 

Leiden University Centre for Linguistics, Leiden, The Netherlands

ABSTRACT

The Hague, the third largest city of The Netherlands, is a multicultural and multi-ethnic urban centre with many migrant churches scattered across the city. This article examines the linguistic presence and identity of a select number of English-speaking churches and their identification through Linguistic Landscaping. Our findings show that, while it is claimed that Dutch society is becoming increasingly secularised, the many migrant and other international churches currently present in The Hague suggest the opposite. In addition, it appeared that English-language churches in The Hague attract large numbers of Dutch congregants for whom English is their second language. Reasons for this are that English is perceived as a lighter language than Dutch for practising their religion, and that it brings fresh perspectives to their faith. The use of English is thus expanding to the religious domain in The Netherlands in a new way (cf. Edwards, A. 2016. *English in the Netherlands: Functions, Forms and Attitudes*. Amsterdam/Philadelphia: John Benjamins). Applying Linguistic Landscaping as a research tool was found to work only for older heritage-language churches, which have a more established and sometimes even officially recognised position in the city, than newer migrant churches, whose presence is often transient in line with the changing nature of superdiverse cities.

ARTICLE HISTORY

Received 23 December 2021
Accepted 10 March 2022

KEYWORDS

Linguistic landscape;
religion; superdiversity;
language attitudes; migrant
churches; English; The Hague

Introduction

In June 2017, the Dutch regional broadcasting company *Omroep West* published an article on the secularisation process affecting Dutch society today, focussing especially on The Hague. One of the interviewees, however, protested that there is actually an increase in the number of churches in this city, which to him suggested evidence to the contrary.¹ The article itself did refer to the many churches currently catering for the numerous ethnic communities inhabiting The Hague (*Omroep West 2017*). Specific migrant churches mentioned were those attended by Ghanese, Bulgarian, Portuguese, English and Chinese worshippers. The article also mentioned that the large number of such churches calls for creative attempts at finding places for their congregations to meet, such as schools, conference rooms and even private homes. This was confirmed by a leaflet distributed in June 2020 in Stationsbuurt (where Ingrid Tieken lives), a borough situated close to The Hague's city centre, which announced the impending move of the Wesley Methodist Church to a former childcare centre nearby (Figure 1).

CONTACT Ingrid Tieken-Boon van Ostade  i.m.tieken@hum.leidenuniv.nl

© 2022 The Author(s). Published by Informa UK Limited, trading as Taylor & Francis Group
This is an Open Access article distributed under the terms of the Creative Commons Attribution-NonCommercial-NoDerivatives License (<http://creativecommons.org/licenses/by-nc-nd/4.0/>), which permits non-commercial re-use, distribution, and reproduction in any medium, provided the original work is properly cited, and is not altered, transformed, or built upon in any way.



Figure 1. Temporary announcement of the Wesley Methodist Church's services (*aanbidding*) in English and Dutch (© Ingrid Tieken-Boon van Ostade).

Note: Unless indicated otherwise, all pictures in this paper were taken by Elise Alberts.

Upon reading the article, the question arose as to how many such churches there are in The Hague. The question is inextricably linked to the question of how many languages are spoken in this highly multicultural city (see Tieken-Boon van Ostade 2019) or indeed how many nationalities there are in The Hague. The latter two questions are impossible to answer, primarily because, unlike in countries like Finland (Gruzdeva, Huttunen, and Philippova 2018), the ethnic origin of migrants and other internationals entering The Netherlands is not registered (Cottaar 2005, 227), let alone the languages they speak. In the late 1990s, an inventory of the home languages spoken by The Hague's schoolchildren (Extra et al. 2001) listed 89 of them, including Dutch; today, however, due to the continued and increased immigration affecting many parts of Western Europe, this figure is no longer accurate. As for the different nationalities found in The Hague, the unverifiable figure of 180 is usually cited (e.g. in Magendane 2021, 150). The former question is likewise hard to answer, given the many private places where migrant and other international churches are located.² Checking the list of addresses for non-Dutch churches in The Hague on the website www.kerkinderhaag.nl, however, proved very informative in this respect, as at the time of writing this paper it contained 89 such churches. Most likely this is a conservative figure, since there are possibly many more; according to Stoppels et al. (2008), many migrant churches are not officially registered. For all that, this figure forms the starting point of our investigation.

If there are indeed many migrant and other international churches in The Hague, you would expect them to be visually present in the city's linguistic landscape – as indeed they are, as Figure 2 illustrates (cf. Figure 1).

While the German church in Figure 2 merely presents its name on its façade (*Deutschsprachige Katholische Gemeinde/Huize Rafaël* 'German-speaking Catholic parish/House of Raphael'), using German alongside Dutch, the Walloon Church displays a biblical saying in French: *Je suis la lumière du monde* 'I am the light of the world'. Do other churches that are of interest to our analysis, like the American Protestant Church of The Hague (2019) or the Anglican Church of St John and St Philip, similarly exhibit their linguistic identity in The Hague's public space, and if so, how? Several international churches such as the Activate International Church, Bethel International Church Den Haag and Crossroads International Church of The Hague carry the word *international* in their names; does this mean



Figure 2. Left: German Roman-Catholic Church in Scheveningen. Right: Walloon Church of The Hague.

Note: Originally a neighbouring fishermen's village, today, Scheveningen is one of The Hague's 44 boroughs (Figure 4).

that English, as the language most frequently spoken in an international context, is their primary religious language? What is the internal linguistic policy of international churches in The Hague with respect to the language(s) adopted during church service? And how is their linguistic identity reflected in The Hague's linguistic landscape? Before discussing how we aim to answer these questions, we will provide a brief account of the current status of The Hague as a superdiverse city. The results of our analysis and the conclusions arrived at are provided in the final sections.

The Hague's superdiversity

Though Amsterdam is the capital of The Netherlands, The Hague functions as the administrative capital. It is where the Dutch parliament is situated and where traditionally the country's rulers have resided (Nigten 2005). With 549,163 inhabitants in January 2021 (*Den Haag in Cijfers*), it is the third largest city of The Netherlands, though it has the largest number of citizens with a migration background, with Amsterdam being a close runner-up (allecijfers.nl). Furthermore, this figure comprises more than half its current inhabitants (55.6%). Superdiversity, or 'diversity within diversity' (Blommaert 2013, 4), is a concept first formulated by Vertovec (2007) 'to address the changing nature of global migration' (Pütz and Mund 2019, 10). It characterises megacities like Cairo or Tokyo, but also cities like The Hague (and likewise Amsterdam and Rotterdam). The number of inhabitants with a migration background currently not only outnumbers that of native citizens, but is also steadily growing: since 2014, a random starting point, the number of citizens of The Hague with a native Dutch background has decreased by about 10,000, while the city itself has grown by about 35,000 (*Den Haag in Cijfers*). This increase is thus due to a rise in the number of internationals – a term covering the many categories of new arrivals inhabiting the city today. Just as in megacities (cf. several papers in Smakman and Heinrich 2018), in The Hague, too, newcomers, whether permanent settlers (migrants, refugees, asylum seekers) or temporary inhabitants (seasonal labourers, expats, students, refugees, tourists), have to adjust to their new environment, while the municipality has to face the consequences of the variable make-up of the city, adapting older norms, linguistic and otherwise, to continually changing circumstances (cf. Smakman and Heinrich 2018, 4).

The Hague's status as a city of internationals has a long history: during the second half of the nineteenth century, twenty to twenty-five countries had diplomatic representatives in the city (Nigten 2005, 112). Today, The Hague houses important international organisations, like Eurojust, the Organisation for the Prohibition of Chemical Weapons, Europol, and the International Court of Justice (Nigten 2005, 121). A number of specific ethnic communities, moreover, are associated with The Hague due to The Netherlands' colonial history. Willems (2001:69), for instance, notes that in 1930, the city counted around 1200 people born in the Dutch East Indies, a figure which rose spectacularly at Indonesia's independence after World War II. The figure includes Indonesians as well as people of Dutch or mixed Dutch origin who had migrated at some point in history to this former Dutch colony.³ The Hague has consequently been nicknamed the *kampong*, Indonesian for 'village', of The Netherlands (Cottaar 2005, 218), so it is hardly surprising to see that our list of 89 migrant and international churches includes six Indonesian ones. The 1930s also marks the start of Chinese immigration into The Hague (Willems, Cottaar, and Yin Or 2010). Today, it is the only ethnic community in the city whose visibility – linguistic and otherwise – has received official municipal sanction through the establishment of a formally recognised Chinatown (Tieken-Boon van Ostade, Geuke, and Oechies 2020).

Cottaar (2005, 222–223) furthermore mentions the recruitment during the 1960s of migrant workers from various Mediterranean countries – Italy, Spain, Turkey, Greece, Morocco, and, later, former Yugoslavia – with Turks and Moroccans eventually settling in The Hague (as elsewhere in the country) in substantial numbers. A decade later, upon Surinam's independence from The Netherlands in 1975, many Surinamese came to The Hague as well. In 2004, the city's Surinamese population (45,172) far exceeded the number of registered Turks (31,052), Moroccans (23,525), Indonesians (21,933) and Antilleans (11,117). (Cottaar 2005, 217). Today, as *Den Haag in Cijfers* shows, the relative size of these population groups in The Hague is still fairly similar, though the number of Turks in the city (41,168) is much closer to that of Surinamese (45,839); only the number of Indonesian inhabitants has been dwindling (17,205) – for reasons that are currently unclear. These figures agree with the languages most spoken in The Hague: the Top 5 in Extra et al. (2001, 17–18) comprises Turkish, Surinamese Hindi, Berber (Morocco) and Arabic, with English in fifth place. Not included in Cottaar's figures is the increase of migrant workers from central and eastern European countries since joining the European Union: Estonia, Hungary, Latvia, Lithuania, Poland, Slovenia, Slovakia and the Czech Republic in 2004 and Bulgaria and Romania in 2007 (CBS). The consequent freedom of movement within the EU, followed by the abolishment of a work permit requirement for The Netherlands a little later, led to an increase of internationals from these countries in The Hague as well, particularly of seasonal workers due to the proximity of the greenhouse industry in Westland, south of the city. As shown in Figure 3, the Polish population increase took off immediately after 2004 and continued to rise steadily.⁴

The Polish increase in the city has led to the derogatory qualification of The Hague as 'the Polish capital of The Netherlands' (*Rijswijks Dagblad*, 25 April 2018) and of Laak, the borough where most Poles are living, as 'little Warsaw' (Bral 2018). It consequently comes as no surprise that our list includes a Polish church, located in the city centre.

The Hague's linguistic landscape

The Hague's linguistic diversity has barely been studied (Tieken-Boon van Ostade 2019): the city was, for instance, not part of the LUCIDE project (King and Carson 2016), which did include Utrecht even though this is only the fourth largest city of the country and has a much smaller migrant population (36% today; *allecijfers.nl*). Nor was The Hague part of the study by Cornips, de Rooij, and Smakman (2018), which focused on Amsterdam, Rotterdam and, again, Utrecht only. The Hague is, moreover, known as the most segregated city of The Netherlands (van de Wouden and de Bruijne 2001, 118–120). Laak has already been mentioned as a borough with a

Polish inhabitants of The Hague (1996–2018)

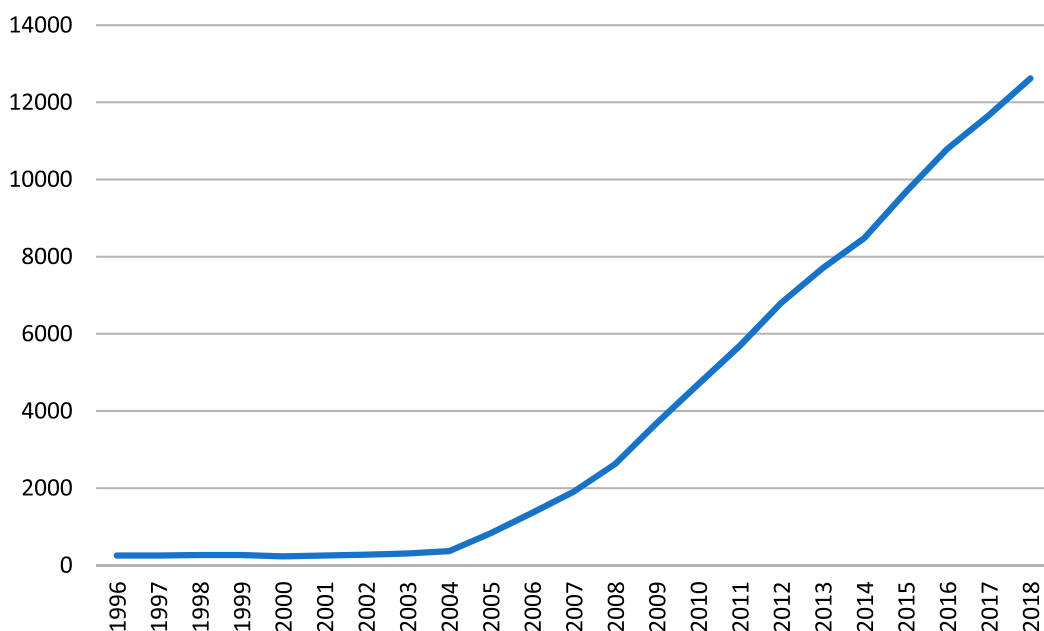


Figure 3. Increase of Polish inhabitants of The Hague (1996–2018).

Note: With thanks to Wouter van Bijsterveld (allecijfers.nl).

large Polish population, though according to Nijhoff (2017), Poles move to the slightly more up-market Valkenboskwartier when settling more permanently (see the map in Figure 4).

Many Polish people also live in Rustenburg and Oostbroek, as shown by job agencies advertising in Polish there. Adjacent Transvaal is where according to Noteboom and Taal (2007:29, 58) many Surinamese and Turks are living (thus giving rise to its nickname ‘little Istanbul’, 2007:136), while also attracting many central and eastern Europeans. The Hague’s Chinatown is today rather a commercial than a residential Chinese area, and is nowadays more generally Asian in character (Tieken-Boon van Ostade, Geuke, and Oechies 2020). Most of the languages spoken by these communities are indeed visibly present in the areas mentioned. Going from Stationsbuurt, for instance, through Schilderswijk to the open-air market on the edge of Transvaal, the linguistic landscape changes from largely Moroccan through Turkish to Polish. Schilderswijk is one of the poorest districts of The Netherlands and is commonly believed to house over 100 nationalities, another unverifiable figure.

But the Polish church, as already mentioned, is located in the city centre, not in any of the boroughs with a high concentration of Polish inhabitants, nor are the three Chinese churches on our list situated in Chinatown. The Walloon Church shown in Figure 1 finds itself in an upmarket shopping street in the city centre close to the royal palace, while the German church in that figure is in Scheveningen, possibly to serve the many German tourists frequenting this seaside resort during the summer. Sleebe (2005:278) notes that already in 1874 Scheveningen housed a chapel catering for tourists with services in English and German. Should the churches on our list be linguistically visible in the boroughs where they are situated, their presence will therefore not add to the diagnostic means to which Linguistic Landscaping is often put in order to identify the presence of particular ethnic communities in certain districts (Blommaert 2013, 2; Gaiser and Matras 2016). Blommaert (2013, 90) notes that ‘churches have become one of the main infrastructures of superdiversity’, and in Berchem, the neighbourhood in Antwerp (Belgium) which he studied, he counted as many as sixteen ‘places of worship’ – churches, but also mosques. Their visibility is not always obvious,

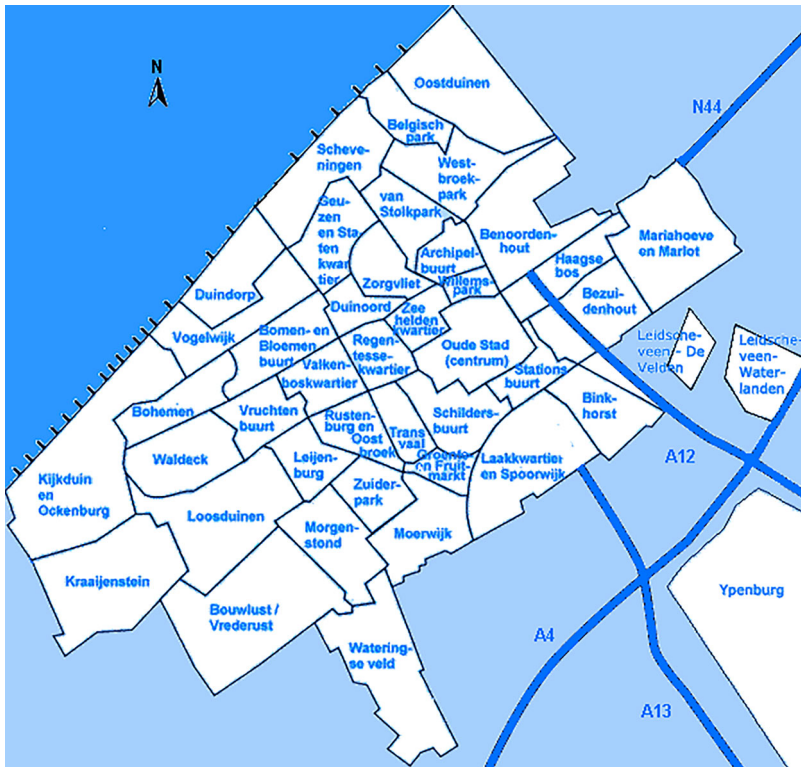


Figure 4. The Hague's 44 boroughs.

Note: Source: https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/Category:Maps_of_The_Hague#/media/File:Wijken_denhaag.gif.

he writes, since they may be housed in private homes which are not marked for the religious function they have. Churches, Blommaert argues, are important to newcomers to a city, helping them 'to get access to cheap housing, child care, inexpensive cares and furniture, and sometimes also jobs or financial loans' (2013, 104). This social-welfare function, catering specifically for foreigners and especially for refugees during the current war in Ukraine,⁵ is evident in the churches we visited, too, though as we will see, and due to the multilingual interests of many native Dutch people in The Hague, English-speaking churches have a different function here as well.

Fieldwork and selection principles

As for our methodology, we decided to approach only a selection of the churches on our list because it would have been unrealistic to access all 89 of them. Moreover, although the presence of migrant churches in The Hague often does not correlate with the districts where most nationalities these churches cater for are situated (cf. the Polish and Chinese churches mentioned above), their visibility, as illustrated above, often *is* marked linguistically in the surroundings. As we will demonstrate, differences in this respect reflect the different ways in which migrant churches are integrated into The Hague's linguistic landscape. We thus developed a fieldwork method which comprised attending church service and establishing a relationship with church representatives that would facilitate interviewing them for the purpose of acquiring data for our study.

Our selection principles for the churches we wished to visit were the following. To begin with, we were curious about the effect of The Hague's current Dutch-only policy on the linguistic representation of the churches in the city. In effect, however, English takes up an exceptional position with respect to this policy (Thieme 2020), being considered an acceptable language for communication

in the area designated as the International Zone; this is an affluent part of The Hague where several of the above-mentioned international organisations are situated (www.denhaag.nl/en) and where many inhabitants speak English. Nevertheless, English is increasingly visible in official signage elsewhere as well, as became particularly noticeable when restrictions were implemented in 2020 and 2021 to try and curb the effects of the Covid-19 pandemic. Adopting English as a general language of communication reflects the current situation in The Netherlands, where English increasingly has the status of a second – rather than foreign – language (Edwards 2016). We therefore decided to focus only on the traditionally English-language and international churches on our list.

In order to see if there were any internal (church policy) and external (visual representation) linguistic differences between these two categories we selected three well-established heritage-language churches that represented different religious denominations, the Anglican Church of St John and St David, the Roman-Catholic Church of Our Saviour and the American Protestant Church, and two non-denominational international churches. Our list comprised 36 such churches, but not all of them proved relevant to our analysis, as became apparent after attending their services: Bethel International Church, for instance, caters largely for Indonesians only. We therefore selected Crossroads International Church and the Redeemer International Church already mentioned for our analysis. At all five churches, Elise attended a Sunday service and personally contacted the churches' pastors or other representatives who were knowledgeable about the policies and practices in their respective church communities due to their leadership positions in the churches concerned. This resulted in five participants, one for each church, who were subsequently interviewed regarding the churches' linguistic policies and other topics relevant for our analysis. Information on the history and background of the churches was gathered by examining the churches' websites and by confirming the information during the interviews. For the linguistic landscape data, the churches' presence in the respective districts was examined before attending service. This combination of research methods was chosen in order to focus not only on the outward linguistic presence of the churches in The Hague, but also to uncover the motivations and ideologies surrounding linguistic topics presented in – and outside church.

The interviews, which were held in November and December 2019, were semi-structured; topics included the language(s) used during and outside church service; each church's language policy in relation to its position in The Hague's linguistic landscape; whether the use of English as the main language influenced the type of congregants visiting the church; and whether the linguistic needs of non-native English churchgoers (and their children) were catered for. The interviews, with one exception (the Church of Our Saviour), were conducted in English, and will be summarised and analysed in the next section.

The five churches as case studies

In this section, we will analyse the interviews with representatives of the five churches that served as case studies for this paper alongside the linguistic landscape data collected. We will do so in chronological order, i.e. by the dates when the churches were established in The Hague, and provide brief summaries of their history and background. For reasons of privacy, our informants will be quoted anonymously.

The Anglican Church of St. John and St. Philip.

One of the oldest English-speaking church communities in The Hague is the Church of St. John and St. Philip (ACJP). It dates back to 1586, although its current building, situated in Archipelbuurt (Figure 4), has only been in use since 1952, as the original one had been destroyed during World War II (ACJP). A commemorative sign in front of the church (in Dutch) tells the story of the bombardment and the destruction of the church in March 1945 (Figure 5).



Figure 5. Sign in Dutch describing ACJP's history, reading: 'Messages from the previous century' (top) and 'This church replaced the English church in Bezuidenhout which was destroyed during the bombardment in March 1945 (see stone in the wall of the church). A message from the Chaplain of the Church of St. John and St. Philip' (bottom).

The new church was aimed at American and British visitors, and received funding from the U.S. after the war, according to our informant. A monolingual English noticeboard in front of the church announces events and service hours of the church community (Figure 6).

ACJP is thus clearly visible within The Hague's linguistic landscape; Dutch people call it *de Engelse kerk* ('the English church'), though this is not how the church wishes to profile itself: 'The international flavour is very much part of our identity,' our informant told us. While the church also welcomes Dutch congregants – around one-third of its members are Dutch – it mostly caters to the international community: people working in The Hague from a variety of language backgrounds but often with jobs that require English. When asked if language classes (in Dutch or English) are provided, our informant explained that this is not considered necessary, as the church primarily attracts the already English-speaking community in The Hague.

ACJP's church service is similar to that of Anglican churches worldwide, though it offers both a traditional liturgical service, which follows the Common Worship format, and a contemporary, more informal service. Our informant told us that ACJP is quite careful about its language use: 'Language per se is incredibly – incredibly – bound up in a permanent, inextricable way with Anglican identity and the Anglican denomination.' Changing the service may create tensions in the community, she added. There are, however, a few exceptions to this. The Lord's Prayer, for example, is said both in English and Dutch: 'It is one of the few prayers that Christians from around the world



Figure 6. Noticeboard outside of The Church of St. John & St. Philip.

tend to know by heart, and you can only know something by heart through repetition. [We] don't want to deprive our young Dutch kids of that opportunity to learn it by heart. It is an oral prayer, not a read prayer.' Moreover, for the sake of Dutch children who attend church along with their parents, a Dutch hymn is occasionally sung as well. Sunday school is bilingual, with a Dutch interpreter present. However, not everyone in the church approves of this, as it splits up the children and is believed to hamper their acquisition of English.

Interestingly, the most passionate defenders of keeping the service in English in this church are the Dutch congregants. Dutch people love the English Book of Common Prayer, which is one of the reasons for them to visit the church. Dutch members enjoy the English liturgy and style of worship, our informant explained: 'When they hear the same Bible passages in Dutch, they [the texts] feel heavy, they feel it's oppressive. [But in English] they feel a certain lightness to it and a warmth and a love they did not feel in Dutch.' Our informant called English a '*via media*', a mediating language that brings a new side to Christianity. After church service, during coffee, the language of social interaction was mainly English, although Dutch was heard as well.

The American Protestant Church

Another long-established church in The Hague, the American Protestant Church (APCH), is situated a little further from the city centre, in Bezuidenhout (Figure 4). The church itself was established during the second half of the nineteenth century, when English services were organised by the Dutch Reformed Church specifically for anglophone tourists in the summer. The church caught the attention of the Reformed Church in America who decided to co-sponsor it and supply it with ministers (APCH). After World War II, American businessmen, military and embassy personnel started attending service, which led to a considerably expanded congregation. A larger building was consequently called for, which prompted the purchase of the impressive building that is in use now (Figure 7).

Just like the Anglican Church discussed above, APCH gained a clearly visible presence in The Hague's linguistic landscape. Its name is prominently displayed on the building, and a noticeboard in English is situated outside (Figure 7).

The presence of the church is even marked by municipal signage (Figure 8), as a permanent reminder of its significance for The Hague.



Figure 7. APCH's façade and English-language noticeboard.



Figure 8. Municipal signage indicating APCH's location.

Although still American in name as well as having an American pastor, the church nowadays hosts some 300 congregants, primarily expats from all over the world, but also a fair number of Dutch people. The change from mainly an American church to being in effect an international one has, to some extent, been inhibited by the word *American* in its name. The pastor told us that the church is considering adding ‘international’ to its name, to attract people of other nationalities as well: ‘*American* evokes the idea that Dutch people are not welcome. You’re essentially telling half of the world you’re not welcome there.’ However, there is still much opposition to this change, as it feels like losing part of the church’s identity.

Despite increasing Dutch attendance, APCH continues to use English as its main medium. As with the Anglican Church discussed in the section on ACJP 5.1, only the Lord’s Prayer is said in both languages. Even so, not everyone has an equal command of English. Some of the younger members even learnt English by attending church. If there are Dutch people in need of pastoral care, our informant told us, there are Dutch-speaking church leaders who can provide it, but not in any other languages.

Contrary to the Anglican church, APCH is thinking of providing English-language classes; but teaching Dutch to expats would not be practical, our informant explained, as most expats are only in The Netherlands for a few years. Even the current minister has not learnt Dutch, as the church is situated in the International Zone (see the next section). If the church had been situated in Schilderswijk, our informant said, he might have learnt Dutch and maybe also Turkish to minister to that community. As he is approaching retirement age, he was not required to learn Dutch by the Dutch government, so there was no pressing need to do so. Our meeting ended with a prayer of gratitude: ‘Thank you, God, for the gift of language, for making us able to communicate with each other.’

The Church of Our Saviour

The Church of Our Saviour (COS) is the only English-speaking Roman-Catholic Church in The Hague. It was established in 1953 when the need arose for Catholic services in English for British and American military personnel stationed in the city (cf. previous section). In 2003, the church moved to Bezuidenhout (Figure 4), where it shares the building with a small Dutch – Indonesian parish community (COS). COS soon attracted other communities as well, and today it welcomes all English-speaking parishioners. Their current pastor, a Dutchman called Father Sjaak, has been the main pastor since 1998.



Figure 9. English sign on COS’s façade (left) and a Dutch one marking the chapel entrance (right).

The building itself is owned by the English congregation, as shown on the sign outside, which informs people about the service only in English (Figure 9). But inside, traces of the originally Dutch parish can still be found in the form of the Dutch word *kapel* marking the entrance to a small chapel (Figure 9). Apart from this, hardly anything marks the church's linguistic affiliation, nor are there any municipal signs directing potential churchgoers, as in the case of APCH. The church attracts people from all over the city and even from outside The Hague.

Although the original Dutch congregation still meets in the small chapel, the English congregation has far outgrown them in number. In fact, our interviewee told us that their use of English as the language of mass is one of the main reasons COS still attracts many people, even when numbers have been dropping across the board for the Catholic Church (see Introduction): 'The fact that we're English-speaking and the fact that there is a great expat community in the area keeps us alive,' he said. As the only English-speaking Catholic church in The Hague, COS attracts expats and other internationals from many different language backgrounds, so they can rely on this dynamic community to keep filling the church.

While originally serving English-speaking congregants in The Hague, a growing number of Dutch families attends the church. This has created the need to host religious education classes for children in Dutch, as their skill in English is often insufficient. However, many parishioners are opposed to this. It is a slippery slope, our informant explained: once you accept Dutch, other language communities might want to pitch in as well. The fear is that language bubbles might arise, splitting up the community, which could harm the English-speaking identity of the church: '[W]e have tons of Italian and Spanish people – are we going to go down that road and teach *them* in their own language as well?' he queried. The church recently started providing Dutch conversation classes for refugees, arising from the wish to reach out to refugees.

While the children's ministry is bilingual, mass is still fully in English. Nevertheless, Father Sjaak encourages his parishioners to feel free to recite the Lord's Prayer in their own language. It is a nice moment when everyone is connected, even when they are using different languages. But when the parishioners meet for coffee after mass, English dominates, which after all makes it possible for many different nationalities to attend and worship together.

Crossroads International Church

Unlike the Church of our Saviour, which is housed in an impressive building in Bezuidenhout, Crossroads International Church (CIC) is relatively invisible as a church community. It is a much newer church, having been established in 1997 in Voorburg, a suburb of The Hague, following a dream by a group of Americans encouraging them to start 'a vibrant, Christ-centered spiritual community in an English-speaking context' (CIC). Since its establishment, CIC has grown rapidly and had to move several times. It is currently housed in a secondary school, also in Bezuidenhout, which is only theirs to use on Sundays. Consequently, it was impossible to mark its presence on the building's façade and thus make a permanent appearance in the linguistic landscape of The Hague; much to its disappointment, CIC can only place temporary signs at the entrance on Sundays during church service (Figure 10; cf. Figure 1).

CIC regards its international community as 'a little sneak preview of Heaven; a place where people from many tribes and nations gather to worship Jesus Christ' (CIC). Its international character is part of CIC's identity, and English is used as a tool to unite people. Still, despite its international status, the church has more Dutch-speaking members than members from other language backgrounds. According to its current pastor, Dutch people, and other internationals, feel attracted to CIC's international character, and enjoy speaking English. But most importantly, she added, talking about religious concepts in English, which is not their native language, brings in a new way of understanding God, something Dutch congregants claim they were unable to experience in their own churches:

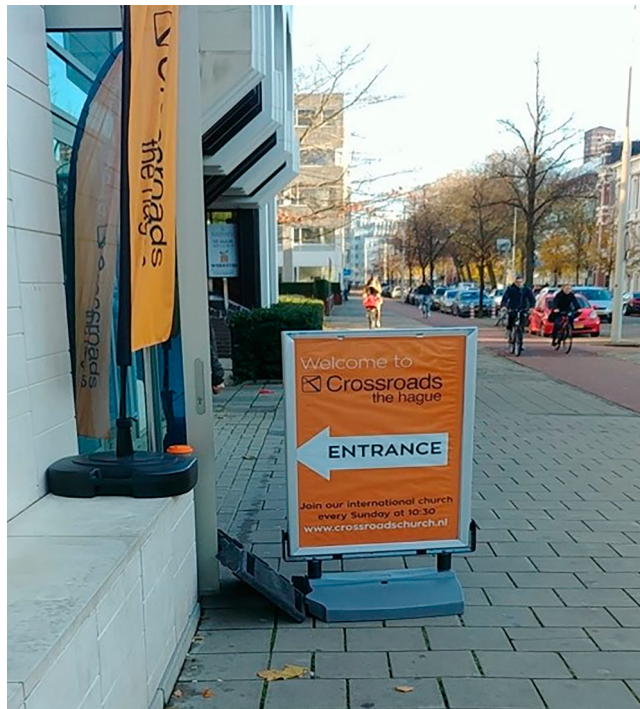


Figure 10. CIC's welcome sign outside the church building.

Sometimes people have a lot of baggage connected to church language in their own language. [In English] they could think about the concepts and not get so bogged down with the words they hear. [...] It circumvented some of the prejudices and helped them to be able to see it in a fresh way without all the baggage from maybe damaged relationships or bad experiences and everything in another language.

Many of CIC's Dutch attendants grew up in a Dutch church and claim to have found it hard to disconnect Christianity from the strict liturgical language used there (cf. section on ACJP above). Worshipping in English apparently adds a new dimension to their faith.

However, the rising number of Dutch congregants produces new challenges. As CIC used to attract mostly expats and other internationals, like students, who stay in The Netherlands only briefly, most leadership positions are filled by Dutch people. The question arose as to whether services should not be held in Dutch to accommodate Dutch members and their children, who were unable to connect to their English-speaking peers. Indeed, during coffee after morning service, many adults and children could be heard speaking Dutch together: hardly an international environment, in other words.

The pastor recognises these challenges and intends to tackle them. CIC should be a safe place for English speakers worldwide, so she wants to keep the English language alive in the church:

You have to decide what kind of church you're going to be. You will meet the needs of the people here better if you translate. You will attract more Dutch people if you translate more. But you will lose the safe place for the English speakers.

Dutch parents in the community are encouraged to teach their children English, and Dutch children learn English songs through the children's ministry during the service as well. By encouraging the members of the church to speak English together, the pastor hopes, everyone will be included.

Redeemer International Church

Our fifth church, Redeemer International Church (RIC), meets in *Nieuwe Kerk*, a church building situated in the city centre on the edge of Chinatown (Figure 4). As a church, *Nieuwe Kerk* dates from 1656, but due to dwindling church attendance (see Introduction) it lost its religious function during the late 1960s. It now serves as a concert hall and event venue (*Nieuwe Kerk*, 2021). Years later, in 2012, RIC started using the building on Sundays (RIC 2020; *Nieuwe Kerk*, 2021), and nowadays, the church is packed with people from different linguistic backgrounds, with around half its congregation being Dutch. As with COS, discussed in the above section on COS, the novelty of the church and indeed the language used during church service drew people to church again, filling the gap left by the former Dutch members of the original congregation.

RIC is the latest addition to the international churches in The Hague. Its pastor is a Botswanan, who decided to plant the church in The Hague after research showed the city to be low in church attendance; newly established churches are often the most successful in bringing people back to church (Paas 2016). The decision to set up an English-speaking church in a Dutch-speaking environment originated from the wish to bring together The Hague's many different cultures, as the pastor said during the interview:

We wanted a church that reflected the city and reflected God's heart to the nations. English is simply a tool to enable the greatest diversity of people to come together [...] It's not about elevating the language; it's about using the language as a tool to be able to reach the most people possible.

In their desire to reflect The Hague's current demographics, RIC occupies a strategic place in the city centre: rather than serving a single neighbourhood, everyone may feel invited to join in.

Still, similar to CIC (see previous section), RIC can only advertise their service on Sunday mornings with a temporary sign, as it is not the main user of the church building. As shown in Figure 11, a welcome banner is attached between the drainpipes of the building, and has to be removed after service, so that the church building is ready for other events. Above the banner, a Dutch Bible verse can still be seen on the original church building: *Het woord des heeren blijft in der eeuwigheid* ('(But) the word of the lord endures forever', 1 Peter 1:25).



Figure 11. RIC's temporary sign displayed on Sundays outside *Nieuwe Kerk*.

While the church service is entirely in English, our informant does not think the language is important to RIC's identity. Instead, he promotes translating the service into other languages, as a means of breaking down barriers. Upon request, therefore, the church service is translated through headphones into Dutch as well as Farsi (upon the arrival of many Afghan and Iranian refugees), and the children's programme during the service is multilingual Dutch – English. Though RIC would welcome more linguistic diversity in the church, our informant encourages his congregants to learn Dutch, arguing that otherwise they would be 'dishonouring the place where God has put you in'.

Being an English-speaking church in a Dutch context is not without its complications, our informant told us. As the congregation is very mixed, the level of English differs considerably, which is why the church decided to use the New International Version of the Bible instead of the more accurate (in his opinion) – but more difficult – English Standard Version. The pastor also admitted that he tries to make the service more accessible to non-English-speaking congregants by speaking slowly and using simple language. Moreover, although many of them have no difficulty following the service in English, praying in English can sometimes be difficult, as this is more personal and more intimate. And while the children's programme is indeed multilingual, he added that some children are unable to understand everything that is said.

As with the other churches discussed here, RIC likewise began to attract many Dutch people: around 50–55 per cent of its current congregation is Dutch. Dutch people, according to the pastor, join the church for a variety of reasons:

For some people it's friendships of people that brought them into church, for some people it is a bit of baggage around Dutch-speaking church history and the connotations of religiosity and legalism [...] and for some just the desire of an international environment [...] or the language, English as an aspirational language.

Interestingly, like our informant from CIC (see previous section), he used the word 'baggage' in connection with Dutch religious language. He likewise finds it striking that people join the church to practise their English, though in his view, 'any reason to come to church is a good reason'. He also claims that some new Dutch congregants actually find it easier to pray in English than in Dutch; it is their formative religious experience in an English-speaking context that appears to make their preferred language of prayer English.

Interpreting our findings

Our main findings are summarised in the following [Table 1](#).

To start with the churches' visibility in The Hague's linguistic landscape (LL), it is not surprising to see that the presence of the more established churches (ACJP, APCH, COS) is marked by permanent signage, in one case (APCH) even by a municipal sign. The newer churches, CIC and RIC, are typical examples of the kind of churches Blommaert (2013) describes as characteristic of super-diverse cities: they tend not to have buildings of their own, which explains their temporary signage. Neither church is, however, situated in a neighbourhood with an exceptionally large number of citizens with a migration background (48.5% and 40.4%, respectively; *Den Haag in Cijfers*). For all five churches, English is their preferred language, and for CIC even its only language: CIC sees English as an important medium to unite its congregants. The more established churches, as well as RIC, do, however, encourage its attendants to pray in their native languages; RIC even offers a translation service for Dutch as well as – responding to recent refugee patterns in The Netherlands – Farsi-speaking people. It thus goes furthest in serving its international congregation, and, more importantly, shows a willingness to cater linguistically for newly arrived migrants in the city.

What all five churches have in common is the large, and even growing share of Dutch churchgoers. This was explained as being due to the fact that such people were raised in what was, in retrospect, experienced as an 'oppressive' religious environment. Using English frees them from this kind of 'baggage', and offers a new perspective to their faith. For us, this finding was quite unexpected. Edwards (2016), discussing the present, expanding, status of English in The Netherlands,

Table 1. Linguistic profiles of the five churches studied.

Churches visited	Founded	Denomination	Congregation	Visibility in LL	Language policy
ACJP	1586	Anglican	American and British; 1/3 Dutch; international community	permanent signage	English; Dutch in prayer; bilingual Sunday school
APCH	2nd half nineteenth century	Protestant	American; expats; internationals, growing number of Dutch	permanent signage, municipal signage	English; Dutch in prayer; planning English classes
COS	1953	Roman Catholic	English-speaking parishioners; expats; growing number of Dutch	permanent sign	English; Dutch religious-education classes; prayer in native language
CIC	1997	non-denominational	More Dutch than internationals	temporary signage	English only
RIC	2010	non-denominational	International; half Dutch; Farsi-speaking refugees	temporary signage	English; Dutch, Farsi translation service; prayer in native language; multilingual children's service

does not mention religious institutions as an area where English is gaining ground. But in multicultural The Hague it looks as if this is currently another domain where English is supplanting Dutch. The presence of older established English-language churches like ACJP, APC and COS thus offers new opportunities for people, from a religious but also, interestingly, a linguistic perspective. Since these churches represent different denominations, they are between them clearly in a position to cater for whoever wishes to join them. The same applies to the two much more recently established churches, who index themselves as 'international'. Apart from the fact that Dutch congregants feel attracted to these churches for religious reasons, it is also the language used which they consider attractive, as voiced in particular by our informant from RIC, and strongly advocated by him. While this church's aim is to create a linguistically diverse congregation, CIC, by contrast, sticks to English, since it wishes to function as a 'safe place for English speakers'. These speakers also include Dutch attendants.

Conclusion

Our study has shown that the large-scale secularisation that is allegedly affecting Dutch society today is not evident in multicultural The Hague. The city not only counts many heritage-language churches, but also international ones, some of them newly established in accordance with patterns found in other superdiverse cities. But we also found that these churches, which cater for different denominations, attract increasingly large numbers of Dutch congregants. Reasons for this are largely twofold. To begin with, many Dutch attendants evidently experience a lighter form of religion in the churches they moved to compared to those of their upbringing. The second major reason is the language used in these churches, English. The Netherlands, with The Hague as an international city, is developing into a country where English is virtually its second language, and churches are seen as a place where Dutch people can increase their English skills. This phenomenon is recognised by some of the churches themselves, which either offer bilingual Sunday school for the children of their Dutch congregants (ACJP) or are considering starting language classes to help improve English skills (APCH), ideas that are not uncontroversial within the churches concerned.

Our study has also shown that Linguistic Landscaping is not a fruitful tool to identify religious diversity in The Hague: migrant and international churches are not usually situated in areas specifically inhabited by their congregants. This is due to the fact that these churches originally had no

buildings of their own, as is particularly true for the international churches studied, which consequently have no permanent visibility in The Hague's linguistic landscape. The signage in all five churches is in effect primarily bottom-up signage (Ben-Rafael, Shohamy, and Barni 2010:xvii), with one exception, the American Protestant Church. APCH is situated in the city's International Zone, a part of The Hague with only a slightly higher than average number of non-Dutch citizens (58.2% vs. 55.6% for The Hague generally). The International Zone currently enjoys an exceptional position with regard to The Hague's language policy for the city as a whole. The municipal sign indicating the direction to the American Protestant Church clearly illustrates this preferential treatment.

Further studies might examine how widespread the phenomenon of non-native English speakers preferring English-language churches is, particularly within The Netherlands with its expanding use of English alongside Dutch. In addition, it would be of interest to discover whether similar developments are taking place in other countries where English holds an important position or where English L2 proficiency is high. In such further studies it would be worthwhile to incorporate Church attendants with English as an L2 and the majority language as an L1 as informants, to examine the link between religion and language and the experience of religion in a second language. The Hague's abundance of migrant churches, and their contribution to the superdiverse city, could well serve as a starting point for such a largescale investigation.

Notes

1. This point of view is endorsed by SKIN (*Samen Kerk in Nederland*), a joint organisation of international and migrant churches.
2. SKIN uses 'international churches' as a cover term for all churches catering for communities of internationals of any kind. Church attendants, however, are often identified by the language they speak rather than their nationality; thus, a Portuguese church may also count Brazilians among its congregation. In this paper, we will use the term 'migrant churches' since our starting point has been the presence in The Hague of churches servicing inhabitants with a migration background (Grant 2015, 9).
3. Ingrid Tiekens's father, grandfather and great-grandfather, for instance, were all born in pre-war Indonesia. After the war, when her grandparents were repatriated to The Netherlands, like many people in similar circumstances they settled in The Hague (cf. Nigten 2005, 11; Cottaar 2005, 218).
4. Recent reports in the press, however, note a significant decrease of central and eastern European immigration figures, partly resulting from the COVID-19 pandemic but also due to improved economic circumstances at home (van Outeren 2021).
5. This is illustrated by the Ukrainian church on our list, situated in Rijswijk, a small town bordering on The Hague, which has incorporated a prayer for peace in their service (*Omroep West* 2022).

Acknowledgement

We would like to thank our informants for their time and openness when participating in the interviews, and gratefully acknowledge the reviewer's suggestions made on an earlier version of this paper.

Disclosure statement

No potential conflict of interest was reported by the author(s).

ORCID

Ingrid Tiekens-Boon van Ostade  <http://orcid.org/0000-0003-4362-6188>

References

ACJP. Church of St. John and St. Philip The Hague. History. <http://www.stjohn-stphilip.org/history>. Accessed 2 November 2021.

- allecijfers.nl. Hoogste percentage allochtonen van gemeenten in Nederland. <https://allecijfers.nl/ranglijst/hoogste-percentage-allochtonen-van-gemeenten-in-nederland/>. Accessed 23 October 2021.
- APCH: American Protestant Church of The Hague. History. 2019. <https://storage.snappages.site/T82G4Q/assets/files/HISTORY-2.pdf>. Accessed 2 November 2021.
- Ben-Rafael, E., E. Shohamy, and M. Barni. 2010. "Introduction: An approach to an "ordered disorder"." In *Linguistic Landscape in the City*, edited by E. Shohamy, E. Ben-Rafael, and M. Barni, xi–xxviii. Bristol/Buffalo/Toronto: Multilingual Matters.
- Blommaert, J. 2013. *Ethnography, Superdiversity and Linguistic Landscape*. Bristol/Buffalo/Toronto: Multilingual Matters.
- Bral, Sjaak. 2018. We noemen Laak toch allang Klein Warschau? ["Laak has long been called Little Warsaw"]. *AD Online*, <https://www.ad.nl/den-haag/we-noemen-laak-toch-allang-klein-warschau-a223416f/> (accessed 2 November 2021).
- CBS. Centraal Bureau voor de Statistiek): <https://www.cbs.nl/nl-nl/achtergrond/2013/35/moe-landen> (accessed 31 October 2021).
- CIC. Crossroads International Church. Our Story. <http://www.crossroadschurch.nl/who-we-are/our-story/> (accessed 31 October 2021).
- Cornips, L., V. de Rooij, and D. Smakman. 2018. "The Randstad area in the Netherlands: Emergent and fluid identity-locality production through language in use." In *Urban Sociolinguistics: The City as a Linguistic Process and Experience*. London/New York: Routledge, edited by D. Smakman, and P. Heinrich, 162–180.
- COS. Roman Catholic Parish Church of Our Saviour. Our History. <https://parish.nl/our-history-3/> (accessed 2 November 2021).
- Cottaar, A. 2005. "Stad van migranten: De lange lijnen van migratie." In: de Nijs et al. (eds.), 208–233. *Den Haag in Cijfers*: databank <https://denhaag.incijfers.nl/jive> (accessed 2 November 2021).
- Edwards, A. 2016. *English in the Netherlands: Functions, Forms and Attitudes*. Amsterdam/Philadelphia: John Benjamins.
- Extra, G., R. Aarts, T. van der Avoird, and P. B. Yagmur. 2021. *Meertaligheid in Den Haag. De Status van Allochtone Talen Thuis en op School*. Amsterdam: European Cultural Foundation.
- Gaiser, L., and Y. Matras. 2016. *The Spatial Construction of Civic Identities: A Study of Manchester's Linguistic Landscapes*, 18 February 2020. <http://mlm.humanities.manchester.ac.uk/wpcontent/uploads/2016/12/ManchesterLinguisticLandscapes.pdf> (accessed 22 March 2022).
- Grant, M. 2015. *Gids voor Christelijke Internationale Gemeenschappen in Rotterdam*. Rotterdam: SKIN-Rotterdam.
- Gruzdeva, E., S. Huttunen, and N. Philippova. 2018. "Urban multilingualism in Helsinki metropolitan area." Paper presented at the conference Globalising Sociolinguistics: Communicating in the City, University of Leiden, 13–15 December 2018.
- King, L., and L. Carson. 2016. *The Multilingual City. Vitality, Conflict and Change*. Bristol/Buffalo/Toronto: Multilingual Matters.
- Magendane, Kiza. 2021. *Met Nederland in Therapie*. Amsterdam: Prometheus.
- Nieuwe Kerk Den Haag. <https://www.nieuwekerkdenhaag.nl/historie/concertzaal-en-evenementenlocatie> (accessed 31 October 2021).
- Nigten, C. 2005. "Den Haag als nationaal en internationaal centrum." In: de Nijs et al. (eds.), 101–122.
- Nijhoff, K. G. 2017. "Polish migrants in The Hague: Stories of integration and attachment." *Journal of International Migration and Integration* 18: 623–640.
- Noteboom, J., and F. Taal, (eds). 2007. *Transvaal, Wereldwijk*. Schiedam: Artemis Uitgevers.
- de Nijs, T., J. Sillevius, and E. Beukers (eds.). *Den Haag. Geschiedenis van de Stad. Vol. 3. Negentiende en Twintigste Eeuw*. Zwolle: Waanders Uitgevers.
- Omroep West. 2017. Ontkerkelijking? Den Haag telt meer kerken dan ooit [Secularisation? The Hague counts more churches than ever before]. <https://www.omroepwest.nl/nieuws/3461134/Ontkerkelijking-Den-Haag-telt-meer-kerken-dan-ooit> (accessed 2 November 2021).
- Omroep West. 2022. Oekraïners bidden tijdens kerkdienst voor vrede: "Vrienden en familie zijn ontzettend bang", <https://www.omroepwest.nl/nieuws/4540031/oekraïners-bidden-tijdens-kerkdienst-voor-vrede-vrienden-en-familie-zijn-ontzettend-bang> (accessed 7 March 2022).
- van Outeren, E. 2021. Werken aan de keukentafel kan ook in Slowakije. *NRC-Handelsblad*, 11 July 2021. <https://www.nrc.nl/nieuws/2021/07/11/voor-veel-migranten-is-west-europa-voorbij-a4050661#:~:text=Terug%20naar%20Oost%2DEuropa%20Door,enorme%20opkikker%20voor%20de%20economie.%E2%80%9D> (accessed 2 November 2021).
- Paas, S. 2016. *Church Planting in Secular West*. Grand Rapids, MI: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company.
- Pütz, M., and N. Mund. 2019. "Introduction." In *Expanding the Linguistic Landscape: Linguistic Diversity, Multimodality and the Use of Space as a Semiotic Resource*, edited by Pütz, and Mund, 1–22. Bristol/Buffalo/Toronto: Multilingual Matters.
- RIC: Redeemer International Church. 2020. *Our Story*. <https://www.redeemerchurch.nl/about/our-story/> (accessed 2 November 2021).

- Rijswijks Dagblad*. Den Haag is de “Poolse hoofdstad” van Nederland, 25 April 2018. <https://rijswijksdagblad.nl/Algemeen/den-haag-is-de-poolse-hoofdstad-van-nederland> (accessed 2 November 2021).
- SKIN: Samen Kerk in Nederland. <https://skinkerken.wixsite.com/skin/migrantenkerkendatabase> (accessed 2 November 2021).
- Sleebe, V. 2005. “Religie.” In edited by de Nijs et al., 267–299.
- Smakman, D., and P. Heinrich. 2018. “Introduction: Why cities matter for globalising sociolinguistics.” In: Smakman and Heinrich (eds.), 1–11.
- Smakman, D., and P. Heinrich, (eds.) 2018. *Urban Sociolinguistics: The City as a Linguistic Process and Experience*. London/New York: Routledge.
- Stoppels, S., G. van Noort, S. Paas, and H. de Roest, (eds.) 2008. *Als een Kerk (Opnieuw) Begint: Handboek voor Missionaire Gemeenschapvorming*. Zoetermeer: Boekencentrum.
- Thieme, A.-M. 2020. Multilingual The Hague: Municipal language policy, politics, and practice. Research MA thesis, University of Leiden (<https://studenttheses.universiteitleiden.nl/access/item%3A2660137/view>).
- Tieken-Boon van Ostade, I. 2019. “Introduction.” In *Languages of The Hague*, 5–12. The Hague: De Nieuwe Haagsche.
- Tieken-Boon van Ostade, I., S. Geuke, and L. Oechies. 2020. “How Chinese is The Hague’s Chinatown?” *Journal of Multilingual and Multicultural Development*, 1–20. doi:10.1080/01434632.2020.1801696.
- Vertovec, S. 2007. “Super-diversity and its implications.” *Ethnic and Racial Studies* 30 (6): 1024–1054.
- Willems, W. 2001. *De Uittocht uit Indië. 1945 - 95*. Amsterdam: Bakker.
- Willems, W., A. Cottaar, and K. Yin Or. 2010. *Een Draak met Vele Gezichten. Chinatown Den Haag 1920–2010*. Den Haag: De Nieuwe Haagsche.
- van de Wouden, R., and E. de Bruijne. 2001. *De Stad in de Omtrek. Problemen en Perspectieven van de Vier Grootstedelijke Gebieden in de Randstad*. Den Haag: SCP.