

## Language and religious identities

*Ana Souza*

### Introduction

The 21<sup>st</sup> century has seen the start of the systematic development of ‘language and religion’ as a subfield of sociolinguistics (Darquennes and Vandebussche 2011). Studies in this subfield have pointed to two fundamental issues: firstly, the importance of language for the maintenance of religion and religious practices and, vice-versa, the importance of religious practices for the maintenance of language and, secondly, the role of language and religion as markers of identity (Mukherjee 2013). This chapter presents a general view of both these issues, with particular consideration of language and religious identities within the field of applied linguistics.

The publication of Omoniyi and Fishman’s (2006) *Explorations in the Sociology of Language and Religion* established the Sociology of Language and Religion as a field of study. Their edited collection had four parts: (1) the effects of religion on language; (2) the mutuality of language and religion; (3) the effects of language on religion and (4) the effects of language and religion on literacy. That religious practices may influence the maintenance and the loss of migrants’ languages is illustrated in Dzialtuvaite’s (2006) study of Lithuanians, published in part one of Omoniyi and Fishman’s volume. The first Lithuanians arrived in Scotland at the end of the 19<sup>th</sup> century and nurtured their identity and culture through the use of the Lithuanian language in Catholic services. However, the present generation is reported to have become more secular. Consequently, the youth of Lithuanian background have become less connected with their language of origin through religious practices. Nevertheless, as noted by Chruszczewski (2006), another study in Omoniyi and Fishman’s volume, it is language that sometimes impacts on what happens to religion. He analyses Jewish benedictions (i.e. prayers that ask for divine

blessing) and their role in integrating specific Jewish discourse forms. He concludes that it is through these prayers that the religious identity of Jews, a multi-ethnic and multilingual group, is established. Nonetheless, the relationship between language and religion is not necessarily causal. Reciprocity between language and religion is possible, as is illustrated in Joseph's (2006) study of Lebanon in part two of Omoniyi and Fishman's collection. Both Arabic and French are spoken in the region, however bilingualism in French by the Christian population was increasingly used to highlight their religious identities after Lebanon came under *de facto* control of the Muslim Syrian government in 2000. Indeed language and religion can be so intertwined that they can affect a group's literacy. An example comes in Rosowsky's (2006) explorations of the role of liturgical literacy (i.e. reading exclusively for ritual / devotional practices) in the lives of a Pakistani community in the UK. Despite being multilingual, Koranic Arabic literacy is the one mostly supported and maintained by this community. In other words, this group of Muslims most value literacy in the language that is closely linked to their religious practices.

A number of studies on language and religion have been conducted in various parts of the world since the establishment of the sociology of language and religion. One of the latest publications is Mukherjee's (2013) special edition. The articles in this volume drew on three of the categories used in Omoniyi and Fishman's seminal publication, namely: (1) the mutuality of language and religion; (2) the effects of religion on language; and (3) the effects of language on religion. Koechert and Pfeiler (2013) display the mutuality of language and religion in their analysis of the ritual speech form of the prayers of the Kaqchikel indigenous group in Guatemala. As a result of Spanish colonisation, Spanish words and notions of Catholicism were incorporated into the Kaqchikel's religious rituals although indigenous spirituality was maintained in their prayers. Consequently, syncretism (i.e. the symbolic modifications in the cultural practices of the indigenous Kaqchikel that resulted from their interaction with non-indigenous Spanish *mestizo*) is represented in the Kaqchikel's prayers.

Within the studies that consider the effects of religion on language, Gregory *et al.* (2013a) examine four migrant faith communities in England. They provide examples of how sacred texts are used by teachers and family members from these different groups in order to socialise children into their faiths. Hence, this study also covers the effects of language and religion on literacy. While this was an original category in the work of Omoniyi and Fishman (2006), it was not used by Mukherjee (2013) to structure her special edition. Nevertheless, the descriptions in Gregory *et al.*'s article show the importance of learning heritage languages in providing children with access to the religious and cultural membership of their communities. The effects of language on religion are exemplified by Vajta's (2013) study in Alsace, a region that has alternated repeatedly between being part of Germany and France. In this region, Catholicism is linked to French and Lutheranism is connected to German. Vajta explains that, although secularisation and the promotion of French in the 20<sup>th</sup> century was expected to erase this linguistic division, language and religion have been stronger identity markers for Alsatians than national belonging.

These examples give an indication of the relationship between language and religion generally and in studies of identity in sociolinguistics. In this chapter, I further explore the role of language and religion as markers of identity. I start by presenting an overview of these markers in the next section. This overview is followed by three ongoing debates of salience for applied linguistics: faith literacy, language planning and policy, and faith in English Language Teaching.

### **Overview of religion as a marker of identity**

Religious organisations play a key role in supporting migrants as they settle into a new country. From the perspective of migrants, this role can be summarised as the search for refuge (i.e. stability, sense of belonging, psychological comfort and physical safety); respectability (i.e. status recognition and social mobility within the migrant group) and

resources (i.e. practical assistance and access to social networks) (Hirschman 2004). Religious support provided in the form of resources is illustrated in the work of Oosterbaan (2010), which explores the role of religious institutions in giving migrants access to important social networks in their hosting country. He focuses on how evangelical churches use the Internet to make resources available to Brazilian migrants in Barcelona and Amsterdam. These virtual religious communities were observed sharing information on how to plan the trip to Europe and how to settle in the new country, including advice on services and products as well as housing and employment possibilities. The sharing of these pieces of information indicated that the churches in Oosterbaan's study offered their members practical assistance as well as providing spiritual services.

Religious organisations are also known for providing migrants with respectability. Han's (2011) study of a Chinese church in Canada illustrates this. She explored how the multilingual policies adopted by the church facilitated the social inclusion of new arrivals. The church delivered services in different languages (i.e. Cantonese, Mandarin offered an English programme for adults that integrated language and the content of Christian practices. This programme served the role of supporting the church members with resources, as improving their English may improve their settlement experiences in the new country, including their employment opportunities. Additionally, the programme enabled the church members to practise their religion in English and public speeches by speakers with limited English language competence were common practice. Han argues that a 'good Christian' identity secures migrants a respected status within the church, regardless of their language competences.

The studies above indicate that the access migrants have to specific social networks (i.e. resources) and the recognition of their social status (i.e. respectability) within a religious institution can provide them with a positive sense of belonging. Migrants' search for refuge through religion is more specifically exemplified by the work of Peek (2005). Her study indicated that religious identity was the most salient source of personal and social

identity (i.e. how individuals see themselves and how they wish to be perceived by others in a specific social context) for the Muslim university students with whom she worked in New York. Peek's analysis of the religious development of her participants revealed three stages: ascription, choice and declaration. The ascribed identity referred to the students' assigned religious identity taken for granted as part of their everyday lives due to their family upbringing. It is interesting to note the difference of meaning in the term 'ascribed' as used by Peek and as used by Blommaert (2006). Peek appears to merge

Blommaert's 'ascribed' (i.e. given to someone else) and 'achieved' (i.e. claimed by oneself) identities under 'ascription'. Peek's (2005) participants reported that as children, they followed their parents' religious identification as Muslim, thus being content to inhabit the religious identity ascribed to them by their parents and heritage community. As they became older, Peek's participants reported viewing religion as their 'chosen' identity - a conscious preference. The third stage in the religious identity development of these Muslim young people, 'declared' identity, took place in response to the events of 9/11. Peek's participants reported experiencing discrimination on the basis of their religion, claiming that in the search for answers to this discrimination, their religious attachments were reinforced along with the need to assert Muslim identity to retain a positive view of themselves. As this 'declared' identity is articulated by individuals, it can also be considered an achieved identity (Blommaert 2006).

Independently of how an identity is reached, religion has long been considered an important dimension of an individual's identity, whether a migrant or not. Religious identity (i.e. the identification of an individual with a religious tradition) is nowadays described as being four-fold and composed of '(1) affiliation and belonging; (2) behaviours and practices; (3) beliefs and values; and (4) religious and spiritual experiences' (Hemming and Madge 2011: 40). According to Hemming and Madge (2011), the way an individual labels him/ herself; how often s/he attends a place of worship; what s/he believes in and how s/he expresses and experiences his/her beliefs

contribute to religious identity. Hemming and Madge developed this description when trying to make sense of the complexity of children's religious lives. They argue that children's agency is an important aspect of the development of religious identity and acknowledge that religious identity, as with any other dimension of identity, is developed through social interactions and linked to specific social contexts. This socially situated view of identity also applies to adults and, thus, is adopted in this chapter. In addition, the fact that language is associated with religious identities and practices is highlighted in the discussions below.

### *Language, religion and identity*

Kouega's (2008) work with twenty Catholic parishes in Yaoundé, Cameroon, shows how linguistic identities may affect linguistic practices within religious organisations. Kouega identified the various parts of the religious services of the parishes in his study and described the languages used for each part of the service. The structural-functional approach adopted by Kouega revealed that the parishes were multilingual congregations that alternated services in the official languages of Cameroon (i.e. French and English) and in a selection of indigenous languages. This approach shed light on the use of language for liturgical practices with Kouega pointing out the use of French, English, Beti and Basa for the Gospel, the sermon, the offertory and the Eucharist, along with other minority languages for singing and occasional reading of epistles (i.e. letters written by Jesus's followers with Christian teachings). More importantly, this study demonstrates how individuals with high levels of religious commitment influenced the language choices made in the Catholic services attended by local groups in Cameroon. As Yaoundé is in the francophone part of Cameroon, French is the default language of Catholic services. However, another language was found to be used if at least one priest spoke it. Catechists (i.e. teachers of the Catholic faith) also influenced the language used in the parishes, as they prepared the epistles and helped to select their readers. Moreover, the active participation of a multilingual linguistic community in Mass (i.e. the Catholic communal worship) and their involvement in other parish activities led to the use of a

specific language in church.

Chew (2014) raises the point that particular languages in a religious context may favour certain practices and identities. She compared the language choices and religious identities of three weekend madrasahs (i.e. schools for Islamic instruction) in Singapore: a traditional one, where Arabic was the language of instruction; a moderate one, where Malay was the language of instruction; and a liberal one, where English was the language of instruction. As Arabic is the language of the Koran, its status as a liturgical language (here treated as language used for ritual / devotional practices) was maintained in all three madrasahs, where key verses and compulsory prayers of the Koran were learned in Arabic. Nevertheless, the language choices of each of the madrasahs enabled links with specific cultural and pedagogical practices. Arabic as a means of instruction signalled the more traditional position of the first madrasah in relation to religion and language. The use of Malay, the mother tongue of the children attending the madrasah described as moderate, helped to promote a generally more familiar and informal atmosphere. While the third madrasah offered the option of lessons in English or Malay, two-thirds of its attendees opted for English. Chew argues that the language choices of the madrasahs are juxtaposed with a set of distinctive religious and pedagogical approaches. Arabic symbolised a pious religious reverence followed by the adoption of traditional and conservative teaching methodology. Malay allowed for the connection between religious and home domains, and thus, reproduced mainstream teaching in Malaysia. English enabled engagement with a globalised world and, as such, offered the possibility of a more critical approach to teaching.

The links between religion and language in educational contexts have also been approached with attention to issues of gender. Jule (2005), for example, investigated the language practices of women in an evangelical theological college in Canada. More specifically, she focused on the use of linguistic space (i.e. amount of talk during formal classroom lessons) by the female students in relation to male students and male lecturers in two groups, one formal and the other more informal, over the course of a term. Jule

observed that the lectures were structured in two parts. In the first part, the lecturers delivered the content of their sessions. In the second, the floor was opened for the students to ask questions. Although, the lecturers used most of the linguistic space in both groups, there was a clear difference in the use of linguist space by male and female students regardless of group. In the more formal group, only male students asked questions for a whole term; this finding was replicated in the less formal group where there was only one example of a female student asking a question. Jule argues that these patterns may be common in classroom interactions and concludes that ‘women [in this Evangelical theological college are] consciously or subconsciously colluding in such patterns’ (p. 164). According to Jule, the reason that leads to these female students’ silence in public space relates to gender identity norms in Christian discourses that view women as being supportive of others and submissive to male leadership.

### **Issues and ongoing debates with reference to applied linguistics**

One perspective used to explore issues of language choice and religious identity in the 21<sup>st</sup> century is that of language socialisation. Language socialisation is the process by which individuals learn how to communicate in a way that is culturally appropriate and effective in the social interactions of a particular group. Participation in language-mediated interactions allows individuals to learn cultural knowledge and ways of using language (Schieffelin and Ochs 1986). Hence, individuals are socialised *through* language, at the same time that they are socialised *into* the use of language (Ochs and Schieffelin 2008). From this perspective:

language acquisition is far more than a matter of ... learning to produce well-formed referential utterances; it also entails learning how to use language in socially appropriate ways to co-construct meaningful social contexts and to engage with others in culturally relevant meaning-making activities (Garrett and Baquedano-López 2002: 342).



Following a language socialisation paradigm, Baquedano-López (2008) names the experiences of faith lesson attendance as ‘religious socialisation’ and argues that the linguistic practices of these lessons socialise children into the necessary skills and appropriate behaviour of their religion. With this purpose, Baquedano-López examined how prayers are read in Catholic lessons offered to Mexican migrant children in California, analysing the Act of Contrition, the prayer used by Catholics to tell God that they are sorry for their sins and ask for forgiveness. She argued that in the process of learning the Act of Contrition the children were prepared to participate in the Catholic ritual practice of confession of sins. That is, children were socialised into the appropriate behaviours, the religious language and the cultural facts necessary to participate in the ritual of confession by reading, writing, interpreting and comparing texts and memorising and reciting facts.

There are other contexts in which children and adults participate in religious socialisation. In other to explore these, the following section discusses faith literacies, language planning and policy and faith in ELT.

### *Faith literacies*

The teaching, learning and use of language to read sacred texts has had a number of labels (see e.g. Fishman 1989; Watt and Fairfield 2010; Rosowsky 2013). Yet, language is not the only knowledge necessary for the reading of religious texts (see e.g. Gregory *et al.* 2013a). Indeed, elsewhere I propose (Souza forthcoming) a broadening of the perception of literacy on religion as ‘faith literacies’, which are defined as:

practices which involve the reading of written texts (scripts), the use of oral texts (discussions about the faith, interaction with a deity or other members of the faith community), the performance of faith through actions (silent or not), and knowledge (including theological, geographical and historical information about the faith).

Faith literacies may lead individuals to learn a language as a consequence of their interest in becoming members of a specific religion. These literacies may also have a positive impact on secular literacies. For instance, faith literacies can provide language learners with further opportunities to develop their knowledge of sound–letter correspondences in an alphabetic script, a general principle that could be applied to other alphabets (Rosowsky 2013). Faith literacies can also support the meaning making of secular texts, as demonstrated by Skerrett’s (2014) study of a ninth-grade teacher and her students in a school in the United States. One of Skerrett’s participants, a Christian Colombian named Carlos, presents an interesting illustration of how religious literacies can be a resource for learning in other contexts. Skerrett observed Carlos reading a book that portrayed the image of a poor man with his arms spread out. Carlos linked this image to the one of Jesus on a cross, which led to a class discussion of the validity of this comparison. Skerrett points out that while the teacher did not critically explore the students’ different perspectives, it was clear that the students were drawing on their experiences of religious literacy developed outside school to make sense of their secular literacy experiences in class.

The way in which understanding of meaning in one context may support the learning in another has also been witnessed with younger children. Gregory *et al.* (2013b), for example, present the case of four children in London with links to different religions and explore how these children make sense of their faith and everyday experiences. One of the children in their study is Tanja, a seven-year old Hindu girl, who was video-recorded as she told a story in English about fairy-tale characters and Hindu Gods. Through this story, Tanja displayed an ability to bring together her experiences in two different settings (i.e. temple and school). In addition, Tanja’s story revealed her ability to transform the knowledge she had acquired in different settings in a coherent way. This transformation of knowledge is seen as a positive force in the language and literacy learning of multilingual and multicultural children and has been named ‘syncretic acts’ (ibid.: 3). Through these acts, children combine the experiences they have in different

contexts in a creative way, which enables them to develop individual understanding of the world.

*Language Planning and Policy*

Language planning and policy (LPP) refers to decisions made about language that may refer to its standardisation, status, acquisition and/or use. Ricento and Hornberger (1996) present LPP as having three layers, namely national, institutional and interpersonal. The national layer, i.e. the macro one, refers to the political processes of a nation in relation to language planning. The institutional layer, i.e. the meso one, represents the ideologies of the different institutions in a society. The interpersonal layer i.e. the micro one, relates to the language negotiations which take place in spoken interaction. One example of LPP at both the meso and micro-layers in faith contexts is Woods’ (2004) ‘Language-Religion Ideology (LRI) Continuum’ of ethnic churches. Woods studied a variety of Christian denominations of varied linguistic and ethnic backgrounds in Melbourne. She observed that the role of language was valued differently by each of these denominations, and so, developed a framework to explore the links between their language ideologies and language practices.

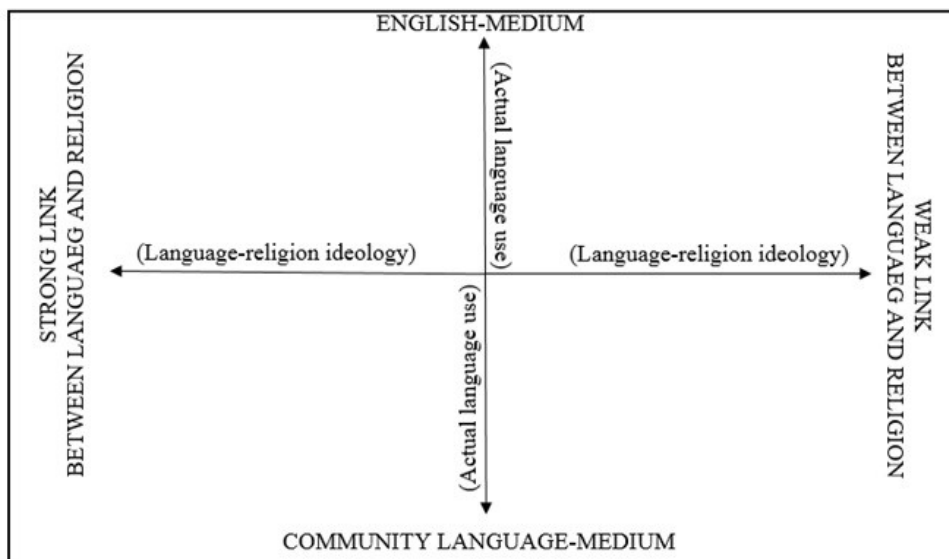


Figure 1 – The LRI Continuum (Adapted from Woods, 2004)

As figure 1 illustrates, the horizontal axis of the LRI continuum represents the relationship between language and religion. A strong link between language and religion is represented by placing an ethnic church on the left of the continuum. A strong link grants one language the status of being special enough to be used with God. A weak link between language and religion is placed on the right of the continuum. A weak link allows for the use of an individual's everyday language practices for a personal relationship with God. The vertical axis represents the language practices of a congregation. The use of English is at the top of this axis and the use of community languages at the bottom. Woods uses this framework to interpret the relationship between the institutional and the interpersonal level of language planning and policy in ethnic churches.

Woods (2006) observed that language ideologies can vary within a single religious institution. In the case of the Latvian Lutheran congregation in her study, the congregation's goal was to preserve their cultural heritage as well as to gather for spiritual reasons. As a consequence, they expected their religious services to be in Latvian, following the Lutheran perspective that everyone has the right to listen to God's Word in their mother tongue. As can be seen in figure 2, Woods placed the Latvian Lutheran congregation on the left of the LRI Continuum, where the links between language and religion are perceived to be strong and only one language, in this case Latvian, was considered acceptable. Yet, given the location of the church in Australia, the Latvian minister also considered it necessary to adopt the use of English in communicating the Gospel to Latvian-heritage youth. This ideology represents weak links between language and religion, and as such, Woods placed the Latvian minister's ideologies towards the right extreme of the LRI Continuum.

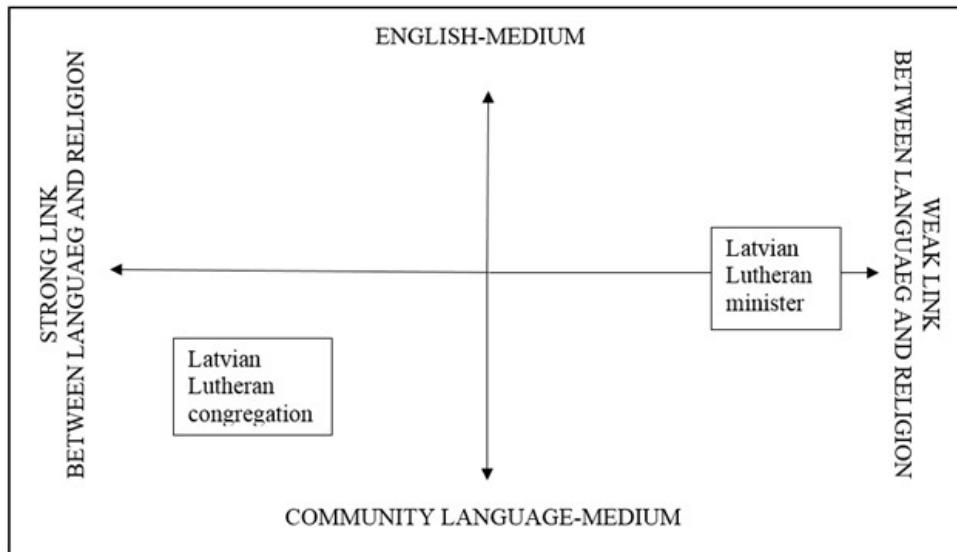


Figure 2 – The LRI Continuum of a Latvian Lutheran Church (Adapted from Woods, 2006)

In this later publication, Woods (2006) stressed that the place of language in migrant churches is influenced by two sources: the cultural value system of an ethnic group and the culture of the religious denomination. In fact, the cultural characteristics of a group (i.e. ethnicity) have been considered of relevance to the understanding of the role of language and religion in one's identity formation. Along with Kwapong and Woodham, I have developed the Religion-Ethnicity-Language (REL) Triangle (Souza, Kwapong and Woodham 2012), a framework in which each dimension of identity is placed at one of the angles of a triangle with a continuum moving inwards. A move inwards represents weaker identity links with that aspect of identity, whereas a move outwards means stronger links.

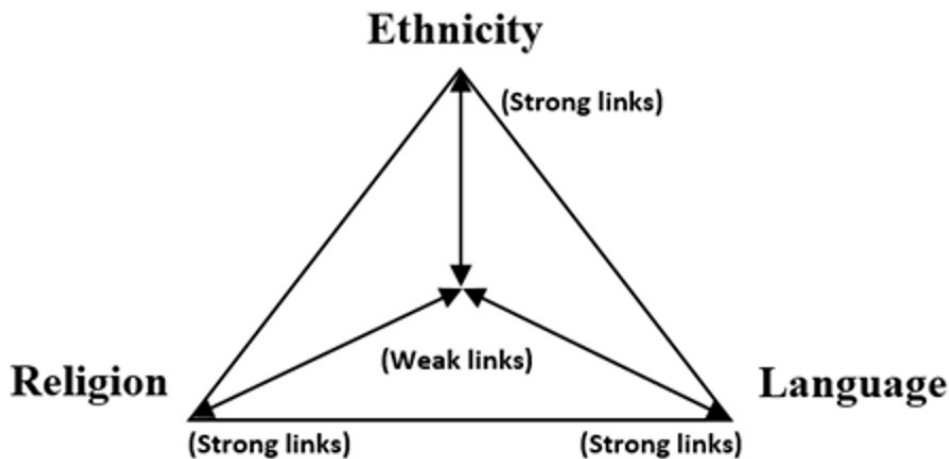


Figure 3 – The REL Triangle (Souza *et al*, 2012)

In the case of the Brazilian Catholic setting in our study, the theological orientation was to support migrants abroad and to offer support in Portuguese as the mother tongue. This concern affected the religious services offered to the adult congregation, such as Mass, and the ones offered to their children, such as the Catechism (i.e. faith lessons that introduce children to the Catholic sacraments). According to the priest, the decision to deliver the faith lessons in Portuguese was a consequence of the importance the Brazilian Catholic Chaplaincy in London gave to language maintenance and to the children’s emotional and cultural links to Brazil. In other words, the study found that the religious, ethnic and linguistic dimensions of identity were reinforced in the Brazilian Catholic lessons. Although the REL Triangle is a tentative framework which needs refining, especially in relation to how religion, ethnicity and language can be accounted for (Souza 2015), it is useful in allowing for an understanding of the opportunities children have to develop their cultural, linguistic and religious identities.

### *Faith and English Language Teaching*

Whilst the sociology of language and religion has developed as a subfield of

sociolinguistics, ELT research on language and religion is an emerging subfield of Second Language Acquisition (SLA) and has been developing since the 1990s (Wong, Kristjánsson and Dörnyei 2013). It is also relevant to note that a number of English language teachers are ‘evangelical Christians for whom faith and professional work are inextricably intertwined’ (Varghese and Johnston 2007: 5). Therefore, this section starts with a consideration of how faith may affect the professionalism of ELT teachers and then moves to issues of the ELT curriculum in relation to faith with a focus on teachers of different religious backgrounds. These sections are followed by a discussion on faith from the perspective of the learners.

### Faith and the Professionalism of ELT Teachers

Varghese and Johnston (2007) consider the link between religion and profession to raise moral questions, as the ‘prominent view in [the Teaching of English to Speakers of Other Languages is] that the teacher should not influence students' beliefs’ (p. 16). With this in mind, they interviewed ten trainee teachers at two evangelical colleges in the United States and examined (a) whether their religious beliefs were shared with their students; (b) what their attitudes were toward attempts at converting students and (c) what they thought about using ELT as a platform for missionary work. Varghese and Johnston highlight that the working context of teachers may influence how much religion can be brought into their teaching. As the trainees were planning to work in the American public educational system, they would not be allowed to discuss religion in their lessons. In fact, the crucial point raised by the trainee teachers in this study was not talking openly about religion nor trying to convert students, but how to be exemplars of their religion. . However, Varghese and Johnston interpret the underlying goal of these teachers to be one of conversion to Christianity, especially in the case of ELT programmes run by evangelical groups. Nevertheless, these researchers acknowledge that both evangelical and non-evangelical Christian teachers of English as a Foreign Language have implicit and explicit agenda, and call upon both to undertake a self-critical, reflective and open dialogue about the effect a teacher’s religious identity has on their professionalism.

In contrast, Wong (2013) examines the impact of faith on the professional identity formation of three Christian American English teachers in China and argues that religious identities guarantee the teachers' professional high standards. Five in-depth interviews with each of the teachers were conducted in two studies a decade apart. The data were analysed using the framework of communities of practice (Lave and Wenger 1991). In this way, Wong (2013) looked into the process through which the teachers went from a peripheral to a more engaged participation in three different communities of practice, namely that of local academic colleagues, church communities and Christian expatriate teachers. One of Wong's participants, Suzanne, who engaged most with her local academic colleagues, chose not to participate in the practice of manipulating students' exam results claiming that it went against her faith values. Wong found that Jacque, who engaged most with the local academic and church communities, overcame his prejudices against Muslims as he befriended a Muslim colleague. He shifted from 'we Christians vs. those Muslims' to 'we fellow believers of God' (Wong 2013: 24). Another of Wong's participants, Cynthia, who interacted most with the group of Christian expatriate teachers, resisted pressure by this group to cover religious topics in her teaching. In spite of identifying as a missionary, Cynthia felt that religious topics should only be incorporated in her lessons if relevant to the students' learning needs – a faith-informed belief of what teaching with integrity entails.

The relevance of considering whether to incorporate religion as a topic in the teaching of English is not restricted to Christianity. Therefore, the following section further discusses faith in the ELT curriculum from the perspective of Christianity and other religions.

#### Faith and the ELT Curriculum

Lessard-Clouston (2013) examines the integration of faith and learning in an English as a Second Language programme in the United States and in EFL courses at a university in Indonesia, both connected to the American Council for Christian Colleges and



Universities. A total of eight teachers, four from each institution, answered a questionnaire on the implementation of the integration of faith into the English language curriculum, the resources used for the integration, the teaching benefits/challenges for the integration and the instructors' previous/desired training in integration. The teachers reported that faith and language learning integration was taking place in their classes, albeit in different ways. Some of the teachers had incorporated prayers as part of the lessons, others had used readings on Christian themes, related textbooks to their faith, developed critical thinking skills about their faith, behaved in favour of their faith, shared life experiences and/or successful stories. Variety was also reported in relation to the materials used: writings and discussions, textbooks, exercise books, readings, lectures, presentations, vocabulary and pronunciation materials, and websites - the same variety of resources used in a regular ELT classroom. The only difference between the two sets of materials (i.e. the one used in regular ELT classrooms and the one used in Christian ELT classrooms) was the content, with the latter explicitly including religious issues while the former did not. The integration of faith topics into language learning was perceived as positive by the teachers for promoting learners' engagement with language learning, stronger teacher-student relationships, faith strengthening and improved classroom dynamics. The teachers however mentioned a number of barriers that they faced in implementing this integration, such as the lack of the necessary background knowledge, time, guidance, training and the neglect of ESL/EFL syllabi in relation to faith and learning integration. As a result, even in the context of Christian universities, the ELT curriculum is dependent on the action of individual teachers.

Considering the topic of religion in language learning more generally, Foye (2014) conducted a survey with 277 teachers, teacher-trainers, and materials developers of different religions in forty-four countries. The respondents were asked three multiple-choice questions and were invited to comment on them. In response to the first question, whether religion should be totally avoided in English lessons, 60% of the respondents disagreed. Interestingly, 'teachers based in the Middle East were nearly 50% more likely than respondents in general to feel ... that religion should be avoided in class' (ibid.: 6-

7). The positioning of these teachers may be related to issues of conflict and war, as raised by academics such as Karmani (2005). Nevertheless, the sensitivity of religion as a topic in ELT is highlighted by some of the teachers in Foye's study. In reply to the second question, 85% of respondents agreed that it is acceptable to discuss religion in lessons as long as culture is respected and neutrality is adopted. In relation to the third question, whether it is appropriate to include religious references when focusing on linguistic features, 70% of respondents provided a positive reply. Nevertheless, their written comments pointed to some restrictions in their views: the inclusion of religious references should serve the learning needs of the students and should relate to the teachers' or the learners' daily lives. Overall, religion was acknowledged as having an important role in people's lives and, as such, was deemed to be a legitimate subject for the ELT classroom, as long as it was handled with care.

#### Faith and the Language Learner

I start this section by focusing on faith from the perspective of language learners in a study in Sri Lanka. In this study, Liyanage, Barlett and Grimbeek (2010) highlight the importance of understanding the learning strategies linked to specific ethno religious affiliations in lesson planning and emphasise that language learner strategy should be accommodated in ELT. This observation resulted from the exploration of the learning strategies of almost 1,000 ESL students from three religious groups: Buddhist, Hindu and Muslim, in government schools. It was found that the participants had a strong preference for advance organisation (i.e. skimming the text for its organising principle) as a metacognitive strategy. They liked to learn text-based content sequentially and systematically in the same way they had learned to read religious texts. The three groups also had a preference for note taking when doing listening activities in class. According to Liyanage, Barlett and Grimbeek, the selection of this strategy suggests the importance of memory building, which is promoted in the learning of the three religions. In reading activities, repetition was a strategy most preferred by Muslims. Nevertheless, both

Buddhist and Hindu learners also showed a strong preference for repetition as a reading strategy, which was constantly encouraged in their traditional educational practices too. Although the learners from the three different ethno religious groups did not strikingly differ in relation to their learning preferences, Liyanage, Barlett and Grimbeek make a valid point that pedagogical approaches should reflect the socio-cultural contexts of learners.

Religious faith has been taken into consideration in SLA as a possible motivation for language learning. Lepp-Kaethler and Dörnyei (2013), for instance, investigated how the use of a sacred text can motivate learners to learn a language. They selected seven Christian adult participants from different nationalities who demonstrated unusual high motivation to learn languages to access the Bible. Motivation, in Lepp-Kaethler and Dörnyei's (2013: 171) words, is:

responsible for *why* people decide to do something, *how hard* they work to pursue the activity, and *how long* they are willing to sustain it. Accordingly, investigations into L2 motivation are important because they allow us to tap into the reasons for language-learning success or failure, and a greater understanding of the various sources of motivation may help both students and teachers to reenergize the often dreary and arid terrain of mastering a new language.

While motivation can also be regarded as a social concept (Norton 2013) (i.e. learners' levels of motivation depend on the social context in which they experience learning and on the opportunities the context offers for access to the target language community), learners' self-identity and motivation need to be addressed in relation to decisions made about the topics and the materials used in L2 curriculum, as highlighted by Lepp-Kaethler and Dörnyei (2013). Their results show that learners welcomed discussions that allowed for their religious identities to be brought to light with the use of texts that had special significance to their religious affiliations. However, Lepp-Kaethler and Dörnyei

(2013: 186) acknowledge that ‘sacred texts by no means tap into all language learners’ motivations’. They also remind us that this is true of any content in ESP courses. In fact, no type of text and no type of topic are considered interesting by all learners in any learning situation. Therefore, there is a need to address the appropriateness of topics and materials with the different groups of learners a teacher may have.

In conclusion, the studies discussed in this chapter highlight the relevance of religion, particularly Christianity and Islam, as a dimension of identity and the relationship of language and religion in identity studies. Countries that are culturally and linguistically diverse would benefit from a better understanding of religion as an identity marker and its role in language maintenance to support the learning of indigenous and migrant children in and out of mainstream schooling. Religious identities are also significant for adults learning foreign or second languages although the extent to which religion can be or should be integrated into language learning curricula remains a contentious issue. Teachers with strong religious identities also face challenges in relating their faith to pedagogical practices. There is certainly scope for applied linguists to investigate these matters further in future language and identity studies.

## **Summary**

This chapter highlights the literature on language and religion in relation to language and identity studies in applied linguistics and sociolinguistics. With this purpose, the multidisciplinary (engagement with different disciplines) and the interdisciplinarity (application of methods and approaches of different disciplines) involved in researching religion as a dimension of identity and the link between language and religion in language and identity studies are covered. These issues are introduced with a discussion of the development of the Sociology of Language and Religion (SLR) as a subfield of sociolinguistics in the 21<sup>st</sup> century. One fundamental issue in the studies of language and religion is that both aspects play an important role as identity markers. An overview of

identity and its relationship to language, to religion, and to language and religion is presented in the following section. Issues of language and religious identities are then revisited with an examination of ongoing debates in applied linguistics in relation to faith literacies, language planning and policy, and faith and English language teaching. A number of denominations, a variety of contexts and a diversity of ethnic groups were used to illustrate the relevance of language, religion and identity in different parts of the world although the chapter has in the main focused on studies involving Christian and Muslim participants and/ or contexts.

### **Related topics**

Historical perspectives on language and identity; Positioning language and identity: Poststructuralist perspectives; The politics of researcher identities: opportunities and challenges in identities research; Beyond the micro-macro interface in language and identity research; Language and ethnic identity; Linguistic practices and transnational identities; Being a language teacher in the content classroom: teacher identity and content and language integrated learning (CLIL); Language, gender and identities in political life: a case study from Malaysia; Identity in language learning and teaching: research agendas for the future

### **Further reading**

Joseph, J. (2004). *Language and identity: national, ethnic, religious*. Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan. (This book is an excellent introduction to the study of language and identity with discussions from a wide range of academic fields, including structural linguistics, sociology, social psychology and sociolinguistics.)

Jule, A. (ed) (2005). *Gender and the language of religion*. Hampshire: Palgrave Macmillan. (This timely edited collection adds religion to the discussions of language and gender with articles that apply a variety of methods and theoretical frameworks.)

Omoniyi, T. and Fishman, J. (eds.) (2006.) *Explorations in the sociology of language and religion*. Amsterdam & Philadelphia: John Benjamins. (This is a seminal publication of studies within the Sociology of Language and Religion that covers a variety of religions and countries.)

Wong, M., Kristjánsson, C. and Dörnyei, Z. (eds.) (2013). *Christian faith and English language teaching and learning research on the interrelationship of religion and ELT*. Abingdon: Routledge. (This collection is a rich contribution to the exploration of the relationships between faith, pedagogical practices and motivation.)

## References

Blommaert, J. (2006). Language policy and national identity, in T. Ricento (ed)

*Language policy: theory and method*. Oxford: Blackwell, pp. 238-54.

Baquedano-López, P. (2008). 'The pragmatics of reading prayers: learning the act of contrition in Spanish-based religious education classes (doctrina)', *Text and Talk*, 28(5): 581–602.

Chew, P. (2014). 'Language choice and religious identities in three Singaporean madrasahs', *International Journal of the Sociology of Language*, 229: 49-65.

Chruszczewski, P. (2006). Prayers as an integrative factor in Jewish religious discourse communities, in T. Omoniyi and J. Fishman (eds.) *Explorations in the sociology of language and religion*. Amsterdam and Philadelphia: John Benjamins, pp. 278–290.

Darquennes, J. and Vandenbussche, W. (2011). 'Language and religion as a sociolinguistic field of study: some introductory notes', *Sociolinguistica*, 25: 1-11.

Dziantuvaite, J. (2006). The role of religion in language choice and identity among Lithuanian immigrants in Scotland, in T. Omoniyi and J. Fishman (eds.) *Explorations in the sociology of language and religion*. Amsterdam and Philadelphia: John Benjamins, pp 79-85.

Fishman, J. (1989). *Language and ethnicity in minority sociolinguistic perspective*.

Clevedon: Multilingual Matters.

Foye, K. (2014). 'Religion in the ELT classroom: Teachers' perspectives', *The Language*

*Teacher*, 38(2): 5-12.

Garrett, P. and Baquedano-López, P. (2002). 'Language socialization: reproduction and continuity, transformation and change', *Annual Review of Anthropology*, 31: 339-361.

Gregory, E., Choudhury, H., Ilankuberan, A., Kwapong, A. and Woodham, M. (2013a). 'Practise, performance and perfection: Learning sacred texts in four faith communities in London', *International Journal of the Sociology of Language*, 220: 27-48.

Gregory, E., Lytra, V., Choudhury, H., Ilankuberan, A. and Woodham, M. (2013b). 'Syncretism as a creative act of mind: the narratives of children from four faith communities in London', *Journal of Early Childhood Literacy*, 13(3): 322-347.

Han, H. (2011). 'Social inclusion through multilingual ideologies, policies and practices: a case study of a minority church', *International Journal of Bilingual Education and Bilingualism*, 14(4): 383-398.

Hemming, P. and Madge, N. (2011). 'Researching children, youth and religion: identity, complexity and agency', *Childhood*, 19(1): 38-51.

Hirschman, C. (2004). 'The role of religion in the origins and adaptation of immigrant groups in the United States', *International Migration Review*, 38(3): 1206-1233.

Joseph, J. (2006). The shifting role of languages in Lebanese Christian and Muslim identities, in T. Omoniyi and J. Fishman (eds.) *Explorations in the sociology of language and religion*. Amsterdam and Philadelphia: John Benjamins, pp. 165-179.

Jule, A. (2005). Language use and silence as morality: teaching and lecturing at an evangelical theology college, in A. Jule (ed) *Gender and the language of religion*. Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, pp. 151-166.

Karmani, S. (2005). 'TESOL in a time of terror: toward an Islamic perspective on applied linguistics', *TESOL Quarterly*, 39(4): 738-744.

Koechert, A. and Pfeiler, B. (2013). 'Maintenance of Kaqchikel ritual speech in the confraternities of San Juan Sacatepéquez, Guatemala', *International Journal of the Sociology of Language*, 220: 127-149.

Kouega, J.P. (2008). 'Language, religion and cosmopolitanism: language use in the Catholic Church in Yaoundé, Cameroon', *International Journal of Multilingualism*, 5(2): 140-153.

Lave, J. and Wenger, E. (1991). *Situated learning: legitimate peripheral participation*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

Lepp-Kaethler, E. and Dörnyei, Z. (2013). The role of sacred texts in enhancing motivation and living the vision in second language acquisition, in M. Wong, C. Kristjánsson and Z. Dörnyei, Z. (eds.) *Christian faith and English language teaching and learning research on the interrelationship of religion and ELT*. Abingdon: Routledge, pp. 171-188.

Lessard-Clouston, M. (2013). Faith and learning integration in ESL/EFL instruction: a preliminary study in America and Indonesia, in M. Wong, C. Kristjánsson and Z. Dörnyei, Z. (eds.) *Christian Faith and English Language Teaching and Learning Research on the Interrelationship of Religion and ELT*. Abingdon: Routledge, pp. 115-135.

Liyanage, I., Barlett, B. and Grimbeek, P. (2010). 'Religious background and language learning: Practical suggestions for deriving best practice in ELT', *Asian EFL Journal*, 46: 1-20.

Mukherjee, S. (2013). 'Reading language and religion together', *International Journal of the Sociology of Language*, 220: 1-6.

Norton, B. (2013 [2001]) *Identity and Language Learning: Extending the Conversation*. 2<sup>nd</sup> edn. London: Longman.

Ochs, E. and Schieffelin, B. (2008). Language socialization: an historical overview, in P. Duff and N. Hornberger (eds.) *Encyclopedia of language education*, vol. 8. New York: Springer, pp. 3-15.

Omoniyi, T. and Fishman, J. (eds.) (2006). *Explorations in the sociology of language and religion*. Amsterdam and Philadelphia: John Benjamins.



- Oosterbaan, M. (2010). Virtual re-evangelization: Brazilian churches, media and the postsecular city, in J. Beaumont, A. Molendijk and C. Jedan (eds.) *Exploring the postsecular: the religious, the political, the urban*. Leiden: Brill, pp. 281-308.
- Peek, L. (2005). 'Becoming Muslim: the development of a religious identity', *Sociology of Religion*, 66(3): 215-242.
- Ricento, T., and Hornberger, N. (1996). 'Unpeeling the onion: Language planning and policy and the ELT professional', *TESOL Quarterly*, 30: 401-427.
- Rosowsky, A. (2013). 'Faith, phonics and identity: reading in faith complementary schools', *Literacy*, 47(2): 67-78.
- Rosowsky, A. (2006). The role of liturgical literacy in UK Muslim communities, in T. Omoniyi and J. Fishman (eds.) *Explorations in the sociology of language and religion*. Amsterdam and Philadelphia: John Benjamins, pp. 309-324.
- Schieffelin, B. and Ochs, E. (1986). 'Language socialization', *Annual Review of Anthropology*, 15: 163-191.
- Skerrett, A. (2014). 'Religious literacies in a secular literacy classroom', *Reading Research Quarterly*, 49(2): 233-250.
- Souza, A. (2015). 'Language and faith encounters: Bridging language-ethnicity and language-religion studies', *International Journal of Multilingualism*. DOI: 10.1080/14790718.2015.1040023
- Souza, A (forthcoming). Faith and language maintenance in transnational places of worship: Brazilian Christian settings in London, in T. Omoniyi R. Pandharipande, and M. Ebsworth (eds.) *Maintenance and Revival in the Sociology of Language and Religion*. Bristol: Multilingual Matters.
- Souza, A., Kwapong, A. and Woodham, M. (2012). 'Pentecostal and Catholic migrant churches in London – the role of ideologies in the language planning of faith lessons', *Current Issues in Language Planning*, 13(2): 105-120.
- Vajta, K. (2013). 'Linguistic, religious and national loyalties in Alsace', *International Journal of the Sociology of Language*, 220: 109-125.
- Varghese, M. and Johnston, B. (2007). 'Evangelical Christians and English language teaching', *TESOL Quarterly*, 41(1): 5-31.
- Watt, J. and Fairfield, S. (2010). Religious and sacred literacies, in B. Spolsky and F.

- Hult (eds.) *The handbook of educational linguistics*. Oxford: Wiley-Blackwell, pp. 355-366.
- Wenger, E. (1998). *Communities of practice: learning, meaning and identity*. New York: Cambridge University Press.

Wong, M. (2013). Called to teach: the impact of faith on professional identity formation of three Western English teachers in China, in M. Wong, C. Kristjánsson and Z. Dörnyei, Z. (eds.) *Christian faith and English language teaching and learning research on the interrelationship of religion and ELT*. Abingdon: Routledge, pp. 11-30.

Wong, M., Kristjánsson, C. and Dörnyei, Z. (eds.) (2013). *Christian faith and English language teaching and learning research on the interrelationship of religion and ELT*. Abingdon: Routledge.

Woods, A. (2004). *Medium or message? Language and faith in ethnic churches*. Clevedon: Multilingual Matters.

Woods, A. (2006). The role of language in some ethnic churches in Melbourne, in T. Omoniyi and J. Fishman (eds.) *Explorations in the sociology of language and religion*. Amsterdam and Philadelphia: John Benjamins, pp. 197-212.