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edited by Michael Lessard-Clouston & Xuesong (Andy) Gao

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Reviews

Christian faith and English language teaching and learning: Research on the interrelationship of religion and ELT

Mary Shepard Wong, Carolyn Kristjánsson, and Zoltán Dörnyei (Eds.). New York: Routledge, 2013. Pp. xiii + 279, \$135.00 (hardcover), ISBN 9780415898959.

Reviewed by Jan Edwards Dormer, Messiah College

Those concerned with issues at the intersection of Christianity and English language teaching have seen great strides in this emerging field in recent years. Ten years ago, articles began appearing on this theme – some calling Christians to task for engaging in missionary work while teaching English (e.g., Edge, 2003; Pennycook & Coutand-Marin, 2003), and others in response to such accusations (e.g., Baurain, 2007). Then Wong and Canagarajah's (2009) landmark book brought diverse opinions on the subject together in one volume. Now the present collection edited by Wong, Kristjánsson, and Dörnyei addresses the need for empirical research in this emergent field. Canagarajah states in the foreword that this text “ushers in a tradition of research on faith-based teaching that future generations of teachers and researchers can build upon” (p. xxiii).

Summary

After helpful front pages introducing the contributors and providing a guide to acronyms used, the book opens with a preface outlining the format, purpose and intended audience. This is followed by a foreword by Suresh Canagarajah, who unapologetically addresses the limitations experienced by secular researchers and theorists in attempting to understand faith-based language teaching, and the necessity of hearing the voices of Christian researchers. Chapter 1, written by the three editors, begins with a history of research and writing on faith and ELT over the past two decades, followed by the rationale for this volume: that previous writing on faith and ELT has largely been theoretical or ideological in nature, and empirical research is needed. The editors then outline the three main sections in the book on 1) Christian faith and language teacher identity, 2) Christian faith and the English language learning context, and 3) Christian faith, motivation, and L2 learning process. Each section contains several research studies, concluding with a review by a well-known scholar and discussion questions. A final section wraps up the volume in part 4), resources and conclusions.

Part one begins with chapter 2, “Called to teach: The impact of faith on professional identity formation of three Western English teachers in China.” Author Mary Shepard Wong presents a longitudinal study of three teachers and their identity formation over the course of a decade, confirming the impact of personal identity and purpose on teacher identity. In chapter 3, “The role of faith in the power balance between Christian native speakers and Taiwanese teachers who team teach,” Shu-Chuan Wang-McGrath provides four interactional models, which helpfully describe different ways in which native and nonnative English speaking teachers (NESTs and NNESTs) might interact. She looks specifically at issues of power, asserting that there was “no evidence in this study that the power balance was manipulated with the intent of winning students over to thinking positively about Christianity. Rather, native speaker status was used as a tool to help fellow teachers help their students learn English well” (p. 45). In chapter 4, “Folk linguistics, content-oriented discourse analysis, and language teacher beliefs,” Michael Pasquale investigates the relationship between faith and practice in veteran and pre-service teachers. His findings reveal that “whereas veteran teachers understand their faith and practice to be inseparably intertwined, the accounts of pre-service teachers indicate a less integrated understanding” (p. 47). The final study in part one is chapter 5, “‘Forever changed’: Emerging TESOL educators’ cultural learning and spiritual formation on a study abroad trip in Myanmar,” by Shuang Frances Wu and Mary Shepard Wong. Conducted through a summer study abroad trip primarily composed of graduate students in TESOL, this research confirms that study abroad programs can result in spiritual growth as well as increased understanding of world languages and cultures. The review for part one, chapter 6, is provided by Magdalena Kubanyiova, and is entitled “Towards understanding the role of faith in the development of language teachers’ identities: A modest proposal for extending the research agenda.” This chapter is one of the gems in this volume, tying together the research presented with simple yet impactful statements such as “Christian beliefs may be a key source for constructing teachers’ images of good teaching” (p. 87). Kubanyiova also succeeds well in her goal of extending the research agenda, with a call for more empirical research on “enacted” as opposed to merely “narrated” identities, involving the thick description that enhances the validity of qualitative research (p. 90).

Part two begins with chapter 7, “The globalization of English and China’s Christian colleges,” by Don Snow. With a fascinating documentation of the history of the University of

Nanking with regard to language issues, and reference to other colleges and universities along the way, this chapter is a must-read for any Christian working in the Chinese context. Snow calls into question the accuracy of Pennycook and Makoni's (2005) characterization of English use in Christian colleges as "'attacking and destroying' other languages and cultures" (p. 106), pointing out that "among Chinese parents and students, there was substantial demand for English-medium education" and "the demand from Chinese people was sometimes greater than the willingness of missionaries to offer education in English" (p. 107). Snow reaffirms his strong claims elsewhere (e.g., Snow, 2009) that valuing the local language is an imperative in ELT contexts, and that ultimately, "the goal is generally to strike a balance, meeting students' needs by assisting them in acquisition of a language that empowers them, but also honoring and encouraging their languages and cultures" (p. 112). In chapter 8, "Faith and learning integration in ESL/EFL instruction: A preliminary study in America and Indonesia," Michael Lessard-Clouston presents research on teachers' perceptions and experiences of integration in two very different ELT contexts, in order to "provide baseline data on faith integration in ESL/EFL" (p. 133). Interestingly, he found that "ESL/EFL syllabi for courses in both contexts reportedly neglect any mention of faith and learning integration, though it is valued at both institutions" (p. 131) and that "participants indicated a clear desire to obtain more training in integrating their faith and their teaching better" (p. 132).

In chapter 9, "Putting beliefs into practice in a church-run adult ESOL ministry," Bradley Baurain describes a qualitative study primarily involving six volunteer tutors in an ESL program run by an evangelical church in the U.S. Similar in focus to Lessard-Clouston's study, Baurain sought to understand "the applied dynamics of how religious beliefs might be translated into words, actions, and patterns of behavior" (p. 136). He identifies four emergent themes: 1) relationality and empathy, 2) Christian love and care, 3) practical service, and 4) learner-centeredness, and addresses the fact that "the connections the volunteers made between their ESOL tutoring and their Christian religious beliefs are connections that can also be made by people who believe differently" (p. 148), questioning the nature of *Christian* witness. Lessard-Clouston's and Baurain's research combined should lead those responsible for Christian ESL/EFL programs to deeper consideration of missional or faith-based goals, and how these goals are articulated and met. David Smith's commentary concludes this section in chapter 10, "Frameworks for investigating faith and ESL: A response to Snow, Lessard-

Clouston, and Baurain.” Smith points to the complexity inherent in investigating faith in practice, stating that “each frame makes certain aspects of the whole visible, while perhaps obscuring others,” and calling for “coordinated attention to beliefs, practices, institutional dynamics, cultural and communal contexts and divergent interpretations of both faith and practice within the Christian fold” (p. 163).

Elfrieda Lepp-Kaethler and Zoltán Dörnyei begin part three with chapter 11, “The role of sacred texts in enhancing motivation and living the vision in second language acquisition.” They found that a sacred text (the Bible, specifically, for their participants) contributed to learner motivation in “(1) *creating the vision* (*why* participants learn language); and (2) *living the vision* (*how hard* and *how long* they are willing to work at it)” (p. 176). In summary, the authors state that “when the three key components examined in this study – divine call/vision, L2 learning vision, and a sacred text – are pooled, synchronized, and channeled meaningfully, they appear to generate an unusually high ‘jet stream’ of motivation for language learning” (p. 186). In chapter 12, “Cosmopolitanism, Christianity, and the contemporary Chinese context: Impacts upon second language motivation,” Peng Ding reports on a study of primarily Chinese university students, with regard to the connection between English learning and the Christian faith. Ding discovered an “intertwined” relationship between Christianity and English learning – that is, the students’ Christian faith contributed to their English language learning and English learning directed them towards the Christian faith. Ding summarizes:

It is this transformative effect of their faith that led to a radical shift in their motivational dispositions with regard to learning English, considerably reducing the fear of failure and the fear of the subject, and enhancing both the students’ confidence in their own abilities to learn English and their attitudes and approaches toward the learning of English. (p. 203)

Letty Chan provides the final research study in chapter 13, “Christian language professionals (CLPS) and integrated vision: The stories of four educators.” Her research explores the integration of Christian and professional selves, and how such integration develops, helping us understand that “even committed Christians do not share the same pattern of Ideal Self integration” (p. 221). In chapter 14, Ema Ushioda writes the review for this section, “Christian faith, motivation, and L2 learning: Personal, social, and research perspectives.” In addressing the motivational self-system upon which several of the studies were framed, Ushioda poses a question that is especially interesting in light of the fact that she is the book’s

only self-proclaimed non-Christian author: “Conceptually speaking, one may well ask whether such motivation can be viewed as ‘self-determined’ if the L2 learner believes it to emanate from a higher divine source, and whether we need to theorize new forms of L2 motivation to capture this belief in divine (rather than self or external) regulation of motivation” (p. 225). Ushioda also urges us to consider the fact that Christian communities are essentially social communities, and that perhaps the social nature, rather than or in addition to the Christian nature, of these communities is a driving force in L2 motivation.

Part four begins with chapter 15, “A working bibliography: Faith and language teaching,” by Tasha Bleistein, Mary Shepard Wong and David Smith, no doubt the largest collection of resources on this topic to date, and invaluable in furthering research on faith and ELT. In Chapter 16, “Conclusion: Faith and SLA: An emerging area of inquiry,” the editors restate the rationale for the book: “to go beyond ideological and belief-based claims concerning the interaction of religion and language and to generate firm insights into the actual role that faith plays in various aspects of the language learning and teaching experience” (p. 267). They then proceed to address various issues brought to light in the volume’s research, clearing a path for future research on such topics as student perspectives, spiritual agency, cognitive and social agendas in SLA, the linking of faith beliefs to methodology, and similar investigations with other faiths. The editors conclude by reiterating that “the domain of ‘faith and SLA’ is a valid research strand” (p. 271).

Commentary

I couldn’t agree more. Certainly, this collection of robust research furthers the view of faith and ELT as a legitimate and important area of inquiry. Given how difficult it is to conduct and publish quality research studies, this book is a laudable contribution to the literature, and the studies here may serve as examples for other Christians wishing to carry out their own qualitative research on related aspects of religion and ELT. However, any collection of research shows us not only what we know, but also what is still lacking. It is these issues which I will now address.

First, I felt in reading some of the studies in this collection that earlier Christian work in ELT was either unknown or unacknowledged. For example, Dörnyei and Lepp-Kaethler suggest “We might consider using sacred texts...as L2 curriculum content” (p. 185), and “The results of this study point to a hidden but surprisingly powerful motivator for SLA that has

received little attention in the field of applied linguistics” (p. 186). These comments fail to acknowledge that the Bible *has* been used as L2 curriculum in missions for many decades. While it is no doubt true that the use of sacred texts has received little attention in the academy, the role of the Bible in English study is neither surprising nor unaddressed, and the greater wisdom often needed is caution in using it appropriately (Dormer, 2011). Another example where a connection to previous work in missions would have added richness to the current research is in Wang-McGrath’s chapter. NEST/NNEST topics have begun receiving attention in mission circles (e.g., Wong & Stratton, 2011), and NEST/NNEST interaction specifically has been addressed (e.g., Dormer, 2007). I hope that as Christians in the academy continue to provide us with valuable research, the voices of *all* Christians engaged in English teaching and learning will be sought, valued and incorporated into our ongoing, collective learning.

Second, the editors explain in chapter one that “The richest data were obtained about teacher identities” (p. 5), and reiterate this fact in the conclusion, acknowledging that “future research could potentially be enhanced by also including student voices in the research designs” (p. 268). I would state this more strongly: I believe we *must* extend our research in this direction. In fact perhaps this collection warrants a follow up volume with research specifically on Christian faith and the *learning* of English. Finally, I hope that future investigation will dare to push beyond the often sterile and purely analytic boundaries that often limit our research. In *Scholarship and Christian Faith*, Jacobsen and Jacobsen (2004) challenge Christian scholars to value *strategic* and *empathic* scholarship alongside the more traditional *analytic* scholarship. Perhaps our field is ripe for empathic scholarship, “seeking to think with the subject rather than merely about the subject of inquiry” (p. 127). Could it be that limiting ourselves to the familiar analytic approach common in empirical studies is partly to blame for our lack of research involving learners? Might we, as Christians, have a unique role to play in bringing more relational and personal forms of research to larger acceptance within our field of TESOL?

These suggestions ultimately speak in favor of the success of this text. The editors have motivated this reader to consider ways to further bridge the gap between lay/church/mission knowledge and the academy of TESOL professionals. And the wheels have begun turning on a possible a study of learner voices that is more empathic in nature. In short, the writers and editors of this volume have indeed set the stage for future research.

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Every Tribe and Tongue: A Biblical Vision for Language and Society

Michael Pasquale and Nathan L. K. Bierma. Eugene, OR: Pickwick Publications, 2011. Pp. xi + 84, \$14.00 (paper), ISBN 9781608990146.

Reviewed by William Acton, Trinity Western University

What should the Christian English language instructor's perspective be on multilingualism, multiculturalism or English-only advocacy? I am asked those questions repeatedly in any of several forms. *Every Tribe and Tongue: A Biblical Vision for Language and Society*, by Michael Pasquale and Nathan L. K. Bierma, provides a workable framework for a response. Fortunately, the book is written to be accessible to undergraduate students; it is eminently readable, Scripturally sound and grounded, such that it will be very helpful in any number of contexts. And one other bit of "meta-commentary" on the basic format: I found it to

be an engaging read on two levels. First, it provides the essential Biblical anchoring, along with linguistic, historical and sociological arguments for the central thesis of the book:

A community transformed through Christ will be marked in part by its transformed vision for language as a gift from God, and will see itself as called out from the world to model a new way of appreciating and using language in society that anticipates the heavenly gathering of every tribe and tongue. (p. 80)

Second, perhaps the most striking aspect of the book for any involved in Christian English language teacher training is the well-marked path of the argument adopted by Pasquale and Bierma. Their point of departure is basically the nature of language as God-created and how that has unfolded throughout history. By beginning there – rather than with the current sociocultural or sociolinguistic or sociopolitical arguments – language and its place in culture, society, the identity of the individual and the Christian worldview remain in proper perspective.

Having finished reading the book, it is not all that difficult to verbalize the outline of your answer to the questions posed above. It is one of those almost catechism-like, ordered set of 8 chapters that both inform the reader new to the issues and assist anyone in presenting the case and evidence, or training students how to do the same. (The general focus is on the U.S., but the overall framework is relevant and easily adaptable in many cultures and contexts.) Just articulating the opening “way in” of our understanding of the central role of language and its creator will make immediate sense to most any believer, and will situate the discussion within our worldview from the outset, rather than struggling to return to it later in the discussion.

In part due to the breadth and scope of the presentation in 80 pages, it is not possible to cover all areas equally or adequately in places for some readers. One may have to at least temporarily take a few of the arguments on faith – and investigate further if necessary. (As the book is intended for upper division students, we can assume the general reader is coming to the narrative with some background, at least in the Christian faith tradition, of linguistics and some basic theology.) The sections dealing with second language identity and child language acquisition do identify the key pieces but are relatively dense for the uninformed or unconvinced reader. The sections dealing with the history of immigration in the U.S., on the other hand, are especially well written and informative.

From a professional-political standpoint, as Christian leaders in this field, there is no more important voice for the public square or response to be thoughtfully prepared for today than that addressed well in *Every Tribe and Tongue*. Required reading.

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Teaching English in Missions: Effectiveness and Integrity

Jan Edwards Dormer. Pasadena CA: William Carey Library, 2011.

Pp. xvii + 165, \$13.99 (paper), ISBN 9780878085262.

Reviewed by Marilyn Lewis, University of Auckland

The last few years have seen a sprinkling of books and articles on the topic of *Teaching English in Mission*. Dormer's background of academic qualifications, her professional work in four continents and her starting point as a person of faith qualify her to add ideas to the discussion. Her bringing together of two aspects makes this book's genre difficult to pigeonhole. As well as addressing the big issues of the relationship between professional and faith-based callings, the author offers plenty of practical advice to people who want to combine these two. Her strong case for integrity might dissuade some from taking up what they thought would be a good opportunity for service, but for those who persist, there are plenty of suggestions for being professionally effective. These two threads are interwoven through the text.

The title of the first (short) chapter is the clue to Dormer's first premise: "If you can speak English you can teach it. True or false?" In other words, do qualifications matter in teaching a language if one is already a native speaker? People who see the answer as obvious might find the statistics and examples from mission organisations sobering. To make her point, Dormer supports anecdotal snippets about the hypothetical and well-intentioned "Bill," with an evaluation of his readiness to be an English language teaching professional. Based on her figure "Requirements for effective language teaching," poor Bill scored only 37%.

Warming to her theme, in Chapter 2 Dormer borrows a medical analogy for the title: "First, do no harm: An English teacher's Hippocratic oath". Here she presents both the good that can be done by the well prepared English teacher and the harms that stem from the well-meaning efforts of others. She is not afraid to agree with critics of those embarking on teaching English for non-transparent reasons and without qualifications. She summarises their warnings about societal, cultural and educational harm, followed by a category of her own: spiritual harm. In the introduction, two possible reader groups were suggested: pre-service teachers of English

and those already trained. In the light of the material in the first two chapters, to these I would add as readers the organisations who send well intentioned but professionally unqualified people overseas.

By Chapter 3, “English ministries with integrity: Four types,” the message becomes more positive, despite opening comments about what English ministry is not. The message is to be transparent. I found many of the quotations incisive and helpful, such as Purgason’s (2009, p. 190) statement that “typical textbooks teach students the language of buying, but not charitable giving, complaining but not necessarily praising, and apologizing, but usually not forgiving.”

Chapter 4 groups requirements for “English teachers with integrity” under three categories: professional, relational and ministry. Professionally, a teacher needs communicative competence, linguistic knowledge, knowledge about the language learning process, and competence in teaching methodology. These were the skills on which “Bill” failed to achieve a good mark in Chapter 1. Readers can grade themselves on various scales such as their experiences and qualifications, the latter ranging from short certificate courses to tertiary qualifications. Under relational skills Dormer includes cross-cultural understanding, such as finding out differences between local beliefs and Christianity. Some of the advice goes beyond specifically Christian responses. What about cultural misunderstandings of the type where Western ‘standards’ clash with the local understanding, such as the one that says “no one fails a class, regardless of their level of learning or accomplishment” (p. 56)? Or a less excusable lack of preparation for the local context, such as assuming that the word ‘Arab’ has the same definition as ‘Muslim’. The ministry skills section has a number of suggestions, including the ability to mentor.

Chapter 5, “English teaching formats: Four models,” continues with information that would be helpful to a wider readership. There are examples of the difference between planning a programme (with several teachers), a course (one teacher, one group), tutoring or coaching (one-to-one), and finally planning special events. Each section is tantalisingly short; perhaps in the future Dormer might produce booklets or articles that expand each of them. In fact Chapter 6, titled “English classes: Three building blocks,” does expand earlier topics in three categories: curriculum, methodology and materials. I can imagine using the “ten tips for planning curricula for English ministries” (pp. 86-89) as a framework for a teacher training session on course design. Although most of the points are a useful summary of principles of curriculum, some are

less obvious. For instance, in the spirit of learner autonomy, Dormer recommends considering learning opportunities beyond the course being planned. Similarly, her recommendation to teach ‘developmentally’ addresses the need to “develop the person” (p. 90). This principle is expanded with examples.

The final chapter, “Putting it all together: Making decisions about English ministry,” starts with a brief summary of the issues set out so far, and then revisits these in the form of questions to be asked by those who have a personal calling. My personal preference would have been to see this content at the start of the book as an overview, but perhaps that might have tempted readers to skip the details. The chapters end there, but not the content. At 43 pages, the seven appendices are, collectively, more than a third the length of the main text. For teachers wanting something tangible to help them get started, there are many practical suggestions. Either the *English for Life Curriculum* in Appendix A or the *Topical Course Syllabus* in Appendix B could provide a basis for modification to a local context. Further on there are a sample lesson plan, a shortish appendix on organising an English camp, a list of resources and other handy references.

Dormer’s material for this book comes from three main sources: the current literature on language teaching and learning, published viewpoints on English teaching as mission, and original ideas from the author’s own experience. Some sources will be familiar to TESOL readers: H. D. Brown, Kumaravadivelu, McKay, and others. The experiences scattered throughout the book include some fictional and some actual examples. For instance, she describes working with elementary school children in a country where repetition was so engrained that asking a question led to its being echoed back to her (Chapter 3).

Comparisons will be made between this book and a similarly titled one by Snow (2001). The two authors share a nationality, a life purpose and the fact that both have spent lengthy periods teaching English outside their own country. Snow addresses the issues without including details of methodology, a topic he address in another book, whereas Dormer combines the two elements, using a discussion of the issues as a basis for presenting ‘how to do it’ sections. Since the two books complement each other, people interested in the topic would probably want to read both.

Dormer acknowledges that there are not always easy answers to complex issues but does not stand back from offering practical and sound advice. It would be a pity if the book’s

message about professionalism put off volunteers who do not claim to be classroom teachers, but rather conversational partners to individuals or friendship groups offered to language learners who are looking for native speakers with whom to practise English.

The contexts where this book could be useful are varied. So far I have recommended it to people involved in a church-based conversation group for immigrants in an English speaking country and to people teaching English at tertiary levels in a country where English is not the first language. The discussion and application section at the end of each chapter would also make the book useful as a textbook in a pre-service course for teachers.

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