

11

THE ROLE OF SACRED TEXTS IN ENHANCING MOTIVATION AND LIVING THE VISION IN SECOND LANGUAGE ACQUISITION¹

Elfrieda Lepp-Kaethler

PROVIDENCE COLLEGE & SEMINARY (CANADA)

Zoltán Dörnyei

UNIVERSITY OF NOTTINGHAM (UK)

There is little debate about the importance of a wellspring of motivation for sustained and successful second language (L2) learning. In fact, some L2 educators argue that “motivation is probably the most important characteristic that students bring to a learning task” (O’Malley & Chamot, 1990, p. 160) and motivation has indeed been seen as one of the key learner characteristics in second language acquisition (SLA) (for a recent review, see Dörnyei & Ushioda, 2011). Motivation is by definition 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. Using Dörnyei’s (2005, 2009) “L2 Motivational Self System” as a theoretical framework, this qualitative interview study investigates how harmonizing one’s spiritual vision and future language self image, accompanied by using a sacred text in the learning process, can connect learners to an exceptionally powerful source of motivation for language learning.

Motivation, Vision, and Faith

The factors contributing to motivation in L2 learning are many, as are the theories and constructs employed in the increasingly complex area of L2 motivational

research. One recent approach that has been useful in understanding motivation, especially in highly motivated language learners, considers the motivational impact of *L2 identity* and *vision*. The close connection between language and personal identity comes into play in the learners' projected future selves and, for the purposes of the current study, in visions of their future *L2 selves*. Generally speaking, we also know that *faith* motivates people; it is not uncommon to observe people motivated by belief and devotion to a deity or a set of religious ideals engaging in actions that otherwise would not be undertaken. Finally, a third area of potential motivational factors investigated in our study concerns the anecdotal evidence of learners being motivated to learn a foreign language by specific *texts of significance*; for example, the literary scholar learning Spanish to read Borges in the original, the philosopher learning French to study Rousseau, or the theologian learning German to better understand Barth. In our case, the text of significance under focus is the sacred text of the Christian faith, the Bible. This body of observations resonates with the well-documented research on how language learners are more motivated when they are taught with authentic materials that are related directly to their everyday language needs (see, for example, Gilmore, 2007).

Admittedly, in considering motivational sources for language learning, factors concerning faith and sacred texts may not be the first to come to mind. In fact, Miller (2005) notes that spirituality has been a taboo subject and a "blind spot" in psychology as a whole, and Maehr (2005) confirms that psychological studies in motivation per se have paid very little attention to the possible role that spiritual beliefs play in shaping thoughts, action, feelings, and emotions. As he observes, religion:

... often influences certain basic psychological processes that are well-known and often studied by psychologists: the concept of self, the framing of purpose and purposiveness. Religion demonstrably has been, and remains, a powerful motivational force in the lives of many people.

(p. 141)

Accordingly, Joseph (2004) has extended the link between personal identity, language, and motivation to include religious faith. He identifies a "religious identity" that he notes encompasses the most profound source for understanding the meaning and purpose of life and the existence of the universe:

Ethnic and religious identities concern where we come from and where we are going—our entire existence, not just the moment to moment. It is these identities above all that, for most people, give profound meaning to the "names" we identify ourselves by, both as individuals and as groups. They supply the plot for the stories of our lives, singly and collectively, and are bound up with our deepest beliefs about life, the universe and everything.

(p. 172)

In the "global era" of the present age, questions of faith have increasingly risen to the surface in discourses such as the "war on terrorism" and other global antagonisms (Coupland, 2010), and Heather is right that "today the understanding of religious forces is perhaps rather higher on the agenda of the international community than for many years" (as cited in Mooney, 2010, p. 340). In this light, it is important to remember that language has always been, and continues to be, central to religious practice and, indeed, much of faith has long been mediated through language and sacred texts. The relationship between faith and second languages has also received attention recently in discussions on the pedagogical and ethical dilemmas facing values-based English language educators (see Wong & Canagarajah, 2009), no doubt influenced by the changing currents of religion in an era of globalization (cf. McGrath, 2010; Mooney, 2010; Thomas, 2005), but the linguistics-faith link was already highlighted in Crystal's (1965) early work on what would later come to be known as "theo-linguistics" (Mooney, 2010). Mooney also reviews research on religious language in the field of stylistics, as well as studies of language in religion conducted from a sociolinguistic perspective.

Given that language, identity, and faith are often closely intertwined, it is helpful to consider how this sea of factors influences motivation in language learning. It is against this backdrop that the motivational potential of sacred texts becomes obvious, as these may serve as an effective catalyst for combining language and faith identities to positive learning effect. The psychological theory of possible selves (Markus & Nurius, 1986) is a fruitful starting point for exploring this relationship because, as Maehr (2005) notes, religion contributes significantly to the substance of ideal and possible selves. Building on possible self theory, Dörnyei (2005, 2009) has reinterpreted the future self construct to apply to the L2 learning situation: as learners envision possible future scenarios of what they could become or might become or are afraid of becoming as a result of acquiring a new language identity, their possible future language selves become in many ways the personalized carriers of their goals and aspiration. This approach has been formalized in a three-component construct, the "L2 Motivational Self System":

1. *Ideal L2 Self*, which is the L2-specific facet of one's "ideal self": if the person we would like to become speaks an L2, the ideal L2 self is a powerful motivator to learn the L2 because of the desire to reduce the discrepancy between our actual and ideal selves. Thus, the image of being a person who can converse in the L2 motivates L2 learners to study the L2.
2. *Ought-to L2 Self*, which concerns the attributes that one believes one ought to possess to meet external expectations and to avoid possible negative outcomes.
3. *L2 Learning Experience*, which concerns the motivational impact of how the learner's actual self experiences the immediate learning environment (for example, the impact of the teacher, the curriculum, the peer group, and the experience of success).

As shown above, the study of linguistics and religion has received some attention over the past decades (for an overview, see Mooney, 2010). However, the role of faith from the perspective of the learner's personal progress and motivation has been, by and large, ignored. One of a small number of studies in this regard is a quantitative study based on Deci and Ryan's (1985) self-determination theory of motivation, in which Bakar, Sulaiman, and Rafeai (2010) studied the motivation of Muslim learners of Arabic. Besides observing several established factors, such as various aspects of intrinsic and extrinsic motivation, they also identify a new factor they label as "Religious Motivation" that contributes to the learners' overall motivation to learn Arabic. The authors note that religious motivation encompasses a combination of both intrinsic and extrinsic orientations. The mediating link is the fact that the sacred language of Islam is Arabic, and the authors conclude that, in studying the motivation of learners involved in learning sacred languages such as Arabic or Hebrew, especially by people who have a strong affiliation to the religions these languages are connected to (that is, Muslims and Jews), religious motivation should be considered as an independent factor.

Dörnyei's construct of future language selves, Joseph's notion of religious identity related to personal and language identity, and Bakar et al.'s concept of "religious motivation" provide a rich backdrop against which to examine the unique relationship between personal identity, L2 vision, and faith as they impact L2 motivation. This chapter emerges from conversations and subsequent formal interviews with people who are aligned with one particular faith community, Christianity, and in whom L2 learning emerges like a tributary flowing into the broader working out of their faith. Dörnyei's L2 Motivational Self System lends itself to investigating this junction between faith and language learning, because it addresses the relationship between vision and SLA. In these language learners, we see an L2 vision and a faith-related motivation/vision combine to generate a source of motivational power that propels them to engage in observable language learning behavior with extraordinary intensity and duration. In this study, we examine one specific type of interaction between language learning vision and spiritual vision, the situation in which the increased L2 motivation is in some way related to using or desiring to use a sacred text.

The Study

The participants were selected using snowball sampling, based on two criteria: first, demonstrating an unusually high motivation to learn an L2, and second, engaging in language learning in a way that is linked to using, or desiring to use, a sacred text. The seven participants chosen for this study were selected from a larger project encompassing a total of twenty people who participated in semi-structured face-to-face interviews, which lasted between 45 and 75 minutes each. Participants for the current study were from a number of nationalities and, in terms of their religious background, all seven were strongly affiliated with

Christianity. In addition to their L1, participants had learned a variety of languages—between one and seven—in order to use, understand, or access a sacred text, in this case, the Bible. In terms of their educational background, all participants had post-secondary education ranging from 3 to 9 years. All interviews were recorded with an electronic voice recording device; the data were transcribed and analyzed with NVivo software. Table 11.1 presents a short introduction to the seven interviewees.

TABLE 11.1 Participant descriptions

Myat, in his mid-30s, is from an East Asian country. He is a theology student studying for a Master of Divinity in North America. In his home country, he directs a Bible/Discipleship School. He has learned English in order to be able to read the Bible in English.
Julius, in his early 60s, is North American and has a Ph.D. in Old Testament Studies. He works as Professor of Old Testament in a theological seminary, where he is also an instructor of biblical Hebrew. He has learned seven languages (Hebrew, Greek, French, German, Akkadian, Aramaic, and Ugaritic) in order to understand the Bible and the biblical literature better.
Linda, in her early 50s, is North American, with an MA in Linguistics. She and her husband have worked for 20 years as missionaries and Bible translators in an African country. She has learned three languages (French, Swahili, and Bosdong) in order to translate the Bible.
Lucinda, in her mid-30s, was raised and has lived in South America for most of her life. She has a degree in Biblical Studies and has taken courses in translation and adult literacy development. She has learned two languages (Bibacló and Mankhuet) in order to do Bible translation and related work. She and her husband have worked as Bible translators and adult literacy workers in a South American country for 12 years.
John is in his early 60s and was born and raised in North America. He has an MA in Global Studies and has taken numerous courses in linguistics and translation. He has learned three languages (French, Sulla, and Bilabongalij) in order to translate the Bible. He and his family have worked for 35 years in language learning and Bible translation in an African country.
Daryl is in his mid-60s, born and raised in North America. He has a degree in Biblical Studies and has taken numerous courses in linguistics, second language acquisition, and translation. He has learned two languages (Salimpo and Minkabo) in order to work as a missionary and translate the Bible. Together with his family, he has dedicated 35 years to language learning and Bible translation work in a South American country.
Margaret is in her early 70s, born and raised in a South American country. She has completed a diploma in Biblical Studies, and has taken numerous courses in linguistics and translation. Together with her husband, she has learned Elcavinch and has spent approximately 50 years in language learning and translation of the Bible and related literature in a South American country.

Note: Names and languages have been changed to protect the participants' identities.

Findings

As noted earlier, motivation is the source of *why* people engage in something, *how hard* they work at it and *how long* they pursue it. Upon examining the motivational patterns that emerge from the data, two distinct phases can be observed in the participants' accounts: (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). Let us first consider the main sources that blend to create an L2 vision in the participants' minds: Why do they engage in language learning? After examining how the L2 vision has formed, we will consider *how hard* and *how long* they are willing to sustain language learning. This includes the ways in which this vision is lived out in the observable goal-oriented behavior they occupy themselves with as a result.

1. Creating the Vision

Before examining the trajectory of each participant's language learning journey, it is important to consider their sociocultural and religious contexts. All seven participants in this study align themselves closely with the Christian faith and share a common understanding of the Bible as a divinely inspired book. For example, Julius attended a Bible school right after secondary school before embarking on studies for his chosen career as an engineer; here, as he states:

The first step in becoming interested [in learning languages] came through my interest in the Bible. I was taught that the Bible is foundational to everything. "The Word of our God shall stand forever"—that was a huge stone at the entrance [of the school].

Another explicit summary of the core belief in Holy Scripture comes from Linda, who responds to the question probing her motivation for spending a significant portion of her life doing Bible translation as follows:

... because it is God who is speaking to us. This is the one place that we can with certainty go and know that God has communicated with me and what he tells us about life, eternal life, hope, salvation, and how to live.

In building on this foundation, the participants demonstrate three core characteristics that work together in harmony to create the wellspring in which their language learning vision is embedded and from which their language learning motivation surfaces: (a) *spiritual vision*; (b) *L2 goal/vision of L2 self*; and (c) *sacred text*.

(a) Spiritual Vision/Call

All the participants described a strong inner prompting, which they perceived as a divine call on their lives to vocations of service (for example, missionary, Bible translator, Bible scholar) in the Christian church. This call included a vivid sense of themselves moving toward a hoped-for vision in a future world within an imagined community. By way of illustration, Linda described a strong inner prompting to become a Bible translator, which she remembers sensing from an early age. She credited her motivation for embarking on her training in linguistics and her 20 years of translation work to this call:

It was just an absolute conviction that I just felt that that was what God was telling me to do. It's hard to explain but it was very very strong. And from age nine on I would tell people that I was going to be a writer and a translator . . . a very strong sense of call . . . which was a really good thing for me because I really needed a high motivation. Because I would never ever have gone . . . otherwise.

As a young adult, while engaged in Biblical Studies, Lucinda also experienced a strong inner prompting to become a missionary. She expressed her urge to follow this call, despite initial inner resistance, as follows:

I felt in my heart that this is probably what God wanted me to do; . . . all of a sudden [it] became so clear to me, the shortness of this life and eternity and . . . I reconciled with what God wanted me to do.

Myat also described an inner urge that he recalls vividly from his childhood. He interpreted this experience as a divine call to become a missionary:

When I was a young boy I was convinced that God called me into . . . the ministry of sharing and preaching the gospel to all nations . . . that calling was very strong.

(b) L2 Goal/Vision of an L2 Self

The particular vocations the participants found themselves called to required that they learn one or more languages, as an integral aspect of fulfilling their divine call. While all participants identified a link between their desire to learn language and their divine call, Myat's account was particularly striking in its vividness and in the clarity with which he perceived this connection. First, he noted that learning English was one of the first tasks on his path toward his vocation as a missionary, and he clearly articulated that this was his primary motivation to learn English:

I came to the realization that unless I am able to speak English, how can I go to other nations and do this work? And so I learned English so that I can bring the gospel to the people in a language they can understand.

Myat then described particularly lucid images of a “future English self” from his childhood. From an early age, even before he knew about English as a language, he perceived himself being drawn into a “different world” and a different language:

When I was a boy, about 7 or 8 years . . . I had a very strong sense that I had to be in a different world, different from the world I was living in at that time and I used to dream something entirely different, about a people group that spoke a different language. And when I grew old enough to recognize that there was such a thing as English people, having different cultures and the language, then there was no sense of doubt in me that this is the one.

It is remarkable that this image of a future English-speaking self went so far as to appear even in his dreams, where he clearly saw himself speaking English fluently. The world of English in his dreams gave him a great deal of pleasure; in fact, it became a kind of virtual world that he inhabited in his mind and in his dreams:

In my dream, I was very good at English. I spoke to people, but when I wake up I did not know what I spoke. But I sensed the joy of speaking English. So I lived basically in two worlds. In the world of English, and in the reality where there is very little English.

Myat saw a connection between this future “English self” in his dream that seemed so real, and a sense of divine call, which he identified as a strong source of motivation to learn English. The future L2 self played the role of a model or an ideal that he imitated and aspired to. Even though he had not yet attained the L2 fluency he desired, his future L2 self as he saw and experienced it in his dreams gave him hope that it was indeed possible to achieve fluency. He connected this future L2 self to his divine call and identified it as divine providence putting into place a source of motivation that helped him to keep pushing forward in his language learning efforts:

I tried to imitate the dream I had but it was impossible. However there was a strong sense, as a result of the dream, there is a possibility that I will be able to speak as in the experience of my dream. That always strengthened me. . . . I interpreted the dream as God helping me see myself in the future. I am too far away from the point I would like to be in the future, but I can see the absolute possibility that I can reach that point.

Years later, as the L2 vision and spiritual vision/call became reality, he looked back at his “divine call” as the starting point and saw himself having come full circle:

Some churches invited me to speak [in English] and I see my preaching in other churches as a part of God’s fulfilling my dream. So . . . the gospel is the main motivation.

Other participants’ data was less dramatic but nevertheless demonstrated a clear motivational connection between language learning and faith-related vocation. Linda explained how, in her initial post-secondary education, she chose Greek language courses as a way of laying the foundation for a vocation in Bible translation, even though she was still tentative about it:

I went to Bible College for three years and made sure I was taking Bible courses. And I took Greek with the idea that if I ever went into Bible translation I would want Greek. So I took about 12 credit hours of Greek.

In a similar vein, Julius, who had in the meantime switched from engineering to theology, found himself confronted with the need to learn several languages in order to further his education as a theologian:

As soon as I started doctoral studies . . . I had to learn to read German. I had to learn to read French or I couldn’t pursue doctoral studies.

Margaret described the importance of call as the starting point for her work:

We could only do this work under the condition that God called us to do it. Language learning is of course part of it. How else could we do this work? How else could we understand the people, understand their way of thinking? You have to know the language.

As these examples demonstrate, a clear motivational connection between the future L2 self and a faith vocation can be established in the personal development of the interviewees.

(c) Sacred Text

In addition to the initial divine call and the vision of a future L2 self, there was a third factor playing a central role in the language-learning facet of the participants’ vocation: a *sacred text* (which was, in these cases, the Bible). Myat described the centrality of the sacred text in his language learning, again with exceptional clarity and focus. He noted several reasons why he had chosen to learn English using the Bible: first, it made the process easier because he was already

familiar with the content; second, he had no access to any other resource in English; and third, immersing in the Bible as part of learning the language resulted both in enhanced knowledge of the sacred text and the acquisition of the language that was a part of his L2 vision:

I used the Bible as my textbook . . . this was a help because many of the New Testament stories were familiar to me; . . . the Bible was the only book in English that I had in my hands. The ultimate goal of learning English is that with this language I will be able to read and understand the Word of God. For me learning the truth from the Bible and learning English in my own way are inseparable. So as I read the Bible, I learned the truth and at the same time I learned English. And so it served two purposes together, two in one.

Lucinda further highlighted the motivational capacity of the sacred text by noting the arduous process of language learning and making it clear that, if the sacred text were not involved, she would not embark on that demanding task:

I would not learn Mankhuet or Bibaclo. I would not go through the hard effort of learning another language unless it had to do with translating the word of God or communicating the word of God in some way . . . It is much too hard of work if it were not for the burning desire to communicate God's truth to people who need it.

Julius described the key link between the sacred text and his motivation to learn Hebrew, explaining that a deeper understanding of the sacred text could only be attained through learning Hebrew: "*When I took Hebrew my main motivation was . . . I was entirely intrigued by the way the gospel was preached. And the only way I could figure that out was to start to learn Hebrew.*" He then spoke about the thrill of learning biblical languages during his doctoral studies in Old Testament, a fascination that is reminiscent of "flow" (Csíkszentmihályi, 1996). It is noteworthy, though, that he made a distinction between his enjoyment of language learning—which he admitted was in and of itself fascinating—and the "greater end" of understanding the sacred text at a profound level so that he was equipped to communicate his faith with deeper insight and effectiveness:

Oh . . . I just never had so much joy in my life! . . . this doing languages was better than engineering by far. . . . it enabled me to read the Bible in ways that I had never been able to read it before. . . . I got involved in languages: German, French, Ugaritic, Akkadian, Aramaic, Greek, and Hebrew. But as an end in and of itself it wouldn't have given me any joy at all. Oh no, no, no, no, no . . . It was a means to the greater end that I could preach from the Bible in ways that others can appreciate.

2. Living the Vision

We have examined the reasons why the participants engaged in language learning, allowing us to uncover a tri-part make-up of their vision: a spiritual calling, a vision of an L2 self, and a desire to access (or make accessible to others) a sacred text. In the seven cases that we selected for this study, a key component of operationalizing a response to the spiritual vision/call involved a vision of a future L2 self with a particular projected end in mind. Participants saw themselves as fluent L2 users, and a central facet of this mental picture involved interacting in an L2 with the sacred text and the imagined community surrounding it. When participants engaged in goal-oriented language learning behavior that was synchronized and harmonized with this joint spiritual/L2 vision, the process of language learning was energized with extraordinary vigor. We will now examine observable behavior from which we can make inferences about the intensity (*how hard*) and the longevity (*how long*) of the participants' engagement in language learning and related activities.

(a) Intensity and Quality of Goal-oriented Behavior

Several observable behaviors and end results allow us to infer the intensity and quality of participants' engagement. First of all, the participants' overall willingness to make significant personal investments and sacrifices was striking; second, we have evidence of the high level of language proficiency achieved; and finally, in a number of the participants, there was a tangible "end product"—a translated document.

Willingness to Make Significant Personal Investments, Changes, and Sacrifices

All participants indicated in one way or another that their decision to learn language(s) as a part of their overall spiritual call was a decision made with great care and entailed a significant change of direction in their lives. For most participants and their immediate families, this decision involved relocating from their home country to a culture significantly different than their own. It included moving to countries of extreme poverty, political unrest, harsh climates, isolation, and minimal access to medical services. It entailed living on donations from the members of their extended faith communities. Most of them learned minority languages without written codes for which resources such as language instructors, classes, and course materials were minimal, unavailable, or non-existent, thus requiring significant initiative on their part to put such scaffolds into place for themselves.

Myat's experience illustrates the intensity with which he pursued his language learning. He was so drawn by this future L2 self that he went so far as to voluntarily

remove himself from his L1 in order to propel himself more quickly into this future world of his new language self:

I was very dedicated to learning English. What I did was, the moment I stepped into the campus of the school I said goodbye to my own native language. I said to myself, I will never speak or read anything in my own language. And I said to myself, I will even dream my dreams in English and I did not want to get out of the campus without learning the language.

He described the prayer he engaged in before he began to learn English. The force of his determination is expressed through abandoning his L1 in order to acquire his L2 more quickly, even to the extent of giving up language altogether in the interim and engaging in prayer without language:

Then I went to my room and I wanted to dedicate myself to God in prayer and I knelt and wanted to pray but how should I pray? I had no language. I gave up my native language and here I was ready to learn a new language but I can't use it at that point in time yet. And so I just prayed without words.

Then, in addition to his studies at the theological seminary (where the medium of instruction was neither English nor his L1), he proceeded to teach himself English by working with nothing more than an English version of the New Testament, an English L1 dictionary, and a notebook. During this time, he had virtually no exposure to English speakers. To practice pronunciation and fluency in speaking, he made a habit of going into the forest alone and lecturing to the trees:

I went to a jungle, a place where there was no people so I will preach to the trees, I will preach to the open space with the intention that I will train my . . . lip/mouth organs and also to make myself make sentences spontaneously.

In two and half months, he had worked through the entire New Testament and created an L1 English dictionary in his notebook, based on the words in the text.

John described the particular challenges of learning three languages as follows:

We had no resources, no other linguists working with Bilabongalij, nor was there any other language that was similar. It was a very unique, exceptionally complex tonal language. We were not adequately prepared for such a challenge. We were still weak in French and we thought we would just pick up Sulla along the way, but that was not happening

so we had to set aside six months just to learn Sulla. Then we went back to Bilabongalij.

John and his wife chose to make sacrifices that included simple living conditions in a poverty-stricken country, far away from extended family. They and their children suffered illnesses without having readily accessible health care. Linda also described the difficulties she and her family encountered in experiencing danger and political unrest, which gave rise to their repeated evacuations from their host country.

Level of Language Proficiency Achieved

While we were not able to measure the interviewees' L2 proficiency levels ourselves, the participants who were Bible translators were accountable to their sending agencies and international organizations that oversee Bible translations worldwide. These organizations require a high level of fluency as one condition for authorizing translations. They employ highly trained linguists, Greek and Hebrew scholars, and other translation experts who enforce these standards. In describing the checks and balances in the lengthy translation process, Daryl noted that, "*Bible translators have to be at the top of the proficiency scale.*" Lucinda described the standards in her sending agency, noting that, "*I had to pass all the levels of learning before I was allowed to help [my husband] with translation.*" She explained that, with other cross-cultural work such as health care, one can get by with a lower level of language, but when working with translation, "*it requires a much higher level of fluency.*"

A Tangible End Product: A Translated Document

A number of the participants completed translations of all or significant sections of the Bible, which have gone through rigorous checks under the direction of organizations such as Wycliffe Global Alliance (www.wycliffe.net), SIL International (www.sil.org), and Biblica, an international organization with a 200-year history of Bible translation (www.biblica.com/scripture-ministry/translation).

(b) Longevity of Goal-Oriented Behavior

It is not unusual for someone to commit himself or herself to intense and rigorous language study for a short period of time. For all these participants, however, language learning was an essential part of a life-long commitment to learning. After 35 years of language learning and translation, Daryl recalled that, in their preparatory training, it was instilled in them that they were committing for "the long haul." Daryl spent 10 years in language learning before he was able to begin with translation, but language learning continued in the years that followed; as he recalled, "*I kept having to go back to the dictionaries that I had written.*"

Like Daryl, John also spent over three decades in learning languages. It was only after 15 years of language learning, linguistic analysis, and creating a written code that he was able to begin with translation. At one point, with the help of a more specialized linguist, he dedicated 5 years exclusively to deciphering the exceptionally complex tonal system of Bilabongalij.

Margaret looked back at the commitment she made 50 years earlier to become a translator, which in her mind was as sacred as her marriage vows:

There were two questions that my husband asked me when he proposed: if I would marry him and if I would share his work as a missionary and Bible translator. Now that he has passed away, [my marriage vows] are no longer . . . but the second promise remains. This is why I continue.

At over 70, she continued to work at translation and at improving her language skills as the language changes with cultural and generational shifts:

It is a very long process to learn a language. We had to figure out the grammar and all, and of course we had no materials—the way the words are constructed—it is very complicated and to get it all right—well, I won't reach that in my lifetime. I was recently at a linguists conference and I learned more about the language groups in this region. I learned about new ways in which certain words are used and new phonetic symbols. And now we have to continue working with the language—a grammar book, a dictionary . . .

Summing up, from the participants' observable behavior, we can make inferences about the *intensity*, *quality*, and *longevity* of their engagement. Their willingness to make significant personal investments and sacrifices, the high level of language proficiency achieved, and finally the tangible "end product"—a translated document—all suggest that participants pursued language learning with a high level of intensity and quality. Informants' lengthy commitment to language learning speaks of extraordinary persistence and depth of investment, fuelled by an unusually intensive wellspring of motivation.

Implications

This study suggests that there exists an underground reservoir of motivation for SLA that taps into some learners' identities in harmony with their ideal L2 selves, their spiritual vision, and a sacred text. What implications might this have for the second language classroom? What might language classrooms look like that harness this hidden wellspring? The third pillar of Dörnyei's L2 Motivational Self System concerns the L2 learning experience—motives related to the immediate learning environment such as the impact of the teacher, the curriculum, the

classroom dynamics, and the experience of success. How might the source of motivation that we have identified in this study be utilized to provide sustenance that could refresh language learners and contribute to the language learning experience as a more meaningful, rewarding and fruitful use of time? Here are three broad implications to consider:

1. We might consider more seriously the implications of L2 curriculum content and its relationship to learner self-identity for learner motivation. David Smith and Barbara Carvill (2000) have pointed out that the content of L2 curricula often reflects a confined image of learner identity, such as the learner as a consumer, the learner as a cog in the economic machinery of a society, or the learner as a tourist. For example, in a language classroom, food and drink are routinely treated as items of consumption; however, Carvill and Smith suggest that this may not be the only or even most educationally interesting and necessary way to deal with this vocabulary. What might it mean to engage learners in discussions about those who do not have enough food and drink, or to consider the idea that "humans do not live by bread alone?" Carvill and Smith observe that questions concerning deeper meanings of life or the spiritual identity of language learners are seldom addressed in L2 curriculum. The results of this study indicate that some learners would welcome such a focus.

We find an interesting and well-documented parallel to this need for deeper meaning in actual classroom practice in Bonny Norton's (2001) case study research of two Canadian immigrant language learners, Katarina and Felicia. Norton argues that, while these learners were actively engaged in classroom practices, the realm of their community extended beyond the four walls of the classroom; that is, they were operating at the interface of reality and imagination. However, because the teacher failed to give room to practices of imagination but only focused instead on the pragmatic aspects of the curriculum and the classroom reality, Katarina and Felicia ultimately withdrew from their ESL classes.

2. We might consider using sacred texts—or, more generally, texts of special significance—as L2 curriculum content. The selection of the particular text could be a response to needs identified by the learners themselves. With regard to sacred texts, we should not discount learner motivations other than purely religious ones, which is well illustrated by ways in which the Bible is commonly used in state universities in China, a country where religious proselytizing is forbidden. The first author was astounded when, in a Canadian public university, a student of Chinese heritage and Buddhist persuasion "preached" to her English for Academic Purposes class on the importance of reading the Bible as a way of learning English. Later, she discovered that this view is not at all uncommon in China, as there appears to be a widespread perception there that reading the Bible is an important source for understanding Western literature, law, economics, and history

(Zetzsche, 1997)—and also for learning English. Accordingly, courses in “Bible Stories” are routinely taught in English in Chinese universities. Further research could investigate the nature of the motivational disposition of students, teachers, and university administrators who most likely do not align themselves with the faith communities surrounding this sacred text but nevertheless choose to use sacred texts for language learning, presumably for their literary and historical value. This phenomenon is likely to share several features with aspects of the “Language through Literature” movement that has been so widespread in language teaching methodology.

3. We might also consider using sacred texts as L2 curriculum content in response to learners’ self-identified needs; for example, with learners who are learning a language for theological or missiological purposes or with adherents of faith communities who relocate to another country and choose to integrate into a similar faith community that functions in their new target L2. While the informants of this study represent cases of extraordinary L2 motivation involving a sacred text, anecdotal evidence suggests that there are many people who align themselves with faith communities and engage in language learning at least partially motivated by their religious identity. We have found, for example, in several faith-based English language programs that used the *Faith Series* (Tiessen & Lepp-Kaethler, 2011), which is a Bible-based English language curriculum and coursebook series, that many learners responded positively not only to task-based methodology, but specifically also to the Bible content for learning English. While sacred texts by no means tap into all language learners’ motivations—which, of course, could be said about any content in ESP courses—the current study indicates that there are L2 learners for whom sacred texts do constitute meaningful and highly motivating input for language learning.

Conclusion

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: employing Dörnyei’s L2 Self System in examining the relationship between spiritual vision and L2 vision, our study highlighted the use of sacred texts as a source of singular determination and force among some language learners. We have found 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: learners are caught in a powerful inner current that propels them to acquire language with exceptional intensity, persistence, and longevity. These results, then, may encourage materials writers, curriculum designers, and teachers to try to tap into these or analogous sources of motivation in ways that support positive outcomes for language learning.

Note

1. We are indebted to the following people who provided insights and examples in personal communications to illustrate some of the points made in this chapter: Christy Lewis (March 24, 2010), Vickie LaClare (August 9, 2010), Mary Hogan (February 18, 2009), Oksana, Amile, Ok, Elvina, and Eunjin (June 24, 2009), Gloria Cho (March 7, 2011), InKyung Kim (March 7, 2011), Qiaojun Xu, Jack Xu (2011), Gail Tiessen and Amber Wylie (Nottingham Extension Research Group).

References

- Bakar, K. A., Sulaiman, N. F., & Rafaa, Z. A. M. (2010). Self-determination theory and motivational orientation of arabic learners: A principal component analysis. *GEMA Online Journal of Language Studies*, 10(1), 71–86.
- Coupland, N. (2010). *The handbook of language and globalization*. New York: John Wiley.
- Crystal, D. (1965). *Linguistics, language and religion*. London, UK: Burns Oats/Hawthorn Books.
- Csikszentmihályi, M. (1996). *Creativity: Flow and the psychology of discovery and invention*. New York: HarperCollins.
- Deci, E., & Ryan, M. (1985). *Intrinsic motivation and self-determination in human behavior*. New York: Plenum Press.
- Dörnyei, Z. (2005). *The psychology of the language learner: Individual differences in second language acquisition*. Mahwah, NJ: Lawrence Erlbaum.
- Dörnyei, Z. (2009). The L2 Motivational Self System. In Z. Dörnyei, & E. Ushioda (Eds.), *Motivation, language identity and the L2 self* (pp. 9–42). Bristol, UK: Multilingual Matters.
- Dörnyei, Z., & Ushioda, E. (Eds.). (2009). *Motivation, language identity and the L2 self*. Bristol, UK: Multilingual Matters.
- Dörnyei, Z., & Ushioda, E. (2011). *Teaching and researching motivation* (2nd ed.). Harlow, UK: Longman.
- Gilmore, A. (2007). Authentic materials and authenticity in foreign language learning. *Language Teaching*, 40, 97–118.
- Joseph, J. E. (2004). *Language and identity: National, ethnic, religious*. Basingstoke, UK: Palgrave Macmillan.
- McGrath, A. (2010). *The passionate intellect: Christian faith and the discipleship of the mind*. Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press.
- Maehr, M. L. (2005). The meaning that religion offers and the motivation that may result. In W. R. Miller, & H. Delaney (Eds.), *Judeo-Christian perspectives on psychology: Human nature, motivation, and change* (pp. 133–144). Washington, DC: American Psychological Association.
- Markus, H., & Nurius, P. (1986). Possible selves. *American Psychologist*, 41(9), 954–969.
- Miller, W. R. (2005). What is human nature? Reflections from Judeo-Christian perspectives. In W. R. Miller, & H. D. Delaney (Eds.), *Judeo-Christian perspectives on psychology* (pp. 11–25). Washington, DC: American Psychological Association.
- Mooney, A. (2010). Has God gone global? Religion, language and globalization. In N. Coupland (Ed.), *The handbook of language and globalization* (pp. 323–346). Malden, MA: Wiley-Blackwell.
- Norton, B. (2001). Non-participation, imagined communities and the language classroom. In M. P. Breen (Ed.), *Learner contributions to language learning: New directions in research* (pp. 159–171). Harlow, UK: Longman.

- O'Malley, J. M., & Chamot, A. U. (1990). *Learning strategies in second language acquisition*. New York: Cambridge University Press.
- Smith, D., & Carvill, B. (2000). *The gift of the stranger: Faith, hospitality, and foreign language learning*. Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans.
- Thomas, S. (2005). *The global resurgence of religion and the transformation of international relations: The struggle for the soul of the twenty-first century*. New York: Palgrave Macmillan.
- Tiessen, G., & Lepp-Kaethler, E. (2011). *Faith portraits II: The Acts of the Apostles (Bible-based English language curriculum)*. Otterburne, MB: Providence Bookstore Publishing.
- Wong, M. S., & Canagarajah, A. S. (2009). *Christian and critical English language educators in dialogue: Pedagogical and ethical dilemmas*. New York: Routledge.
- Zetzsche, J. O. (1997). Cultural primer or "Bible Stories" in contemporary mainland China. *Asian and African Studies*, 6(2), 217–232.