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Discourse and Religion in Educational Practice

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Abstract

Despite the existence of long-held binaries between secular and sacred, private and public spaces, school and religious literacies in many contemporary societies, the significance of religion and its relationship to education and society more broadly has become increasingly topical. Yet, it is only recently that the investigation of the nexus of discourse and religion in educational practice has started to receive some scholarly attention. In this chapter, religion is understood as a cultural practice, historically situated and embedded in specific local and global contexts. This view of religion stresses the social alongside the subjective or experiential dimensions. It explores how through active participation and apprenticeship in culturally appropriate practices and behaviors often mediated intergenerationally and the mobilisation of linguistic and other semiotic resources but also affective, social and material resources, membership in religious communities is constructed and affirmed. The chapter reviews research strands that have explored different aspects of discourse and religion in educational practice as a growing interdisciplinary field. Research strands have examined the place and purpose of religion in general and evangelical Christianity in particular in English Language Teaching (ELT) programmes and the interplay of religion and teaching and learning in a wide range of religious and increasingly secular educational

contexts. They provide useful insights for scholars of discourse studies to issues of identity, socialisation, pedagogy and language policy.

1. Introduction/Definitions

"It makes me think that anyone can make a difference, no matter what age, race, gender, or nationality. It shows us that there are more important things than ourselves, and that no one should be alone in the world. We were not made to be alone, we were made so that we could comfort, not kill, so that we could heal, not hurt, and so that we could help our earth become the better, cleaner, kinder earth that God created it to be. Juan Mann's story shows us that no one should suffer being alone. We are all humans. We are all equal. We are all His creations, and He blessed each and every one of us differently, but all the same, He blessed each and every one of us. I think that the Free Hugs campaign was a small bit, but it helped the people he hugged, and the people who saw, and cared." (student reflection, 12/5/2017 reported in Lytra 2018: 45)

The students in this 6th grade classroom had been talking about how the actions of a single person could affect the lives of many as part of the central idea of the unit of inquiry the students had been exploring at the time: "Through small actions, everyone can make an impact." The student who wrote the reflection above was referring to the Free Hugs movement that sprang up in Australia in 2004. It was initiated by Juan Mann from Sydney who started giving free hugs in his local shopping mall. His actions were spurred by the realisation that people were living increasingly disconnected lives and he wanted to do something about it. The idea caught hold of people's imagination and spread across the globe. Earlier that day, I had had an informal conversation with the class teacher about my research interest in the role of

religion in children's learning and social identification. He had commented that he hadn't given the topic much thought in his pedagogical practice; later in the day, he sent me the abovementioned student's reflection via email with the following comment: "Interestingly and coincidently, just after you left a classmate wrote this. Funny time, *non*?" [French for “no” in the original]

The student's reflection and the teacher's comments provide several useful insights to the investigation of the nexus of discourse and religion in secular educational settings and wider society more broadly. First, the student employs a religious interpretative frame to make sense of academic learning (understanding and evaluating the actions of Juan Mann in relation to the central idea of the unit of inquiry). Besides invoking a higher power, the student signals a style shift by appropriating textual features, such as syntax, lexis and repetition, which allude to religious registers and genres, such as sermons. Indeed, language in both written and oral form has played a key role in the development of religion; in constructing and clarifying doctrine, in representing religious experiences and beliefs and in participating in religious practices. The relationship between language and religion is encapsulated in Keane's (1997: 47) observation that "the effort to know and interact with an otherworld tends to demand highly marked uses of linguistic resources". Returning to the example above, the efficacy of the religious frame in lending moral authority to the student's response draws on the status of religion as a source of knowledge. Equally importantly, the student's use of a religious frame demonstrates the central role religion plays in identity development. It illustrates their sense of self and their understanding and interpretation of the world and their place within it as well as how individual self-identity is intertwined with social identity aspects, such as religious and learner

identities (Gregory et al 2013). Framing their response in religious terms demonstrates how the student draws upon the full range of their linguistic and cultural resources (including religious sources of knowledge) across home, community and school settings to successfully participate in the school-assigned writing task. In so doing, the student's reflection indicates that "being a learner takes on wider moral and spiritual dimensions" (Kenner et al 2016: 213), highlighting the centrality of a faith dimension to learner identity. While the student's reflection provides a window into writing as a process of "inscribing ourselves and others in particular ways of doing/thinking/being" (Lillis 2013: 126), it sits uncomfortably with long-held binaries between secular and sacred, private and public spaces, school and religious literacies in many contemporary societies. It points to the existence of more porous and fluid boundaries, what Baquedano-López and Ochs (2002) have referred to as the "entanglement" of secular and sacred worlds (: 175). In secular educational practice in particular, the role of religion in students' achievement, socialisation and identity development tends to be ignored, disparaged or unfavourably compared to that of school literacies (Genishi and Dyson 2009; Gregory, Long, and Volk 2004; Lytra, Volk and Gregory 2016b; Skerrett 2013). The teacher's comment that he hadn't given much thought to the role of religion in students' school learning is indicative of many teachers' stance towards religious literacies (Dávila 2015; Long 2016). The marginal position of religion in secular education in many contemporary societies echoes dominant discourses that consider religion as a very private and personal matter. More often than not, students and teachers are expected to keep aspects of their identities, including their religious identities, outside schools and classrooms. At the same time, the significance of religion and its relationship to schooling and society more broadly has become increasingly topical. It has been linked to concerns about pluralism and

social cohesion as well as debates about citizenship, nationality and belonging, gender and sexuality, violence and terrorism (Baker, Gabrielatos, McEnery 2013; Hemming 2015; Hoque 2015).

Similar to language, culture or community, religion is understood as a complex and contested category. In this chapter, religion is viewed as an essential part of culture; a cultural practice that is historically situated and embedded in specific local and global contexts (Barton and Hamilton 1998; Gregory and Williams 2000; Heath 1983; Lytra, Volk and Gregory 2016b). A religion as cultural practice perspective examines religion in social activity, in people's histories of participation in religious practice and groups, both off-line and increasingly on-line, as the studies in Rosowsky (2018a) attest to. While recognising that each person may experience and participate in religious practices in personal and deeply theological ways (Watson 2018), it stresses the social alongside the subjective or experiential dimension of religion. In this sense, it resonates with Geerzt's (1973: 112-3) assertion that it is "out of the context of concrete acts of religious observance that religious conviction emerges on the human plane". In addition, it highlights the importance of examining religious practices in their historical, socio-political, economic and ideological contexts (Badenhorst and Makoni 2017; Han 2018). Through socialisation in culturally appropriate practices and behaviors and the mobilisation of linguistic and other semiotic resources but also affective, social and material resources, people construct and affirm their membership in religious communities. It is important to bear in mind that similar to religions, religious communities are understood as internally diverse and religious practices as adapting, evolving and transforming across times, spaces, generations and technologies. Moreover, individuals may identify with a particular religious

community (and disassociate themselves from others) to varying degrees, enabled by their unique autobiographies, life experiences and choices and limited by larger constraints over which they may have no control. Central to identity construction is how people present themselves and are seen by others both inside and outside of their own religious communities; also, as we saw in the student's reflection, how religious identity is woven together with other identity aspects and under what conditions one's religious identity is foregrounded, or privileged over other identity aspects. Religious identities are far from homogeneous and static and levels of religiosity are wide-ranging, confirming Badenhorst and Makoni's (2017: 599) observation that "religious subjectivities exist on a continuum that ranges from nominal membership to life-transforming modes of personal devotion".

2. Overview of Topic

Historically, religion has been an important driving force worldwide and it remains as such in today's globalised world despite changes in the religious landscape. These include on the one hand the influence of secularisation and on the other hand the persistence or resurgence of religion and the increasingly multi-faith nature of many contemporary societies. Religion is considered as a resource providing moral and material support, comfort and hope for many individuals and communities as they navigate the challenges and opportunities of a globalised world. This is especially true for individuals and communities new to a country or facing hardship and discrimination. For instance, several scholars have investigated the role of religion as a resource to resist racism, structural discrimination and marginalisation (see studies by Baquedano-López and Ochs 2002, Ek 2005, Volk 2016 with Latino families in the US; Bigelow 2008 with Somali Muslim adolescents also in the US; Han 2009, 2011

with Evangelical Christian Chinese skilled immigrants in Canada). Others have examined the historical significance of the Black Church in the US in supporting African American youth to develop resilience and educational achievement (Barrett 2010; Haight 2002; McMillon and Edwards 2000; Peele-Eady 2011, 2016; Jordan and Wilson 2017). At the same time, religion is regarded as a constraint. All religions involve processes of boundary making with the purpose of including those who belong to the group, thereby enabling group cohesion, and crucially excluding those who break away from cultural conformity and group identity, as Rumsey (2016) has illustrated with regards to religious practices associated with coming of age, adult baptism and shunning among the Amish, in the US. Moreover, religion is often associated with sowing seeds for social division and prejudice and the ills of colonialism, neo-colonialism and proselytism (Edge 2003, Pennycook and Coutand-Marin 2004). Negative representations of religion are compounded by mainstream media reports, which tend to emphasise religious fanaticism and extremism, often stereotyping or misrepresenting particular religions and religious communities (Ahmed 2015; Baker, Gabrielatos, McEnery 2013; Haque 2004; Pihlaja and Thomspon 2017). Rather than ignoring or dismissing religion in social life, its role should be critically investigated through in-depth empirical research. Yet, empirical studies of discourse and religion particularly in educational practice, which is the focus of this chapter, have received limited scholarly attention.

In this chapter, I set out to explore the intersection of discourse and religion as a growing interdisciplinary field. As discussed elsewhere, "religion does not heed subject boundaries"; rather it "weaves a thread in and across disciplines and fields" (Lytra et al 2016b: 2). Echoing Han (2018), I argue that the greater inclusion of

religion in education research agendas is both an important and a timely task. First, I present research strands that have explored different aspects of discourse and religion in educational practice. The chapter continues with implications for pedagogical practice and concludes with some reflections on future directions in the present context of ever increasingly mobilities and technological innovations worldwide.

3. Issues and on-going debates

The investigation of discourse and religion in discourse studies has been overlooked even though as Pennycook and Makoni (2005) remark, to say "that language and religion are profoundly linked is to state the obvious" (: 137). In their paper "The modern mission: The language effects of Christianity", they critically discuss how Christian missionary work influenced the promotion and spread of European languages, especially English, as well as the role of missionary linguists in describing, inventing and constructing languages and producing Bible translations in indigenous languages in the context of the problematic historical relationship between colonisation, empire building and language teaching as well as in more recent missionary activities. They point out that the effects of the missionary language and literacy projects were not limited to linguistic structures but also affected social and cultural structures where "languages and literacy practices are brought into existence as Christian languages and literacy practices, molded along Western lines" (: 151-2).

Their discussion echoes an on-going debate in educational and professional fora regarding the place and purpose of religion in general and evangelical Christianity in particular in English Language Teaching (ELT) programmes. While holding a marginal position within broader debates, it has centred on the impact of religion on

the goals of ELT, ethical practice, the moral and political dimensions of teaching and the formation of professional identities among English teachers. Edge (1996, 2003) criticised the use of English teaching for the purpose of mission work and religious conversion, highlighting concerns about teachers concealing their religious goals and calling for the need to make these goals explicit. As Edge (2003) argued, "if, for some, religious conversion is their goal and TESOL is their means, then I believe that these people have a moral duty to make that instrumental goal and means relationship absolutely explicit at all stages of their work" (: 704). Moreover, the author associated such Christian Evangelical religious goals in ELT with a broader imperialist agenda, arising historically as an inheritance of the British Empire and culminating in the contemporary hegemony of the US, especially in the aftermath of 9/11 and the 2003 invasion of Iraq and likening English language teachers to a "second wave of imperial troopers" (: 703). Writing from a critical pedagogical stand-point, Pennycook and Coutand-Marin (2003) raised similar concerns about transparency and the cultural politics involved "in us[ing] the global spread of English to further the spread of Christianity" in the context of what they called "the massive current project of teaching English as a missionary language" (: 337). Using materials from websites and pamphlets of missionary organisations aimed at recruiting English language teachers, they asserted that teaching English as a missionary language among certain Christian Evangelical circles was exploited as a vehicle to promote a particular set of beliefs, "a particular vision of globalisation, neoliberal values and capitalist accumulation [is] celebrated as part of a missionary message" (: 345). Instead they maintained that, “any good critical approach to ELT must start from a position of respect and engagement with students’ cultures and ideas” (: 350).

Taking their cue from the growing presence of Christian Evangelicals in the field of TESOL worldwide and the paucity of empirical studies addressing the interplay between Christianity, language learning and ETL, Varghese and Johnston (2007) conducted a series of interviews with pre-service English teachers in two evangelical Christian colleges in the US. The first empirical study on teachers' religious beliefs and how they intersected with their teaching it sought to avoid essentialising evangelical teachers and treating them as a homogenous group with fixed views and clear denominational demarcations (: 12). Their study reveals that teachers developed a complex and nuanced relationship with teaching as a form of service, which did not necessarily involve conversion or preaching to students. Rather teachers used the metaphor of "planting seeds" as "the process by which learners are made curious and want to know more about the faith that motivates their teacher" inspired by "the teacher acting in a Christlike fashion" (: 18). According to Varghese and Johnston, the relationship between teachers' religious beliefs and how they inform their teaching raises a fundamental moral dilemma; on the one hand, the desire to share religious belief through the practice of witnessing and on the other hand, valuing, respecting and accepting students beliefs and not wishing to change them (: 27). In his recent ethnographic study, Johnstone (2017) examined the cross-cultural encounters between North American Evangelical English language teachers and their Polish Catholic students in an English language school with a Bible-based curriculum in Poland. He probed into the aforementioned dilemma through the use of what he termed "ecumenical discourse" by one of the participant teachers understood as "a way of using language to address religious and spiritual matters that carefully eschews any reference to denomination-specific terms, practices and values, and that restricts itself to words, phrases and concepts that can be readily understood and accepted (even if in

different ways) by anyone who thinks of himself or herself as a Christian" (: 135). The use of the ecumenical discourse, he argued, created discursive spaces within classroom discourse where religious and theological discussions could be possible across denominational lines. However, attention was drawn to how these discussions fell short of engaging with participants' divergent religious beliefs (: 138-9).

Christian Evangelical educators have responded to the critiques leveled against them regarding the lack of transparency about their identities and purposes by claiming to be forthcoming about their religious beliefs and "mak[ing] them attractive and available in a free market" (Stevick 1996: 6) rather than seeking to covertly impose them on their students and their families. This line of argument has been taken up by Purgason (2004) who in response to Edge (2003) further argued for a commitment to professionalism and high quality teaching by all English teachers and the recognition that "all teachers convey their values to students, and may have agendas both conscious and unconscious" (: 711) from a position of power and influence (see also Griffith 2004 for a similar argument). Baurain (2007) challenged the perceived incompatibility between the practice of witnessing (akin to what Varghese and Johnston (2007) described through the metaphor of "planting seeds") and respecting students' values and beliefs, claiming that, "all teaching is teaching for change" (: 205). He compared Christian teachers with what teachers more generally do, that is seek to influence and change their students' ways of thinking, seeing and acting with the purpose of creating better people and a better world (: 208). In the case of Christian teachers, he argued, neither their own nor their students' spiritual and moral beliefs can be separated from the educational process. While acknowledging that most Christian teachers believe in some absolute truths, Baurain cautioned that religious

belief needs to be approached with humility and that true conversion should be a matter of choice rather than the outcome of imposition or coercion.

In a later publication based on his doctoral research, Baurain (2015) explored the interconnections between Evangelical Christian teachers' personal religious beliefs and their professional knowledge, practices and identities. Mainly through interviews with a group of Evangelical Christian ESOL educators working in secular higher education contexts in Southeast Asia, he identified the multifaceted understandings and interpretations of their professional goals, practices and identities in terms of their religious beliefs as well as the moral and spiritual challenges they engendered. A key finding of the study was that the teachers' narratives challenged the assumption that personal religious beliefs are a private matter that do not belong to the public sphere, thereby questioning the binary between secular and religious, public and private spheres (: 11). In an edited collection of data-driven studies, Wong, Kristjánsson and Dörnyei (2013) further examined the interplay between Christian faith and English language teaching and learning by bringing an insider perspective and focusing on teachers' identities, different English language learning contexts and the influence of faith on motivation and learning. Attempts to establish a dialogue between scholars with religious and non-religious perspectives on the role of faith and spirituality in English language teaching led to the publication of an edited volume by Wong and Canagarajah (2009). Nevertheless, debate has been dominated by a focus on teachers (largely Caucasian, English-speaking Evangelical Christians teaching or in the processes of gaining qualifications to teach abroad), their identities and the diversity of their perspectives and less so on those of the learners and processes of language teaching and learning (with the notable exception of Johnstone's (2017) ethnography).

Within the wider educational field, there is an emergent scholarship that has examined the interplay of religion and teaching and learning in religious and increasingly secular settings. The limited research on discourse and religion in educational settings has been compounded by the privileging of secular schools and classrooms as the main sites for teaching and learning. Places of worship, religious and faith-inspired day schools and religious education classes tend to be under explored. At the same time, day schools with a religious character continue to grow in Britain (Hemming 2015; Sagoo 2016) and in other national contexts (see, for instance, Avni 2012 and Fader 2009 in the US). While many of these schools tend to give admissions priority to students of the same faith, others may be serving religiously and ethnically diverse student populations (LeBlanc 2017). In a similar vein, limited attention has been given to the intersection of religious literacies and schooling in secular schools and classrooms, which, as I argued in the Introduction, is consonant with the peripheral position of religion in secular education in many societies. Yet, as the Douglas Fir Group (2016) assert in "A Transdisciplinary Framework for SLA in a Multilingual World" long-held binaries between the "real world" and the "classroom" setting in SLA are being rendered problematic as "affordances for language learning and use arise in multilingual and multimodal encounters with different interlocutors for diverse purposes, across space and time, and in face-to-face and virtual contexts" (: 23). Moreover, there is a recognition of and attempt to integrate religious beliefs, practices and identities into theories of language learning. For instance, the Douglas Fir Group's transdisciplinary framework for SLA places religious values alongside political, cultural, and economic values comprising the macro level of ideological structures and places of worship as part of the framework's meso level of sociocultural

institutions and communities which include families, schools, neighborhood, places of work and social organizations (: 25) (see also King and Lai, this volume on the interaction of school and other social environments in student learning processes).

While the move to recognise and integrate religious beliefs, practices and identities in theories of language learning may be relatively new to SLA research, it is important to stress that investigations of religion as a situated cultural practice has featured more prominently in scholarship in the related fields of social psychology, anthropology and literacy studies, particularly within New Literacy Studies. Seminal studies by Scribner and Cole (1981), Street (1984), Heath (1983), Barton and Hamilton (1998), Gregory and Williams (2000) urged language and literacy researchers to extend their analytical gaze beyond formal schooling models of literacy to literacies in everyday life of which religious literacies are an integral part for many individuals and communities worldwide. In so doing, they focused on how more experienced group members apprenticed new members into the culturally and socially appropriate languages and literacies of the group. These ethnographically informed studies have demonstrated "the intertwining of language and literacy practices associated with faith with broader repertoires of everyday social and cultural practices and the breadth and scope of faith as a force for learning, socialisation and belonging for individuals and communities" (Lytra forthcoming 2020). Moreover, they have documented that religious literacies bridge home, school and community in fluid and dynamic ways, and that language and literacy resources, spiritual and moral beliefs and values travel across time, space, generations and technologies (see also collection of studies in Lytra, Volk and Gregory 2016a).

In the ensuing section, I discuss selected studies at the intersection of religion and discourse across teaching and learning contexts. Studies have explored issues of identity, socialisation, pedagogy and language policy and how they are intertwined with local and global contexts and processes in present day societies. In this context, it is worth highlighting that faith learning has an additional moral and spiritual dimension, which makes its purpose unique compared to learning in other contexts. The knowledge, competences and performances practiced, performed and perfected over time are the means not only to gain membership in the religious community but more importantly to build a relationship with a higher and eternal being (Gregory and Lytra 2012; Lytra, Volk and Gregory 2016b).

A common theme in these studies has been the way in which language learning is inextricably linked with the construction of a shared religious identity treasured and transmitted to the next generation. Studies have explored how religious identities are negotiated and produced, but also the complexities and struggles involved in achieving membership in a faith community (Auleear Owodally 2016; Rumsey 2016). They have taken a broad constructionist approach to identities that stress their multiplicity, fluidity, fragmentation and changeability across time and place (Pavlenko and Blackledge 2004, also see De Fina and Georgakopoulou, this volume). At the same time, they have alerted us to an apparent contradiction between the researchers' theoretical orientations towards identities as negotiated and discursively constructed and how members of religious communities themselves may often reify, essentialise or romanticise religious identities (Baquedano-López and Ochs 2002; Souza 2016; Lytra, Volk and Gregory 2016b). Han (2009) examined the central role Evangelical churches (also referred to as minority, immigrant or ethnic churches)

played in supporting the linguistic, socio-economic and spiritual needs of many skilled adult immigrants from Mainland China faced with language, employment and other systemic barriers and in facilitating their settlement and integration in Canadian society. She illustrated how practicing, rehearsing and performing a variety of roles for a wide range of religious and social activities and events in Church served as a vehicle for using and learning English and building leadership skills with the purpose of evangelising others. In this respect, the author argued, minority Evangelical Christian communities have been fostering "an alternative space where Chinese immigrants and their children can support each other and assert their legitimacy as being simultaneously Chinese, Christian, and Canadian" (: 665). In subsequent publications, Han (2011, 2014) explored how the construction of religious identities intersected with racial and national identities, linking immigrants to larger networks and communities of Chinese Evangelicals in Mainland China and around the world (for a discussion of intersectionality in identities see Køhler-Mortensen and Milani, this volume).

Most studies investigating the interplay between language learning and religious identity development have focused on children and adolescents' religious socialisation in minority and immigrant contexts. In one such study, Avni (2012) examined Hebrew learning in religious socialisation and cultural identification in a non-Orthodox Jewish elementary day school in New York. Students were exposed to and interacted with different varieties of Hebrew associated with reading, reciting and studying the Bible and sacred texts as well as learning Modern Hebrew. The school promoted a Hebrew-only language policy for prayer and religious study, which explicitly devalued English translation and was rooted in claims of authenticity and

legitimacy of Hebrew as the liturgical language of Judaism and the centrality of religious literacy in Hebrew in sustaining Jewish religious practices in the diaspora. Her study illustrated how students challenged the uniqueness of Hebrew and sought to authenticate English and other languages as a means of experiencing and expressing religious belief. At the same time, it showed the multiplicity and complexity of Jewish American subjectivities. In a study of Hasidic (nonliberal) Jewish girls' language socialisation, anthropologist Ayala Fader (2009) demonstrated how language learning and language use of different forms of Biblical Hebrew, Yiddish, English and Hasidic English was linked to the girls' socialisation to gendered roles and identities and a Hasidic form of femininity, "a religious way of life" which Fader explained as " the ability to be 'with it' enough to selectively use and even enjoy the secular and the Gentile world, while never becoming Jews who are modern or secular" (: 3). Also employing a language socialisation lens, Baquedano-López (2000) examined how Spanish-based Catholic religious education classes served to reinforce the link between language, religion and ethnicity among school-age Mexican immigrant children in Southern California through the ideological orientation regarding the importance of sustaining Spanish in a diasporic context. Through tellings of the religious narrative of “Nuestra Señora de Guadalupe” (Our Lady of Guadalupe, the patron saint of Mexico) almost exclusively in Spanish, children learned “to narrate being Mexican, locating themselves across a distal colonial past in Mexico and their immediate postcolonial present as immigrants in Los Angeles" (: 450). These studies point to how far and in what ways language learning and language use is shaped by language ideologies, language hierarchies and language policies circulating locally in the religious institutional settings and beyond. They also show how the negotiation and construction of religious belonging intersects with other identity categories linked

to gender, ethnicity, race, nationality, or that of becoming a successful language learner, as adults and children learn to navigate different social worlds.

Moreover, studies on religion and language teaching and learning have explored the language interrelationship between liturgical, minority and majority languages, written and oral forms. Religious literacies are based on learning to read, recite and study sacred texts (such as the Bible, the Quran, the Vedas) and devotional texts (songs, chants, hymns and other forms of verse and prose used to mediate religious experience) in one or more languages or language varieties, thereby cutting across language barriers. In a comparative study of British-born children learning to read sacred texts in a Jewish Cheder, a Sikh Gurdwara and a Muslim Mosque, Rosowsky (2013) recorded the enduring significance and resilience of liturgical languages (Biblical Hebrew, Classical Punjabi and Qu'ranic Arabic respectively) and the symbolic and aesthetic values attributed to learning to read in a liturgical language intimately connected to the children's developing religious subjectivities. In another study, Gregory et al (2013a) explored how children learned important sacred and devotional texts in four faith communities (Ghanaian Pentecostal, Polish Catholic, Tamil Hindu and Bangladeshi Muslim) in London, utilising a range of languages (Qu'ranic Arabic, different forms of Tamil, Twi, Polish and English) and textual practices (translation and transliteration) with the expert mediation of faith teachers, parents, siblings and other faith community members. The authors remarked that "although the texts presented and the faiths they belong to are very different, they share much in common in terms of their symbolic meanings, how and in what ways they are learned and their special syncretic nature as they are negotiated in the new host country" (: 345).

Reciting sacred texts and performing certain rituals are inherently multimodal and multisensory activities. Investigating religious literacies goes beyond an exclusive focus on language as a meaning-making resource to examine the broader relationships between language and other communicative modalities, including gesture, body posture, image, song, dance, chant and artifacts as well as the materiality and technological dimensions of these practices (Gregory et al 2013b; Lytra, Gregory and Ilakuberan 2016). In examining Quranic learning among the Fulbe in Northern Cameroon, Moore (2008) observed how the faith teacher relied on the interweaving of Qur'anic Arabic and Fulfulbe alongside the use of other semiotic resources (posture, pointing, gaze) to impart religious knowledge as well as spiritual and moral beliefs and values. Souza et al (2016) discussed how one Polish Catholic child, Adam, developed a wealth of symbolic knowledge through language and other modes (position, gaze, movement, food, cloths) as he participated in his family's Easter celebrations in their London home. Gregory et al (2013b) have proposed to examine religious literacies and the learning potential they offer through the analytical lens of "syncretism" understood as "representing a diverse treasure trove, an array of linguistic, artistic, social and cultural resources from which children can draw", with the purpose of "creat[ing] something that is greater than just the sum of the constituent parts" (: 323). Seen together, these studies suggest that faith learning entails syncretising different languages, modalities, cultures and (re-)interpreting texts across time and space as children learn to live in multiple or "simultaneous" worlds (Kenner 2004: 43).

For scholars of discourse in educational settings the selected studies at the intersection of religion and language teaching and learning in religious settings reviewed in this section reveal a holistic approach to learning and achievement where novices are guided by more expert members to develop a wealth of linguistic, cultural, social, scriptal, and embodied practices and competences, values and dispositions and achieve a sense of self-worth, community and belonging. Moreover, the exploration of religious language and literacy practices in different settings (places of worship, religious education classes, religious and faith-inspired day schools, homes) highlight issues of permeability, boundaries, and movement across settings. In this respect, the studies raise important questions about the transferability of religious language and literacy practices, identities, values and dispositions to secular school contexts to which I turn in the next section.

4. Implications for pedagogical practice

As I argued in the previous section, the role of religious language and literacy practices in secular schools and classrooms has not been adequately explored, despite the growing diversity of the student population and the ever-growing role of religion in the lives of many young people in many contemporary societies. Therefore, how might religious language and literacy mediate meaning in secular schools? What are the opportunities and challenges? In one such ethnographic study, Sarroub (2005) examined how Yemeni-American adolescent girls sought to negotiate home and school worlds and competing expectations for success and academic achievement and how in turn these expectations influenced their use of secular and religious texts for the negotiation of personal and collective identities inside and outside school. Reyes (2009) described how, Zulmy, one high school Latina used her science scrapbook to

document the activities of the school's biology club in which she participated with photographs, maxims, friends' letters and Bible verses and to explore her Christian religious identity alongside the development of her group membership and friendships. The author argued that the biology club afforded a "safe space where she could give voice to her church girl identity" while her engagement with this literacy activity allowed her to feel "confident that her beliefs would not be questioned or attacked" (: 264). Both studies drew on the concept of "in-betweeness" to explore the creation of spaces in schools and classrooms that can afford students with possibilities "to explore, negotiate, interact, counteract, and inscribe multiple selves" (: 269).

Skerrett (2013) discussed a rare case study where students and teachers actively incorporated religious literacies in the secular classroom. The teacher leveraged the students' religious literacies to arrive at more complex literary understandings and interpretations in analysing and understanding secular texts and producing academic writing. The author remarked on how the teacher's knowledge of her students' religious beliefs as well as her own religious knowledge and understanding supported instructional practices which "involved a critical reframing of the literacy curriculum as teacher and students made official students' religious literacies in school" (: 243). This reframing she continued "enabled students to engage in transformed practice, employing their religious literacies for academic literacy learning in school" (: ibid). Seen through the theoretical lens of a pedagogy of multiliteracies (New London Group 1996), the study illustrated the opportunities for building critical literacy through engaging with religious literacies in the classroom. These findings echo calls by other scholars to recruit religious literacies in academic learning, arguing that it can serve as a vehicle for literacy development and a creative and cognitive endeavor.

LeBlanc (2017) has argued for "greater attention to the potential for students' religious practices and identities to contribute to a robustly relevant pedagogy that honors a variety of cultures and values" (: 77; also Long 2016; Papen 2018).

At the same time, Skerrett (2013) has alerted us to some of the tensions and conflicts involved in navigating different religious and non-religious perspectives and interpretations that may accompany the use of religious literacies in the classroom. In her study, she documented how the teacher and the students sought to address these challenges by foregrounding "their shared commitment to classroom community, pursuing understanding of one another's perspectives, and seeking underlying commonalities of different, or differently articulated, religious beliefs" (: 245). Scholars have identified other limitations in engaging with faith literacies in the classroom. Spector (2007) examined how middle school students and teachers responded to the Holocaust memoir "Night" by Elie Wiesel in two US public schools. While students drew upon Christian religious narratives, knowledge and beliefs to understand and interpret the Jewish experience of the Holocaust this engagement did not further the curriculum objectives of increasing tolerance and civic pluralism. Moreover, teachers avoided responding to students' religious framings and in subsequent debriefings with the author explained their reactions, thus: “I kind of tread lightly with the religious things,” and “[religion] is a place I don’t want to go” (: 45). Their reactions suggested that they viewed religion as a controversial topic, which resonated with findings from Dávila's (2015) study of pre-service teachers' responses to the religious content and significance of a children's book.

These studies have highlighted the importance of a critical analysis where students and teachers can work together to explore, confront and transform existing religious identities, knowledge and beliefs. They support Damico and Hall's (2014) argument for teachers to "capitalize on teachable moments in the curriculum when religious knowledge or experience might be crucial to more deeply engaging academic content. This includes not only helping students understand and value the ways that their religious frames are important and powerful; it must also involve helping them understand the potential constraints and limitations of these frames" (: 196).

5. Future directions

Research on discourse and religion has indicated that in many religious settings there remains an enduring link between language, ethnicity and religion (Souza 2016). At the same time, schools both secular and faith-based are serving increasingly religiously and ethnically diverse student populations. This is compounded by the diversification of the state school sectors, for instance with the proliferation of charter schools in the US and academies in the UK usually situated in multi-faith urban areas where religion may play a central role in the school's ethos and curriculum. A case in point is Avni's (2018) investigation of Jewish dual language charter schools in the US where Modern Hebrew and Jewish history are taught as part of the curriculum to students beyond the religious community, thereby rendering the link between language, ethnicity and religion problematic. As schools strive towards pluralistic, democratic and equitable approaches to education it is important for educators to inquire further into: (a) teaching and learning practices in out-of-school contexts that are meaningful to students' lives, religious settings being some of the most salient ones, (b) the opportunities and challenges for students and teachers of engaging with

religious language and literacy practices in schools and classrooms and the potential academic, social and political learning students can accrue, and (c) the development of critical knowledge and pedagogies as well as professional preparation and support necessary for such engagement.

Moreover, the intensification of population flows, the confluence of old and new mobilities and the advent of new communication technologies has seen the emergence of new religious practices, such as the virtual attendance of religious services and rituals (Rosowsky 2018b, Sawin 2018, Padharipande 2018) as well as the sharing of religious experiences through social networking sites, such as Facebook (Souza 2018), and on-line video sharing platforms (Peuronen 2017). These studies have raised questions regarding the authenticity of online religious practices and the fragmentation of religious authority alongside the development of more individualised forms of religious expression as opposed to more communal ones through off line religious practices (Rosowsky 2018a). They have also demonstrated the potential for linguistic innovation and transformation (ibid). New communication technologies have also transformed religious expression and interaction on-line between people of other religions or no religious beliefs. Pihlaja (2018) explored language use and identity positionings in a series of videos in the social media pages of three public religious figures (an Evangelical Christian, a Muslim, and an atheist) and the commentaries they elicited. One of the themes that emerged in his study was how social media users dealt with difference in religious belief, how they framed disagreement vis-à-vis those with whom they shared and those with whom they did not share religious belief. Pihlaja's work seeks to contribute to the on-going debate regarding to what extent and in what ways social media might facilitate or hinder

inter-religious dialogue and understanding between people of same, different or no religious beliefs, that is whether they provide spaces for interaction that reinforce the polarisation of positions, fanning the flames of conflict, and/or promote engagement and respectful co-existence among users. This debate is particularly pertinent as acts of religiously-motivated bias and violence have become commonplace and dehumanising representations or misrepresentations of religious communities have proliferated in both new and traditional media. To this end, recent work by Baker, Gabrielatos and McEnery (2013) combining critical discourse analysis and corpus linguistics (see Hart, this volume for a discussion of this mixed methodology) has investigated the discursive representations of Muslims and Islam in the British national press between 1998-2009 and whether mainly negative categories of representation might have changed over time and across newspapers. The aforementioned studies on discourse and religion in new and traditional media compel us to engage in further work to dismantle binaries between "us" and "them", especially when we consider the impact the perpetuation of binaries can have in educational practice and wider society more broadly.

6. Summary

This chapter has explored the intersection of discourse and religion as a growing interdisciplinary field, arguing that the greater inclusion of religion in discourse studies research agendas is both an important and a timely task. It has presented research strands within applied linguistics and then moved on to discuss empirical studies from related fields that can provide useful insights and directions for discourse studies too. The chapter has also drawn implications for pedagogical practice and concluded with some reflections on future directions in the present context of ever increasingly mobilities and technological innovations worldwide.

7. Further readings

Han, H. (2018) "Studying Religion and Language Teaching and Learning: Building a Subfield". *The Modern Language Journal* 102: 432-445

This is the Position Paper for the Perspectives followed by five commentaries.

Johnston, B. (2017) *English Teaching and Evangelical Mission. The Case of the Lighthouse School.* Bristol: Multilingual Matters.

This is an ethnographic exploration of the intersection of ELT and evangelical Christianity in the context of an English language school with a Bible-based curriculum in Poland.

Lytra, V., Volk, D. and E. Gregory (eds) (2016) Navigating Languages, Literacies and Identities: Religion in Young Lives. New York: Routledge.

This edited collection investigates how children and adolescents leverage rich and complex multilingual, multiscriptal and multimodal resources associated with religion for meaning-making and the performance of religious subjectivities in homes, religious education classes, faith-inspired schools and places of worship across a range of religious communities.

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