

1

INTRODUCTION

The Faithful Fence

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The impatient gate, that swings both in and out,
Whose work is lost when no one passes through;
The faithful fence, that marks off false from true—
No time for hanging back, no room for doubt—
Exist, not in the world, but in the mind.
Yet God forgive if what is there for me
I either hide, or try to press on thee,
To shout thee deaf, or leave thee lost and blind.
This dreadful choice sets sister against brother,
Either to injure, or to fail each other.

(Earl Stevick, as cited in Wong & Canagarajah, 2009, p. 297)

Mary never ceases to be amazed with her graduate students' thoughtful yet diverse interpretations of Earl Stevick's poem cited above. What do the "impatient gate" and "faithful fence" represent and what is the "dreadful choice?" In one interpretation, the dreadful choice is about sharing one's faith and the impatient gate the opportunity that is either lost or taken as it "swings both out and in." The choice is dreadful because one risks either "injuring" someone by "shouting [them] deaf" or "failing" them by leaving them "lost or blind." There is no time to "hang back," for if one does not pass through the gate, its "work is lost."

There might be yet another interpretation of these images—one in which the impatient gate represents our research questions, and the faithful fence "that marks

off false from true” our research. The phrase, “Yet God forgive if what is there for me I either hide, or try to press on three” might, then, refer to full disclosure in research, and not overstating one’s findings and ensuring there is ample evidence for what one claims. “Failing each other” occurs by not asking the questions and not engaging in the research that explores our faith and teaching. It begs the question: What “work is lost” when we fail to investigate how our deeply held beliefs about God and language impact our language teaching pedagogy, scholarship, and students?

This volume arose out of a keen desire to move forward the research agenda on Christian faith and English language teaching and learning. The idea for the book came to us (Mary and Carolyn) the night after a successful panel on faith and research at the Boston TESOL Convention in 2010. The session, “English teaching and Christian mission: Empirical research perspectives” organized by Bill Johnston, was well attended in spite of it being one of the final presentations on the last day of the conference. Four presenters, two Christians (Mary and Carolyn) and two self-identified non-Christians described their research on “Evangelicals and ELT” and a lively yet respectful discussion followed. The question dominating our dinner conversation that evening was what we could do to keep this momentum going. We surmised that an edited volume of empirical studies on faith and English Language Teaching (ELT) would inspire more research in this area. Wanting to internationalize the scope of the project and provide more expertise in research, we invited Zoltán Dörnyei to join the editorial team, and he agreed almost immediately. A call for chapters was sent out and, after receiving a solid response, we wrote a book proposal and a contract from Routledge soon followed.

Research on Faith and English Language Learning/Teaching

Some readers may be unaware of the background of the discussion of faith and language teaching within TESOL. Although research related specifically to faith in ELT is not extensive, it has been developing over the past two decades. A brief summary will be provided here that mentions a few seminal works, but for a more complete list of related works, see Chapter 15, “A Working Bibliography.” It will be shown that the unspoken agreement to not allow one’s religious faith to “intrude” on one’s professional practice is still present within TESOL, as it is in other fields, but research on identity has provided some space to explore how faith and foreign language teaching and learning impact each other in powerful ways.

The influence of faith on language is not new. Accounts in Scripture of Creation, the Tower of Babel, or the events at Pentecost, for example, are rich with insights about the connections of faith and language. Likewise, the connection of faith and language teaching has been around for centuries. Comenius, the seventeenth-century scholar, often called the “father of modern education,”

made insightful comments about the connections of faith and language education, many of which are still relevant today (for more on Comenius, see Howatt, 2004; Smith, 2000). The work by missionaries in language translation and learning has also been ongoing for several centuries (see, for example, the website for SIL International: www.sil.org). However, up until the 1990s, the discussion of faith and language teaching and learning was largely restricted to Christian publications and was not found much in the wider TESOL literature.

This began to change in the 1990s. Earl Stevick’s *Humanism in Language Teaching*, published in 1990 in response to earlier conversations in the field, made the case that the “objective stance” taken by some critics of “humanistic” methods and religious faith was itself grounded in unprovable articles of “faith.” He included in this work a faith-informed assessment of two methods, as well as a discussion of teaching as “sacramental.” Two years later, Robert Phillipson’s (1992) seminal work, *Linguistic Imperialism*, which highlighted aspects of language work in Christian missions, caused many in TESOL to take a more critical look at the forces that made English the language of power and influence that it is today. A series of forum discussions in *TESOL Matters* in 1996 and 1997 called “Keeping the Faith” showcased an interesting discussion between Earl Stevick (1997) and Julian Edge (1996, 1997) around the ethical dilemmas of Christian witness and English teaching. The influential work of David Smith and Barbra Carvill (2000), *The Gift of the Stranger*, and then Don Snow’s (2001a) *English Teaching as Christian Mission*, made a significant contribution to Christian educators who wanted to explore how to better align their calling to Christ and vocation of teaching. However, the fact that these works were by Christian publishers targeting a Christian audience limited their impact on the larger TESOL community.

In 2001, the tide began to turn when Tom Scovel convened a panel of scholars to speak on “Faith, Values and Language Teaching” at the annual TESOL convention in St. Louis. Several language teaching professionals were asked to speak about the influence of their faith beliefs on their practice, including Don Snow (Christian), Mary Ann Christison (Buddhist), David Mendelsohn (Jewish), Kassim Shaaban (Muslim), and Henry Widdowson (atheist), who was the discussant. (The session was recorded and was available for purchase.) This well-attended event demonstrated that the topic of teachers’ faith identities was a legitimate one, even at a professional language conference. As Don Snow wrote in *CETC Newsletter* about the event, “The primary significance of this event was less the specific content . . . than the fact that it occurred at all” (Snow, 2001b, p. 2).

In the following years, a series of articles criticizing Christian English teachers appeared, including Alastair Pennycook and Sophie Coutand-Marin’s (2003) *Teaching English as a Missionary Language* and Julian Edge’s (2003) forum piece in the *TESOL Quarterly*, *Imperial Troopers and Servants of the Lord*. Stephanie Vandrick’s (2002) chapter, “ESL and the colonial legacy: A teacher faces her ‘missionary kid’ past” served to deepen our understanding of the potential negative consequences

of unexamined attitudes of superiority and to raise our awareness of issues of power that all teachers have, especially white educated native-speaking teachers from the West. Manka Varghese and Bill Johnston's lead article in *TESOL Quarterly* in 2007—"Evangelical Christians and English Language Teaching" under Suresh Canagarajah's tenure as editor—provided an interesting qualitative study of Christian MA TESOL students' views of how their faith impacted their teaching, and brought the issue of faith and teaching front and center to the TESOL community. Bradley Baurain's bold article in 2007, "Christian witness and respect for persons" in the *Journal of Language, Identity, and Education*, provided a Christian response to the arguments in several of these and other critical articles. About the same time, Carolyn published a paper investigating the influence of Christian faith on the thinking of Paulo Freire, the father of critical pedagogy, and highlighted the need for theory building that would allow for systematic consideration of spiritual perspectives as a source of knowledge and understanding in language education (Kristjánsson, 2007).

In spite of this flurry of articles on faith and teaching within TESOL, it was clear that the organization was not comfortable with the topic, as was evidenced by the TESOL Board's decision to dissolve the Christian caucus (and all seven caucuses). The Christian caucus, which had been active within TESOL since 1996 and had grown to over 1,000 members at its peak, was dissolved in 2008 due to "legal concerns" of discrimination and fears that people would think TESOL supported Christianity over other religions. We watched how other caucuses, such as NNEST and Teachers for Social Responsibility, applied to become Interest Sections within TESOL and thus maintain their community and strengthen their influence. They did this by demonstrating that there was a solid body of research and scholarship supporting their causes, and thus they were considered robust subfields within TESOL. As a former leader within the Christian caucus, Mary started to consider how more rigorous research on faith and teaching, including publications in peer-reviewed journals, might help to legitimize the area of faith and ELT, by means of publications and conferences not only within Christian circles, but also outside them.

This desire prompted her to bring together major players in this discussion into one volume, and after securing the help of the then-editor of *TESOL Quarterly* Suresh Canagarajah, they invited several of the authors mentioned above (Phillipson, Stevick, Edge, Pennycook, Canagarajah, Smith, Snow, Vandrick, Varghese, Johnston), as well as some twenty others, to continue the dialogue around issues of Christian faith and pedagogy, spirituality, ideology, and teacher identity in an edited volume, which resulted in the Routledge publication by Wong and Canagarajah (2009 hardback; 2011 paperback). That volume, however, was primarily ideological and conceptual in orientation and did not contain empirical studies on faith and language teaching/learning. As stated in the conclusion of that book, the editors felt that "[e]mpirical research [had not] kept pace with the amount of theoretical discussions on the role of spirituality in language learning"

and wanted "to see more classroom research on ways in which teachers and students negotiate their beliefs in teaching and learning" (Wong & Canagarajah, 2009, p. 290). This current volume is a response to that call and a desire to "mark off the false from true" in empirical studies, and explore the questions that investigate the spiritual aspects of language teaching and learning.

About the Studies in This Volume

At the outset of our project, we faced some uncertainties about whether we would be able to solicit enough high-quality research papers on the topic to make up a robust anthology. While we knew that there was a healthy segment of the language teaching community that was interested and even involved in investigations concerning faith and language education, it was to be seen whether this interest would materialize in actual research studies of sufficient rigor to meet our editorial guidelines. Also, we were unsure about which aspects of language education would be targeted by the emerging studies and which would remain underrepresented. Our initial plan foresaw three main areas to be covered: (a) faith and language teacher identity; (b) faith and language learner identity; and (c) faith and language acquisition. Thus, we anticipated papers concerning the interface of faith beliefs and the identities of the agents in the language education process, as well as papers identifying direct links between faith beliefs and the mechanisms of second language acquisition.

In the end, the research papers that were accepted for the volume only partially confirmed our initial anticipations. We were pleased to receive a healthy number of empirical studies, mainly qualitative in nature, and the final content of the volume provides evidence for both the theoretical and practical validity of this new emerging subfield of Second Language Acquisition (SLA). The richest data were obtained about teacher identities, while learners were mainly examined in relation to their learning context—hence the change of title of Part II. The most significant divergence from our original expectations occurred with regard to the actual process of second language learning (Part III). While we recall a few papers at past conferences that specifically linked faith-based issues to components and mechanisms of SLA (for example, praying as a learning strategy in missionary language training), for the present volume there was only one such area represented: the motivational basis of the learning process. Motivation is indeed an obvious factor to mediate faith beliefs but it is not the only possible one by any means; we feel that future research may target a wider scope of potentially relevant issues (we will come back to this question in the conclusion).

As the content of the book was gradually taking shape, we decided to make two further modifications to our initial plans. First, in order to strengthen the theoretical embeddedness of the data-based studies, we invited three content specialists to write review papers for each section. We were pleased that Maggie Kubanyiova, David Smith, and Ema Ushioda accepted our invitation, and their

summaries and responses—also accompanied by suggestions for further research—have become an invaluable asset to the book.

The second change was motivated by the growing recognition that the literature relevant to the areas investigated in this book is considerably larger than each of us would have thought individually. This prompted the idea to go beyond simply giving reference lists for each chapter and to create a set of working bibliographies. Mary joined forces with Tasha Bleistein and David Smith, and together they collected hundreds of resources related to Christian faith and English language teaching and learning. They prioritized and categorized these resources into fourteen working bibliographies on various subthemes that emerged, and wrote an introduction that explains the selection process and provides a context for the bibliographies presented in Chapter 15. We hope that this chapter will be of help both to graduate students who may be starting their investigations and seasoned researchers who might become inspired by a study that had previously gone unnoticed.

In sum, the final volume that has emerged as the outcome of a long and enjoyable journey will hopefully fulfill its role in putting the domain of faith and language learning and teaching firmly on the research agenda within applied linguistics. The selection of papers offers a rich coverage of Christian learning situations and a wide array of interesting Christian voices sharing honest views about how their faith interacted with their language-related experiences, as well as a host of interesting ideas that are worth pursuing further. Finally, as the three content reviews demonstrate, the studies in this volume are also valuable in their own right by contributing to the progression of several content areas of applied linguistics research. We have come to the end of this journey and we sincerely hope that the contributors of this anthology have succeeded in creating an “impatient gate” that is welcomingly open and a “faithful fence that marks off false from true.”

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