The Role of Religion and Language in the Construction of Religious and Linguistic Identity

by

ABDERRAHIM ER-RAGRAGI

(Under the Direction of Alan Godlas)

ABSTRACT

Language and religion share a long history; nowadays, their interaction and connection are observable in different fields such as bilingualism and multilingualism, language planning, language policy, language contact, and identity construction. However, the specific interaction between religion and language and their role in the construction of identity have been little explored since studies of identity construction have been more language-centered. Though there are studies about religious languages and the history of religion that describe the linguistic effects of religion historically, the reciprocality of language and religion and their role in the construction of both linguistic and religious identity have often been neglected. I argue that religion is mutually related to language as they affect each other, that religion can motivate and enhance language learning (for religious purposes), and that religion can also play an effective role in constructing linguistic and religious identity.

INDEX WORDS: Religion, Language, Religious Identity Linguistic Identity, Islam/Muslim, Motivation, Language Learning.

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ABDERRAHIM ER-RAGRAGI

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ABDERRAHIM ER-RAGRAGI

Major Professor:	Alan Godlas
Committee:	Kenneth Lee Honerkamp
	Linda Harklau

Electronic Version Approved:

Ron Walcott

Dean of the Graduate School

The University of Georgia

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CHAPTER ONE

INTRODUCTION: LINGUISTIC IDENTITY, SOCIOLINGUISTIC IDENTITY, AND RELIGIOUS IDENTITY

The controversy and sense of restriction surrounding religion in secular educational settings have caused the inclusion of religion to be discouraged and looked at as a taboo in schools, in general, and in language classes, in particular.[1] Because of the secularist policies of separating the state and the institutions from religion and religious teaching, teachers and curricula designers have been confused about the integration of religious content in class. This marginalizing of religion from public educational institutions has even been witnessed in the Arab countries (in spite of their being Muslim countries). One example is Morocco after what has been called "the reformulation of curricula" by the Ministry of Islamic Affairs and the Ministry of Education in 2007.[2] This reformulation was declared as a response to the terrorist attacks that took place in Morocco and targeted the religious contents in curricula designed for all levels and related fields.[3] Consequently, religious identity has sometimes been dismissed or marginalized in educational and foreign language contexts. Although language is an essential factor in identity construction,[4] I

[1] Jeff Passe and Lara Willox, "Teaching Religion in America's Public Schools: A Necessary Disruption," *Social Studies* 100, no. 3 (May 2009): 102–6, doi:10.3200/TSSS.100.3.

[2] Mohammed El-Katiri, "The Institutionalization of Religious Affairs: Religious Reform in Morocco," in *Journal of North African Studies* 18, no. 1 (January 2013): 53–69; al-Mamlaka al-Maghribiyya, Wizārat al-Tarbiya al-Waṭaniyya, *al-Kitāb al-abyad,* al-Juzʾ 5: *al-Manāhij al-tarbawiya l-qut̠bi-al-ādāb wa-l-insāniyāt*, June 2002c.

[3] Ann Marie Wainscott, "Defending Islamic Education: War on Terror Discourse and Religious Education in Twenty-First-Century Morocco," *Journal of North African Studies* 20, no. 4 (September 2015): 635–53, doi:10.1080/13629387.2015.1041108.

[4] Bonny Norton, *Identity and Language Learning: Extending the Conversation*, 2nd ed (Blue Ridge Summit, PA: Multilingual Matters, 2013), 4.

argue that religion, similar to language, is important in identity construction for three reasons. First, in chapter 1, I argue that religion and language are mutually interrelated. They are both reciprocal; and, in addition, language broadcasts identity, both religious and linguistic identities. Second, in chapter 2, I argue that religion can be an important factor in motivating and enhancing language learning. Third, in chapter 3, I argue that religious identity can be expressed through language and linguistic meanings of a given/ascribed identity, as is the case with the word "Muslim" in Arabic and Qur'an. In sum, the direction of the thesis moves from the general to the specific, focusing first on a broad concentric circle dealing with identity and three of its principal forms: linguistic, socio-linguistic, and religious; second, it focuses on a smaller circle of the issue of the interrelationship between religion, identity, and language learning; third, more narrowly, it it examines the role of identity in language learning motivation; fourth, it brings to light how liturgically-based language constructs identity; and fifth and finally, it discusses the Qur'anic linguistic construction of the Muslim identity.

LINGUISTIC IDENTITY

The concept of identity has been associated, since its emergence, with the term language. Language was and still is the most prominent sign of human existence and the most important aspect of communication and expression. Most scholars in various disciplines agree that language is one of the most important elements of social, ethnic, national, and religious identity.[5] Since language is specific to each socio-linguistic group, separately, and since each group has its own peculiarities, a linguistic system cannot be merely a neutral means of communication. Rather, language carries identity, values, history, and meaning. Because of this system, one can achieve a

[5] Bassām Barakah, Fāyiz al-Ṣūyyāgh et al, *Al-lughah wa-al-huwiyyah fi al-waṭan al-ʿarabi: Ishkāliyyat al-ttaʿlī wa-al-ttarjamah wa-al-moṣṭalaḥ* (Beirut, 2013), 82.

social identity and develop a sense of belonging to the group. According to Izutsu, language is not only a tool for expressing a simple meaning, or forming meanings of things, its role goes beyond the limits of expressing things to contribute to shaping the identity and defining its boundaries as well.[6]

Looking at language in its relationship to identity goes beyond understanding it as a tool used for 1) communication between members of the group to looking at it as a symbol of the group that participates in defining and identifying it and 2) unifying and preserving the community and its continuity.

As John Edwards explains in his book *Language and Identity: An introduction*, language is not just a neutral and negative communicative tool, but rather it is a positive and active means for the reproduction of the identity, its development, or on the contrary, its degradation and decomposition.[7] We can refer here to the issue of linguistic identity in Morocco, where language may be a reason for the division of the group or the nation.[8] When multiple languages exist within a group and those groups refuse to give up on their language in favor of another language that unites the group, then each group separates and forms its own identity based on its own language. From what is mentioned above and from the different definitions of language, it can be inferred that language, as a cognitive means of communication, represents the individual identity as a member of the group. This major role that language plays in shaping social identity indicates that

[6] Toshihiko Izutsu, *Ethico-Religious Concepts in the Qurʾan*. (Montreal [Que.]: McGill-Queenʾs University Press, 2002), 11.
[7] John Edwards, *Language, and Identity: An Introduction. Key Topics in Sociolinguistics*. (Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press, 2009), 52-55.
[8] It appeared that there might be useful information in this book, although I did not have time to access it: Ramzī Munīr Baʿlabakkī, *al-Lughah wa-al-huwwiyyah fī al-waṭan al-ʿarabi: Ishkāliyyāt tārīkhiyah wa-thaqāfiyah wa-siyāsiyah* (al-Markaz al-ʿArabī lil-Abḥāth wa-Dirāsat al-Siyyāsāt, 2013).

language, like religion, goes beyond being a minor factor in one's identity to being foundational to the construction of identity. Language, in other words, constructs identity.

In the case of the Arabic language and the Islamic religion, language is the most important component of identity. Its importance in the formation of identity comes from the fact that Arabic is the language of the Qur'an, which is the source of the Islamic religion. Arabic, in this case, is not just a liturgical language used for performing rituals in a specific time and place only; Arabic is the identity itself because it embodies another element of the identity, which is religion.

SOCIOLINGUISTIC IDENTITY

Identity may belong to a specific person. In this case, it is called a personal (individual) identity, which differs from one person to another. It may also be shared between a group of individuals who share religious, linguistic, or social characteristics: a social identity. Ethnic, national, or linguistic identities are all forms of social identities because they denote a set of aspects common to a group of individuals. By possessing this type of identity, individuals represent certain values and principles that accompany that identity. It allows the behavior of individuals to be similar to others and more normal and typical to that society. This fact can be illustrated by an example of social class. The identity of a particular class encourages people to behave in a certain way. The traditional working class and the middle class have different identities and have been associated with different subcultures.

Research into sociolinguistic identity has been increasing continuously in the last decades. The sociolinguistic approach to identity has investigated the variables that correlate language with behavior and identity. This signifies the importance of both the social identity and the linguistic identity in the construction of sociolinguistic identity. Omoniyi and Fishman in their book

Exploration in the Sociology of Language and Religion claim that identity relates to the process in which individuals shape and locate themselves and are shaped and located by others in a socio-cultural environment through language as an instrument, with reference to the social and linguistic variables as identity markers of the members of each society. Besides language, religion is another instrument that is part of the process of identity construction.[9]

RELIGIOUS IDENTITY

Similar to many other forms of identity such as ethnic and cultural identity, religion generally can provide a perspective from which to see the world, opportunities for social connection with a group of individuals of different generations, and a set of basic principles for living. These foundations can come to shape an individual's identity. Religious identity is one of the terms most used in the social sciences and takes on a different meaning in different research paradigms. In addition to psychological studies, sociologists and anthropologists apply the term "religious identity" and examine its related processes in specific social contexts. Obviously, there is not only one definition of religion. Geertz referred to religion as the belief in a supernatural power that has authority over our moral behavior on this earth and gives promise of an afterlife.[10] Durkheim on the other hand, asserted that religion is not related to spiritual beliefs, but rather to social unity.[11] He claimed that believers practice collectively regular rituals and ceremonial activities. Peek maintained that for most people, religion is an essential element in their social and

[9] Tope Omoniyi and A. Fishman Joshua, *Explorations in the Sociology of Language and Religion. Discourse Approaches to Politics, Society, and Culture.* (Amsterdam: John Benjamins Publishing Co, 2006), 152-158.
[10] Clifford Geertz, *Islam Observed: Religious Development in Morocco and Indonesia.* (The Terry Lectures: V. 37. Yale University Press, 1968), 96-97.
[11] Daniel L. Pals, *Introducing Religion: Readings from the Classic Theorists*. (Oxford University Press, 2009): 100-105.

personal identities.[12] It plays a significant role in providing meaning to their lives and helps them integrate themselves within their societies. Peek categorized religious identity into three types: ascribed, by society or the country; declared, by the individual himself through his behaviors or language; and last, chosen.[13]

In the case of Islam, for example, religion provides one of the most powerful type of identity for individuals and groups. A Muslim shares her/his sense of affiliation with the religion through following the religious guidelines, standards, and values that are communicated through texts (Qur'an) and practices (prayer, fasting, alms, and pilgrimage). Applying those standards and guidelines influences greatly the conceptualization of religious identity, more than any other kind of influence.

[12] Lori Peek, "Becoming Muslim: The Development of a Religious Identity," *Sociology of Religion* 66, no. 3 (2005): 223.
[13] Peek, *Becoming Muslim*, 215-42.

CHAPTER TWO

THE MUTUALITY OF RELIGION, IDENTITY, AND LANGUAGE LEARNING

The incorporation of religious identity and spirituality into language learning contexts has raised concerns about the influence of religion on language educational contexts. In public university settings (rather than seminaries), language teaching professionals, under the influence of secularism, have had reservations and harsh criticism, suggesting that there is no relationship between religious identity and language learning, and arguing equally that integrating religious identity into the language classroom hinders language learning, and, hence, there should be no integration of religio-cultural discourse into the language learning curriculum.[14] By contrast, I argue that linguistic and religious identity are interrelated and inseparable, and more importantly, that religion can be an irenic force in language learning. Furthermore, I will discuss how religious identity markers can be expressed through language, how learning and using a language broadcasts many aspects of religious and likewise non-religious identity, and how religion can be a positive force for language learning.

Religion, identity, and language learning are reciprocally related and educationally inseparable for three reasons. First, there is a clear mutuality of language and religious identity. I draw here on Norton's book, *Identity and Language Learning* in which she examined the ways in which language constitutes identity and identity is constituted through language.[15] Language learners not only exchange information with other members of the community when they use the

[14] Huamei Han, "Studying Religion and Language Teaching and Learning: Building a Subfield," *The Modern Language Journal* 102, no. 2 (2018): 433.
[15] Norton, *Identity and Language Learning.*

target language but also form and communicate a sense of who they are, whether they are religious or not, and how they relate to their society. As a result, they engage in identity negotiation and construction.[16] Norton also highlighted the idea that part of identity construction relates to the "imagined communities" that individuals engage and involve in its practices and relationships. These imagined communities include religious groups and educational institutions, and their power has direct involvement in individuals' linguistic and religious identity affiliation.[17]

Phyllis Chew pointed to similar circumstances, in her study of language use and language practice in the multilingual and multiracial society of Singapore, that both language and religion mutually affect and influence one another.[18] They are inextricably linked to one another as they shape cultures and define characteristics of civilization. Chew reported that some native languages in Singapore survived just because of their relationships to religious practices.[19] Her study investigated how language affects people's religious choices and facilitate religious message, and how religion affects people's linguistic choice and language use. The results of the study gave a clear overview of the mutuality of religion, language, and other variables including race and ethnicity in Singapore. It also outlined some factors (mainly religious) behind language choice, language shift, and language loss. This highlighted the fact that languages in Singapore are associated with religious affiliation and practices. The use of English is not necessarily related to Christianity because English has become a global language that is spoken by different with different belief systems. However, the use of Chinese dialects such as Cantonese and Hokkien are

[16] Ibid., 4.
[17] ″Imagined communities refer to groups of people, not immediately tangible and accessible, with whom we connect through the power of imagination.″ Ibid., 19.
[18] Phyllis Ghim-Lian Chew, "Language Choice and Religious Identities in Three Singaporean Madrasahs." *International Journal of the Sociology of Language*, (January 1, 2014): 49–65.
[19] Tope Omoniyi and Joshua A. Fishman, *Explorations in the Sociology of Language and Religion. Discourse Approaches to Politics, Society, and Culture*; v. 20. (Amsterdam; Philadelphia: J. Benjamins, 2006), 213-216.

closely related to religious practices of Taoism, Buddhism, and other Chinese religions.[20] The practice of Confucianism is affiliated with the use of Mandarin. In like manner, the practices of Islam and some other traditional animistic practices are associated with the Malay language.[21]

In another similar study titled: *Ideology, Authority, and Language Choice,* Rajeshwari attempted to examine the dynamic relationship between language and religion in multilingual and multi-religious South Asia, where indigenous and extraneous religions coexist with multiple languages and other varieties of language families.[22] The study stated that religion is one of the main determinants of language choice. Any change, accommodation, or shift in language choice or use is, however, to a great extent, driven by religion. There are other determinants of this complex relationship between religion and language in South Asia. Authority and power are one of them, as they play an important role in maintaining, shifting, and accommodating languages in religious and other non-religious contexts. As far as the language of religion is concerned, some languages might have power over other languages because they are functionally transparent to a specific religion and uniquely mark one religious identity. For example, for Muslims, the only language used for canonical prayer is Arabic. Therefore, Arabic can be said to be transparent to this function.[23]

The second reason for this reciprocality is related to the effect of religion on language and vice versa. I argue that linguistic choice has direct and indirect effects on a person's religious

[20] Omoniyi and Fishman, *Explorations in Sociology,* 220-230.
[21] Ibid.
[22] Rajeshwari Pandharipande, "Ideology, authority, and language choice: Language of religion in South Asia," in *Explorations in the Sociology of Language and Religion. Discourse Approaches to Politics, Society, and Culture*; v. 20. (Amsterdam; Philadelphia: J. Benjamins, 2006): 142-152.
[23] "The notion 'Functional Transparency' is used in this context as a tool to measure the relative power of a language to express a particular identity. It can be described as follow: if language A is the only language used to perform a particular function in a particular domain, then, language A can be said to have 'functional transparency' vis-à-vis that function." Omoniyi and Fishman, *Explorations in Sociology,* 157.

orientation, much in the same way that religious choice has short and long-term effects on language use and practices. Given the importance of language and literacy in religious practices, Allison Skerrett in her study has explored the processes of religious identity development of a Caribbean-Chinese adolescent who is from a multi-religious multilingual home and analyzed the significance of language in religious identity development.[24] This study was conducted in a Christian school and the focal participant was a 14-year-old adolescent (Peter). His father is Jamaican and speaks, English, Spanish, Cantonese, and some French. His mother on the other hand is Chinese and speaks Cantonese, Mandarin, and some English. His father is Christian and his mother is Buddhist. Peter and his family illustrated the most unique blend of multicultural, multilingual, and multi-religious backgrounds. Peter spoke Cantonese as a child and English as a formal language of education. At the age of 13, he began to linguistically lose his mother tongue because of his mother's progress in learning and using English.

Skerrett investigated how this Caribbean-Chinese understanding and engagement with multiple religions, cultures, and languages at home developed and affected Peter's religious identity, and how Peter's engagements with religion across educational contexts influenced his religious identity choice and affiliation. The analysis clearly showed that Peter developed a Christian religious identity because of his multiple situatednesses within the home and school worlds where the Christian faith was privileged and where the dominant language was English. During the interview, Peter claimed that English is his L1 which was associated with his education. This indicated that Peter's limited knowledge of his mother's Chinese languages was associated with his limited exploration of an additional religious faith within his home. Moreover, the fact

[24] Allison Skerrett, "The Role of Language in Religious Identity Making: A Case of a Caribbean-Chinese Youth," *Literacy Research: Theory, Method, and Practice* 66, no. 1 (November 1, 2017), 325–40.

that his mother mixed the languages, limited Peter's understanding of his mother's religious practices and rituals. Also, both Peter and his mother did not have access to any organized religious institution that would provide physical infrastructures and other resources such as communal conversations or gatherings, or teaching to help educate her son about Buddhism. In brief, in this study, English language teaching at school with religious performances during holidays facilitated Peter's religious identity development and confirmed the reciprocal relationship between language and religion.

In another study that expounds on the link between religion and language, Seong investigated the connection between religious affiliation, and language maintenance and shift in Hakka communities in Malaysia. Hakka is a multilingual (Hakka, English, Mandarin, and Malay) and multi-religious (Christianity, Taoism, and Buddhism) community.[25] Findings based on the respondents show the variation in Hakka use in daily life among respondents from different religious denominations and birth cohorts. The mean score becomes smaller from the older to the younger generation, suggesting an increasingly severe problem with language shift among the younger generations. During the early years of the 19th century, Hakka was used during Sunday school for the Chinese congregation for religious worship, with English being used on occasions. When the priest was replaced years later by another from China, the language of religion changed from Hakka and English to Mandarin. The data of the study revealed that the different languages of religion used by various places of worship, inform the varying results for language use and language maintenance and shift.

[25] Ding Seong Lin, and Kim Leng Goh. "The Impact of Religion on Language Maintenance and Shift," *Language in Society* 49, no. 1 (February 2020), 31–59.

Additionally, religious affiliation can play a more crucial role in language maintenance, especially in situations in which the family struggles with intergenerational transmission of the heritage language. At times, the religious institution's choice of language can lead to an increase in language maintenance given the high religiosity of its religious community,

To clearly understand the overwhelming shift from Hakka to Mandarin, participants were divided into 2 groups: A) those who use Hakka frequently during religious services and attend religious services regularly, and B) people who do not frequently use Hakka during religious services or attend religious services regularly. The analysis found that GA tends to use Hakka more in daily life than GB and the intergenerational shift in the use of Hakka in GB for worship is obvious because Hakka is used only for private religious practices at home.

Some of the interviewees also explained how different religious practices have impacted language maintenance and shift. According to those interviewees, the association between religion and language use in daily life could be due to the predominant use of Mandarin in the religious activities of different groups including Buddhist places of worship that no longer use Hakka, as their religious activities are mostly Mandarin-based. As far as the effect of religion on language is concerned, Fishman explained that intimate relationship, by referencing to the Christianization of Western Europe and how Latin was brought with it, and the Islamization of North Africa and some parts of Asia which caused a functional spread of Arabic due to its requirement in prayer and Quranic studies.[26] In another study on the power of "lexical engineering in Judaism, Islam, and Christianity," Zuckerman emphasized that languages are used as significant devices for religions and religious communities because it plays a role in forming their identity, and that religions, on

[26] Omoniyi and Fishman, *Explorations in Sociology,* 18-20.

the other hand, often attempt to preserve their identity when confronted with linguistic influences.[27]

The third reason is that the integration of religious discourse and topics into language learning has a positive impact on learners' engagement with language learning, and that liturgical language improves the individual's learning and use of the target language. Michael Clouston examined the integration of faith and learning in English as a Second Language program in the United States and in English as a Foreign Language courses at a University in Indonesia.[28] One of the questions that the study attempted to answer was the benefits of faith integration in EFL language classes. The data was collected from multiple semi-structured interviews of three EFL teachers. Participants declared that though it seemed challenging to integrate faith in an EFL class because it might cause students to feel uncomfortable, it was in fact beneficial in many ways. Students could see themselves learning on both sides, spiritual and academic. Moreover, participants noticed, through the integration of religious content in their classes, that students were able to contribute more and were able to present more compelling arguments relevant to their faith and express themselves in the target language. In the end, the three participants in this study agreed that integrating religion in language classes did not only provide learners with necessary background knowledge, but they also appeared to become engaged, used critical thinking, and contributed with compelling arguments to defend their beliefs. It demonstrated the positive role that religion can play in motivating language learning.

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[27] Ghil'ad Zuckermann, " 'Etymythological Othering' and the Power of 'Lexical Engineering' in Judaism, Islam, and Christianity. A Socio-Philo(sopho)logical Perspective", in *Explorations in the Sociology of Language and Religion*, ed. Tope Omoniyi and Joshua A. Fishman (Amsterdam: John Benjamins, 2006), 237-258.

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

In a similar study, Caroline Seymour examined the attachment to Arabic language learning among Arab immigrants in Milwaukee, Wisconsin, and their attitudes and motivations. Seymour found that identity drives Arab-American Muslims to improve and enhance knowledge about their religion, which is Islam. Furthermore, the willingness to learn about Islam leads them to learn Arabic to fully declare their religious identity. Seymour also found that the awareness of being Muslims has led Arab-American Muslims to be more respectful of the Arabic language and motivated them to keep learning it for religious and other non-religious functions. As far as religious identity is concerned, the study revealed that Arab-American students, for religious purposes and reasons, are primarily motivated to study Arabic, in general, and to be able to read the Qur'an and other religious texts, in particular. They also cited their desire to learn the language because of its importance to their cultural identity, to communicate with family and other Arabic speakers, and for the possibility of traveling and making visits to their home countries. Other participants' religious motivations went beyond religious identity to the desire of translating religious texts and for Qur'anic interpretations.[29]

Zare Behtash, Hashemi, and Farokhipour declared in their case study of the influence of religious identity on Iranian EFL learners that the way learners think about language learning affects their attitude toward the target language, their motivation to learn the language, and the extent to which they learn. Besides cultural, ethnic, and social identities, religious identity is among the driving forces which shape and affect language learning, because the religious

[29] Caroline Seymour-Jorn "Arabic Language Learning among Arab Immigrants in Milwaukee, Wisconsin: A Study of Attitudes and Motivations," in *Journal of Muslim Minority Affairs* 24, no. 1 (April 2004), 109–22.

background can be a critical factor that affects language learning due to their historical relationship with religion. [30]

In conclusion, during the 20th century, the secular dogma was that religion, identity, and language do not and should not go together. In that viewpoint, religion was perceived as being based on personal beliefs, feelings, and opinions, while language is construed as academic and objective. Hence, under the sway of secularism, language teaching pedagogy asserted that religion should be kept out of the foreign language learning classroom. Faith and foreign language teaching and learning should not be mixed. In contrast, as I have demonstrated, religion, identity, and language learning are interrelated and, educationally, should not be separated. The studies discussed in this thesis confirm the mutually reinforcing nature of religious and linguistic identity. Furthermore, the evidence has shown that language affects religious identity and, also, that integrating religion and faith within education enhances language learning

[30] Ismail Zare Behtash, Seyyed Hussein Hashemi, and Sajjad Farokhipour, "Influence of Religious Identity on a Foreign Language Learning: A Case of Iranian EFL Learners," *International Journal of English Language & Translation Studies*. 5, no. 2 (2017), 16-20.

CHAPTER THREE

THE ROLE OF IDENTITY IN LANGUAGE LEARNING MOTIVATION

In contrast to the perspective of certain language learning experts, incorporating religious context into language learning pedagogy can enhance language learning by strengthening the motivation of learners since identity plays an important role in motivation and since language and religion and, in particular, liturgical language are significant factors in the construction of identity.[31] Though some scholars assume that language learning motivation is only enhanced by factors such as the job market, education, or globalization, I argue that identity can play a crucial role in language-learning motivation since it ties together a number of important aspects related to the learners, such as culture, religion, society, psychology, and the self.

First, according to the Identity-Based-Motivation (IBM) model, people are motivated to act in identity-congruent ways.[32] The IBM model resumes that people are more likely to interpret actions, situations, and difficulties in ways that are connected and coincided with their identities. Their actions and behaviors might also change to be congruent with their future identity or self.[33] When goals or situations feel identity-related, actions and behaviors relevant to identity are considered highly important and meaningful. On the other hand, when goals and situations feel

[31] Dornyei defines motivation as "the choice of a particular action, the persistence with it, and the effort expended on it." Zoltán Dörnyei and Ema Ushioda, *Teaching and Researching: Motivation, 3rd Ed*. (New York, NY: Routledge/Taylor & Francis Group, 2021), 8.

[32] Daphna Oyserman and Destin Mesmin, "Identity-Based Motivation: Implications for Intervention," *Counseling Psychologist 38*, no. 7 (October 1, 2010): 1001–43.

[33] Self-concept, Self, and identity are often used by scholars as if they are synonyms. The aspects of identity can be considered and used as nested elements and being part of self and self-concepts. For more information, see: Daphna Oyserman, Kristen Elmore, and George Smith. "Self, Self-Concept, and Identity." In *Handbook of Self and Identity, 2nd Ed*., ed. Mark R. Leary and June Price Tangney (New York, NY: The Guilford Press, 2012): 69–104

unrelated to identity, engagement in actions and behaviors seem to be pointless and difficult. These perceptions can have significant effects on language learning and any learning-focused behaviors and activities, including engagement and participation in the classroom, spending more time on homework, and seeking good grades. In an article about the implication of IBD model, Oyserman argues that the self and identity can have an effect on behavior.[34] Identities are predicted to influence what people are motivated to do, the actions they take, their feelings and ability to control or regulate themselves, and how they think and make sense of themselves and others.

Oyserman presented three central parts of the IBM which she termed as *Action-Readiness, Dynamic Construction*, and *Interpretation of Difficulty*.[35] "Action-Readiness" deals with the prediction that identities can positively influence willingness to take action and make decisions. Concerning religion, religious identities cue readiness and motivation to behave in a manner relevant to that religious identity. People who convert to Islam, for example, can show a sense of action-readiness to act and behave according to the instructions and values of Islam, including praying, fasting, Alms, and pilgrimage. "Dynamic Construction" demonstrates how identity is understood and which identity should be constructed. Therefore, behaviors that are congruent with that identity are dynamically constructed depending on the context. For example, behaviors and actions such as reading Qur'an, praying five times a day, avoiding "what is prohibited" (*ḥarām*) and seeking "what is religiously permitted" (*ḥalāl*) are dynamically constructed behaviors that are congruent with Islamic religious identity. The third postulate, "Interpretation of Difficulty," means that when difficult and challenging behaviors, actions, or decisions are identity-congruent,

[34] Daphna Oyserman, S. Casey O'Donnell, Nicholas Sorensen, and Kimberly M. Wingert. "Process Matters: Teachers Benefit Their Classrooms and Students When They Deliver an Identity-Based Motivation Intervention with Fidelity," *Contemporary Educational Psychology 66* (July, 2021): 9-15.

[35] Daphna Oyserman and Destin Mesmin, "Identity-Based Motivation: Implications for Intervention," *Counseling Psychologist 38*, no. 7 (October 1, 2010): 1001–43.

difficulties engaging in those behaviors are predicted and interpreted as necessary and meaningful, not pointless or needless. For example, a Muslim predicts challenges such as waking up at 5 am every day for Fajr prayer, learning a new language (Arabic for non-native speakers), memorizing Qur'an, and implying some lifestyle habits like avoiding alcoholic consumption. All these behaviors are not looked at as difficulties as much as they are considered important for Islamic religious identity construction.

To further investigate the prediction that language learners show readiness to act in identity-congruent ways, and to clarify the relationship between the attitudes of learners and their actions in relation to their identities and motivation, Oyserman tested middle school students' performance after reading about financial aid for college and the cost of college. Students were more likely to submit extra-credit assignments, show motivation to study more, and show great expectations to get better grades after reading about the financial aid.

The work of Dornyei on L2 (second language) self-identity and language learning motivation has also been influential in highlighting the importance of the relationship between identity, motivation, and language learning.[36] Dornyei studied developments in L2 self and identity to reframe L2 motivation and drew on self-report data collected from junior high school students of English as an L2 in Indonesia. The study observed their motivation to learn English and concluded that it is shaped by the recreation of a bicultural identity that is a combination of a world citizen or global identity, which is related to English language (L2 self), on the one hand, and an awareness of local or global identity as an Indonesian citizen on the other hand. The study further showed that changes in motivation to learn English may partly be explained with reference to

[36] Zoltán Dörnyei and Ema Ushioda, *Motivation, Language Identity and the L2 Self*. (Clevedon, England, Bristol, UK, and Buffalo, NY: Multilingual Matters, 2009.

changing perceptions and the reconstruction of these students' identities. Namely, such changes in motivation are a result of a vision of a global and national English-speaking future self that shares a sense of belonging to both communities. This linguistic identity might change especially during the formative years of adolescence.

A similar scenario is the case of the Amazigh language in Morocco before and after its standardization in 2011.[37] Educators and curriculum designers assumed that there would be less interest in learning Amazigh (than the other national languages such as Arabic and French), since it is only spoken in some small parts and among small communities in Morocco and the middle east. However, because of its relevance to the Moroccan Amazigh identity, universities witnessed a noticeable demand for Amazigh learning and research. This demand spread over to include other domains and contexts like media, theater, and even language policy and planning. These postulates explain why identity is important in motivating and directing behaviors which can be implied to school success and language learning. These studies have shown that when students' identity is cued with the target language, students are more likely to be motivated for learning. Also, within that process of learning, students show less motivation to do tasks and show unwillingness to learn languages that are unrelated to their identity or current and future self.[38]

The idea of imagined communities and imagined identities also seems to have a remarkable correspondence to the possible future selves promoted by Bonny Norton in her book *Identity and Language Learning, Extending the Conversation*.[39] Imagined identities and communities are

[37] For more information about Amazigh Language, see Erin Twohig, "Literature and Amazigh Language Debates: The Case of Moroccan Amazigh Literature in 'Other' Languages," *Journal of North African Studies* 22, no. 4 (September 2017): 536–59.
[38] Dörnyei and Ushioda, *Motivation, Language Identity*.
[39] Norton, *Identity and Language Learning,* 9.

concurrent with the future self-association with the Ideal L2 self and identity, which is, in essence, an imagined future identity that belongs to an imagined linguistic or professional community. Both, the social and personal identities of the learners can influence the learning of the target language. Imagined identities relate to the present communities that the learner interacts with while learning the language, and the future imagined communities that the learner is trying to be affiliated with after learning the target language. Hence, successful language learners, in this context, are those who manage to participate in the social life of the desired communities and construct identities that can be acknowledged and recognized by the members of that imagined community.

The Francophone community in Morocco is an example of an imagined linguistic and professional community. Francophones seem to have a French-oriented focus that relates to the French lifestyle and social identity. They attend French school, eat French food, and speak French most of the time. The psychological need of language learners to be acknowledged and accepted by the French community, real or imagined, undoubtedly plays a significant part in their willingness to invest in the French language learning process and not in Arabic or any other language spoken in Morocco. The same goes for social identity. Being Francophone means that one is elite, probably rich, and well-educated. Consequently, one might be motivated to study French instead of any other language by seeking social and cultural affiliation and identification with the French community. So, the need to be part of a community and accepted by the members of that community is essential in motivating language learning.

In another study to investigate the effect of learners' identities on English as a foreign language learning motivation in the University context, Feltman applied the identity-Based Motivation model to investigate Saudi students' motivation and find out how their identities affect

their English learning motivation.[40] Feltman argued that language learning has always been associated with motivation, that motivation has been regarded as one of the most significant aspects of language learning and achievement, and that identity has been identified as one of the important factors in language learning motivation. Though there are different types of factors that motivate students to learn English in Saudi Arabia, such as globalization, and English power and dominance, identity motivation emphasizes that learners show a strong inclination towards the English language by identifying their identity with the English-speaking community, culture, and lifestyle. Identity motivation can also be associated with the language itself which motivates learners to be part of the 'global' identity. This global identity is essential in guiding the learners' actions, behaviors, attitudes, and motivations because it connects with aspects related to their psychology such as beliefs, selves, and identity.[41]

Feltman's study concluded that most students who were motivated to learn English as an L2 believed that learning English will not negatively influence their religious identity, which indicates that they had positive attitudes toward the influence of English on their current religious identity. On the other hand, those who were less motivated to learn English as an L2 had a negative attitude toward English and westernization and its influence on Islam and the Saudi identity. The study also elucidated that there was a significant correlation between aspects of students' identity and their motivation to learn English as an FL. Those aspects are found to be related to their present or future identity-congruent elements such as ethnicity, society, culture, or religion.[42] Students

[40] Moegamat Yusuf Feltman, "The effects of student identities on English as a foreign language learning motivation in a Saudi university context," PhD diss., Stellenbosch University, 2018: 23-26, https://scholar.sun.ac.za/bitstream/handle/10019.1/103654/feltman_effects_2018.pdf.
[41] Sarah Mercer, "Language Learner Self-Concept: Complexity, Continuity and Change," *System: An International Journal of Educational Technology and Applied Linguistics* 39, no. 3 (September, 2011): 335-346.
[42] Feltman, "The effects of student identities": 154-169.

showed motivation and engaged in long process learning activities as they were willing to develop a global linguistic identity through and construct an L2 self or identity.

To shed new light on identity and its association with second language learning motivation, Liliane Sade stated that language learning is complex as it relates to many aspects related to the learners, their learning experiences, and their identities. Sade discussed how these aspects, especially identity, are indivisibly intertwined with language learning motivation, and how the interrelationship between motivation and identity can be a motive to increase and promote autonomous learning.[43] The desire and process of belonging to social communities and participating in its practices, linguistic and non-linguistic, is important for emerging social identity. On the other hand, the process and experience of social belonging can be developed through learning the language of that society and through participating in its linguistic practices. In other words, constructing the desired social identity necessitates some knowledge of the language which can be the motive behind individuals to learn the language and the social aspects related to it. This process is referred to by Sade as "the fractalization of identities" which explains the need for a selection of linguistic and non-linguistic actions and behaviors that will govern the individuals' interactions, and at the same time contribute to the construction of a social identity or even the development and re-construction of new identities within the same society.[44] Sade's study analyzed narratives by a Brazilian learner of English as a second language. The study aimed at understanding how the process of belonging to society and constructing social identity can lead to language learning motivation. At first, the learner did not identify himself with learning English,

[4343] Liliane Assis Sade, "Emerging Selves, Language Learning and Motivation through the Lens of Chaos" In *Identity, Motivation and Autonomy in Language Learning* edited by Garold Murray, Xuesong Gao and Terry Lam (Bristol, Blue Ridge Summit: Multilingual Matters, 2011): 42-56.
[44] Sade, "Emerging Selves," 45-46.

because, according to him, everybody else doesn't see how English connects with their linguistic identity. Consequently, he clearly showed his demotivation towards English learning even though he has open access to formal and structured learning of English. This highlights the idea explained above that students can show less motivation when they don't feel that the language is congruent with who they are and what they want to be. The Brazilian student, after moving with his father to a new city, made a new friend and got involved in rock music. He gradually developed a sense of belonging to the rock community and then started to think of learning English, even though he didn't have the same formal settings for learning English he used to have in his previous city. He started by translating the songs he listened to and memorizing the lyrics. The more involved with this type of music and its community, the more motivation he showed toward English learning. This study demonstrated how the learner's desire to create a sense of belonging to the rock community was conditioned by the linguistic competence that motivated the Brazilian learner to learn English. That desire motivated him to also search for ways by which he could learn the language autonomously. This explains that identity (social identity in this case)--and the construction of the sense of belonging to a community with which one identifies-- can be an effective motive to learn a foreign language or the language associated with the desired identity.

In a like manner, to understand what motivates second language acquisition among Brazilian and Japanese learners of English as a second language, Paiva analyzed a corpus written by those students and provided proof that second language learning does not only involve the content, classroom, and assessment, but also social, ethnic and linguistic identities.[45] Participants in this study have varied reasons behind their language learning motivation. Their reasons were

[45] Vera Lúcia Menezes De Oliveira E. Paiva, "Identity, Motivation and Autonomy in Second Language Acquisition from the Perspective of Complex Adaptive Systems," in *Identity, Motivation and Autonomy in Language* Learning, Garold Murray, Xuesong Gao and Terry Lamb, (Bristol, Blue Ridge Summit: Multilingual Matters, 2011): 57-72.

not only limited to traveling to places where English is used, working, communicating in English, or schooling but they go beyond that and associate with the future self and identity construction. Some participants indicated they are interested in the American lifestyle and stated that by learning English, they would be able to learn more about the culture, the music, and the society of American life. This indicates that learning a language can be motivated by the process of identity reconstruction and that language learning itself is a process of constructing identity.[46]

[46] Norton, Bonny. *Identity and Language Learning: Gender, Ethnicity and Educational Change*. Language in Social Life Series. Harlow, England: Longman Publishers, 2000.

CHAPTER FOUR

THE ROLE OF LITURGICAL LANGUAGE IN THE CONSTRUCTION OF RELIGIOUS IDENTITY

Many studies have tried to answer questions about language and identity construction, and from these studies and research a number of approaches for dealing with the Sociology of Language and the role of language in identity construction have emerged. The relationship and correlations between language and identity have aroused the curiosity of scholars for a long time. As Norton explained in her book *Identity and Language Learning*, language constitutes identity, and identity is constituted through language. Language learners not only exchange information with other members of the community when they use the target language, but they also form and communicate a sense of who they are, whether they are religious or not, and how they relate to their society. As a result, they engage in identity negotiation and construction.[47]

Whenever identity is concerned, there are many factors that contribute to its construction and formation. These factors can be race and ethnicity, social class, gender, religion, or language. Of these, language is the most salient and noticeable principle. Each nation has its ideas, values, habits, patterns of behavior, religion, and its way of life in various aspects of its human activities. All these aspects are represented by language.

[47] Bonny Norton, *Identity and Language Learning: Extending the Conversation*. 2nd ed (Blue Ridge Summit, PA: Multilingual Matters, 2013), 4.

My focus in this chapter is on liturgical language or liturgy. Though language, in general, is an important factor in the construction of identity, I argue that religious language and, in particular, liturgy, can be a particularly powerful factor in identity construction, for two main reasons. The first reason is related to the ethnoreligious identity markers that are linguistic, which include different religious expressions embedded in language. The second reason is related to the sense of spirituality and religiosity that motivates participants to attend religious institutions, gatherings, and celebrations where the liturgical language is used instead of the language used in the streets in daily conversations.

Concerning the first reason, I contend that religious language can be a particularly powerful factor in identity construction because identity can be constructed and strengthened by means of linguistic ethnoreligious identity markers, which include different religious expressions embedded in everyday language. For example, in Islam, the Arabic language, being a spiritual and religious tool of Muslims' approach to worship, is the language of all Muslims of every race and region. As the *lingua franca* of Islam, through Arabic, Muslims become acculturated and communicate their cultural, linguistic and religious identity. That can be witnessed in everyday interactions in Muslim communities. For example, formulaic greetings include many religious expressions. Some of those religious expressions are used in different situations. To thank someone, for example, one says "*Jazākallāh khāyr*" meaning "May God reward you well." A similar form of expressing gratitude is "*Al-ḥamdu lillāh wa sh-shukru lillah*" which means "Praise and thanks be to God." In addition, when one wants to thank someone, one can say "*Allah idžefdek*" (in colloquial Moroccan Arabic), which means "May God protect (and bless) you." Non-Arabic Muslim speakers, tend to use these expressions well to express their religious identity through language. Similarly, common formulaic

religious expressions are "*As-salām 'alaykum*" for greeting and "*akhī*" (brother), "*ukhtī*" (sister)" for calling or addressing someone, to name a few.

Regarding the second reason, I contend that liturgy can be a particularly powerful factor in identity construction because people's spirituality and religiosity motivates them to attend religious institutions, gatherings, and celebrations where the liturgical language is used. Such attendance then reinforces participants' identity. For example, one report has suggested that at least some participants who know English but who do not know the liturgical language—instead of instead of attending religious gatherings in their neighborhood where English is the language of prayer— prefer to attend religious gatherings where the liturgical language is used for prayer even though they might not know anyone in that gathering. This illustrates that the religious language of liturgy, together with one's spiritual or religious identity, has the power motivate actions that further reinforce one's identity.

In a study titled *Investigating Religious Identity in Family Discourse in Saudi*, al-Mulla researched the role that language plays in the construction of identity, focusing primarily on the construction of religious identity in family discourse in Saudi Arabia, an Arab Islamic country.[48] One of the questions the research tried to answer is what the participants mean and what they are trying to achieve when they interact, especially when liturgical language is used in interaction, focusing on the identity of a Muslim family in Saudi Arabia.[49] Al-Mulla, in her interpretation and evaluation of different interactions, noticed that Qur'an and *du'ās* (supplicatory prayers) are always included in such interactions. By doing this, the participants in interactions use these

[48] Iman Al-Mulla, "Investigating Religious Identity in Family Discourse in Saudi Arabia: A Study of Moral Order, Narratives, Power and Solidarity." Order No. 28278041, Lancaster University (United Kingdom, 2018), 159-166
[49] Al-Mulla, *Investigating Religious Identity in Family Discourse in Saudi Arabia*, 170-182

expressions to construct a shared religious identity. In another context, she noticed that when they refer to a verse in Quran, they do not recite the whole verse, they do not refer to the chapter, and they do not even complete the whole verse while interacting. For example, one of the participants recited the Quranic verse from Surat Yaseen (36:9) as: *"And We have put before them a barrier…"* وَجَعَلْنَا مِنْ بَيْنِ أَيْدِيهِمْ سَدًّا... Although this is an incomplete sentence and only part of the Qur'anic verse, it served to cue the meaning of entire Qur'anic verse in the minds of the other participants who most certainly all knew the verse (given its importance in Islamic life). The fact that only the beginning of the verse was recited indicates a sharing of liturgical literacy and religious knowledge and identity among all the participants in that interaction. Such repetition of religious intertexts, according to Cynthia Gordon, takes place across interactive and communicative events and can only be recognized with prior knowledge of the liturgical texts and their source, which essentially necessitates a shared knowledge of liturgy among the participants in a certain interaction.[50] Such instances of liturgical language use and intertextuality are used by the participants to co-construct their religious identity.

The use of liturgical language through formulaic religious expressions has been witnessed in numerous interactions observed by the al-Mulla in different situations, like reciting Qurʾanic verses and *istighfār* (seeking forgiveness) to solve a problem, reciting Sūrat Yāsīn (Qur'an, Sūrat 36) to avoid/minimize injury, reciting a particular *duʿā* (supplicatory prayer) to provide divine protection from the evil eye, and many more, all of which contribute to the construction of Muslim religious, social and linguistic identity in Saudi Arabia.

[50] Cynthia Gordon, *Making Meanings, Creating Family: Intertextuality and Framing in Family Interaction* (Oxford; New York: Oxford University Press, 2009), 26-76

Data analysis has also showed that there is a relationship between religious practices and daily times, a relationship that can be witnessed in two distinct forms. The first relates to parenting and the performance of religious rituals and activities—such *ṣalāt* (ritual prayer), *adhkār* (litanies), and Qurʾan recitation, to name a few examples—which can be coordinated with a natural synchronization according to the time of the day. Functionally, parents are eager to socialize their children through the performance of different religious activities that enable them to monitor both their religious and the social routines. For example, parents ask their children: "What do you say when you wake up?" Children reply: "أَصْبَحْنَا وَأَصْبَحَ المُلْكُ لله رَبِّ الْعَالَمِين" (We have awakened to a new dawn, along with all the dominion which belongs to Allah, Lord of all that exists.) The second relationship entails religio-social synchronization. In an Islamic country such as Saudi Arabia, the timing of social activities such as visiting relatives, going out together, playing or attending a game/match, is governed by the need for participants, in addition, to perform religious duties, *ṣalāt* in particular, at a strictly specified time and space throughout the day. In the same manner, some members of the Islamic community in Athens, GA, set the time to play volleyball at Al-Huda Islamic Center following the *'asr* (afternoon) prayer on Sunday. These examples illustrate how liturgically-rooted language functions together with specific times and religious practices to construct and reinforce religious identity.

In his ethnographic study, Rosowsky examined the role of liturgical literacy in UK Muslim communities. Rosowsky focused on a particular community that neither speaks nor understands Arabic, the language of the Qurʾan, without specific training. For them, Arabic has a sound they can reproduce and repeat, a form they can acknowledge, but a meaning that they cannot grasp or understand on their own. For that purpose, they have to learn the liturgical language for prayer and also for reading Qurʾan. Within the learning process, they also learn some common interjections

and sayings such as *al-hamdu lillāh* (gratitude is due to God) and *astaghfirullāh* (I seek God's forgiveness) to use when they take part in basic integration within the Muslim community.[51]

Rosowsky's analysis demonstrated the relationship between language, liturgical literacy, and religious identity in Muslim communities in the UK, showing how Qur'anic Arabic is given a higher social and linguistic status than the Pakistani community's own vernacular languages, Urdu and Punjabi. He focused specifically on the topic of "liturgical literacy" which he defined as "that use of reading, more rarely of writing, which is essential to ritual and other devotional practices connected with an established religion, usually a 'religion of the book' such as Judaism, Christianity and Islam."[52] He also examined the various settings in which liturgical literacy is usually acquired by Muslims in the UK (at the mosque, school, and at home) and emphasized the importance of the acquisition of Qur'anic Arabic to Muslims of different origins and explored the role that this linguistic variant plays within a particular British Muslim community in northern England. In Islam, liturgical literacy is acquired, practically, for the performance of obligatory prayers, the recitation of the Qur'an and for participating in various religious ceremonies. Nevertheless, liturgical literacy, in addition, serves to establish and maintain religious identity.

Chew in her study raised the point that certain languages in a religious context may favor particular practices and identities. She compared the language choices and religious identities of three weekend schools for Islamic instruction (madrasahs) in Singapore: one where Arabic was the language of instruction; one where English was the language of instruction; and one where

[51] Andrey Rosowsky, "The Role of Liturgical Literacy in UK Muslim Communities," in *Explorations in the Sociology of Language and Religion*, ed. Tope Omoniyi and Joshua A. Fishman (Amsterdam, Netherlands: John Benjamins Publishing Company, 2006): 312-24. The Amazigh (Berbers) in Morocco find themselves in a similar situation when they interject formulaic religious expressions into their daily interactions, like *inshāʾallāh* (God willing), *al-hamdu lillāh* (gratitude is due to God) and *tbārakallāh* ([I'm thankful] for God's blessings).

[52] Rosowsky, "Liturgical Literacy," 320.

Malay was the language of instruction. Every madrasah has its own objectives, orientations, and curricula, but since Arabic is the language of the Quran, its status as a liturgical language was maintained in all three madrasahs, where key verses and compulsory prayers of the Quran were learned in Arabic. Arabic language choice, as a liturgical language in all three schools, is to instill an Islamic religious identity. [53]

In another study titled *Liturgy and Identity* Robinson examined the effect of the liturgy on personal identity in a Fresh Expression of Church, considering the possible effects the liturgy may be having on the identities of those participating in the worship. One of these effects is sensing in the liturgy the vital importance of spirituality beyond physicality.[54] Robinson also referred to the effect of the liturgy on the behavioral style and personal identity (shaking hands vs hugs, using certain body gestures and movements, and following the prayer leader). People get used to the literacy and habitual behaviors of prayer in the liturgical language by which they build a sense of belonging as they are already familiar with the rhythm, the order, the meanings and the patterns. On the other hand, when they attend a prayer where the local language is the language of prayer, they feel lost and uncomfortable, focusing on their behavioral practices rather than prayers and spirituality.

David Crystal in his study *Liturgical Language in a Sociolinguistic Perspective* talked about the different range of functions that liturgical language can perform; it can be social, expressive, aesthetic, but the most important function is identifying. The choice of liturgical

[53] Phyllis Ghim-Lian Chew "Language Choice and Religious Identities in Three Singaporean Madrasahs." *International Journal of the Sociology of Language*, (2014): 49–65.
[54] Tracy Robinson, "Liturgy and Identity: What does the Liturgy Make of Me? Interpreting the Effect of the Liturgy on Personal Identity in a Fresh Expression of Church," MA thesis, Oxford Brookes University, 2009: 69-70.

language always signals our personal, ethnic, social and to a great deal expresses the religious identity of the participant.[55]

In conclusion, the previous studies mentioned above have proved liturgical language to be a significant site for the construction, co-construction, and negotiation of identities (Social, linguistic, and religious). Though there are many factors that contribute to the formation and construction of identity, the analysis showed how language and specifically liturgical language influence and affect the construction, co-construction, and negotiation of religious identity.

[55] David Crystal, *"*Liturgical Language in a Sociolinguistic Perspective*"* in *Language and the Worship of the Church* (Palgrave Macmillan, London, 1990), 120-146

CHAPTER FIVE

THE LINGUISTIC CONSTRUCTION OF ISLAMIC IDENTITY: THE SEMANTIC MEANING OF "MUSLIM" IN THE QUR'AN

Many studies have tried to answer questions about identity construction, and from these studies and research emerged a number of approaches that scholars have relied on to investigate identity construction. This paper will focus on two potential approaches to religious identity construction, the semantic and sociolinguistic approaches. However, I will place more emphasis on the semantic approach. An example of the semantic approach is the method Izutsu has taken in dealing with the semantic meaning of the word "Muslim" in the Qur'an and the construction of Muslim identity. Though there are other approaches to identity construction, for our purposes, we will focus on the semantic approach.[56]

From the beginning of human civilization until this day, humans have been eager to preserve their social, national, cultural, and linguistic uniqueness. Therefore, they have been keen on having an identity that helps elevate individuals in societies. Identity is a set of characteristics and features that a person possesses and through which she/he is identified, and the concept of identity can evolve and change throughout life. In other words, it is not fixed even while it includes many aspects that cannot be controlled, such as skin color, the sex of the individual, or even the place in which one was born and raised. In addition to the aspects that the individuals voluntarily

[56] Toshihiko Izutsu, (1914 – 1993) was a Professor at Keio University in Japan and the author of many books on Islam and other religions.

choose in life, such as their beliefs or their religion, individuals reveal their personal identity to those around them through what they wear, through rituals and practices based on their beliefs, and through linguistic interaction with those around them within the community.

The Term "Muslim" in Quran and its Semantic Meaning

In Izutsu's semantic approach to key terms in Islamic religiosity, he focused on the lexicon of the Qur'an. To this end, he examined the expressions that he regarded as foundational to understanding a term's semantic field. According to Izutsu, the semantic field is made up of a system of key concepts with which words and phrases are transformed to lead to new meanings, more or less different from their basic meanings.[57] The word "hour," for example, has a basic meaning, which is the known period of time. But when you view the word "hour" in the context of the Qur'anic verse: "Nay! The Hour is their tryst, and the Hour is more calamitous and more bitter" (Sūrat al-Qamar, 54: 46), you will read the word "hour" within the semantic field associated with the day of reckoning. That is, the new, expanded meaning of the word is derived from the context in which it was mentioned.

Etymologically, the term "Muslim" comes from the verb "*aslama*" and the verbal noun is "*islām*." Literally, it has been translated as "submission" and "surrendering." The word "muslim" is the "active participle" derived from the verb "*aslama*." Hence, it means "one who is surrendering." In terms of religion, Islam is the name of the Islamic religion, and "*muslim*" or

[57] Toshihiko Izutsu, *God and Man in the Koran: Semantics of the Koranic Weltanschauung.* (Keio University press, 1964), 3.

"*muslimūn*" (plural) refers to a member or members belonging to the Islamic religious community.[58]

The words "muslim, aslama, islām" can be traced in the Qur'an in different passages with different contexts and purposes. One aspect of these terms' semantic field in the Qur'an is the sense of obedience and surrendering to God's commands:

"Say, "We believe in God, and in that which was sent down unto us, and in that which was sent down unto Abraham, Ishmael, Isaac, Jacob, and the Tribes, and in what Moses and Jesus were given, and in what the prophets were given from their Lord. We make no distinction among any of them, and unto Him we submit (*lahu muslimūn*)" (al-Baqarah, 2: 136). In this verse, "*muslimūn*" means "we are obedient and we surrender to him."[59] The same meaning can be applied to the word "wa- antum muslimūn" in al-Baqarah, 2:132 "And Abraham enjoined the same upon his children, as did Jacob, "O my children, God has chosen for you the religion, so die not except in submission (wa-antum muslimūn)." And in al-Naml, 27:38: "He said, "O notables! Which of you will bring me her throne before they come unto me in submission (muslimin)?"

Another semantic meaning of "*muslim*" is related to patience, reliance, and humble submission. The following verse is an example of showing humble submission: "And, our Lord, make us submit (*muslimayn*) unto Thee, and "from our progeny a community submitting (*ummah muslimah*) unto Thee, and show us our rites, and relent unto us. Truly Thou art the Relenting, the Merciful" (al-Baqarah, 2:128), and "And when his Lord said unto him, "Submit!" (*aslim*) he said,

[58] For more details, see Chapter 8 from: Toshihiko Izutsu, *Ethico-Religious Concepts in the Qur'an*. (Montreal: McGill-Queen's University Press, 2002), 156-175.
[59] *Tafsir al-Tabari,* vol. 1, 386-87.

"I submit (*aslamtu*) to the Lord of the worlds" (al-Baqarah, 2:131). In the latter, the word "*aslim*" is the imperative form of the verb "*aslama*," and it means to surrender and obey.[60]

To understand the identity of "*muslim*" it is important to understand its antonym. Things are defined by their opposites. Something is known by what contrasts it and what distinguishes it from other things. In regards to the identity of a people or a nation, certain historical, linguistic, psychological and individual characteristics separate individuals of a group from others. In this manner, investigating the meaning of the word *mushrik* which is commonly regarded as an opposite of *muslim*, can assist us in broadening our understanding of the semantic field of *muslim*. Commonly, *mushrik* is translated as "idolater" or "polytheist," while literally it means "one who worships something besides God, as if it were a "partner" (*sharīk*) to God. In one of its Qur'anic contexts, we see being a *mushrik* as being in opposition to being a *muslim*. Here Muhammad was asked to be the first to surrender and reject idolatry: "Say, I was commanded to be the first of those who submit (aslama), and be not among the idolaters (mushrikīn)" (al-Anʿām: 6: 14). Thus, *muslim* in this context is defined by its contradictory stance to idolatry.

The Construction of Islamic identity: Who is a Muslim?

To answer this question, two perspectives must be discussed: one of them is linguistic, and the other is religious. Linguistically speaking, the word "*aslama*" means to "submit oneself." The Qur'an uses it in this sense when it was mentioned by the previous prophets when they were addressing their followers and asking them to be "Muslims." God said in the Qur'an, in the words of Prophet Ibrahim and his son Prophet Ismail in: "And, our Lord, make us submit (muslimayn) unto Thee, and "from our progeny a community submitting (*ummah muslimah*) unto Thee" (al-

[60] See Izutsu, *Ethico-Religious Concepts*

Baqarah, 2: 128). The same meaning is found in what God said about the people of Lūt: "Yet We did not find therein but one house of submitters (*muslimīn*)," and in the words of Moses: "And Moses said, "O my people! If you believe in God, then trust in Him, if you are submitters (*muslimīn*)" (Yūnus, 10: 84). Solomon also said to the Queen of Saba': "Do not exalt yourselves against me but come unto me in submission (*muslimīn*)" (al-Naml, 27: 31). The apostles of Jesus also used the term: "The apostles said, 'We are God's helpers. We believe in God; bear witness that we are submitters (muslimūn)" (Āl ʿImrān, 2: 52). The word *muslim* mentioned in these verses means "submissive" to God in their command, and it does not mean that they believe in "Islam" the religion that God revealed to Muhammad because this religion was not known to them (since such prophets were alive and had passed on long before the life of Muhammad). God says in Qur'an: "For each among you We have appointed a law and a way" (al-Māʾidah, 4: 48).

After the revelation of the Qur'an from God to the Prophet Muhammad, the meaning of some words shifted from their general etymological meaning to a formal religious meaning indicated by texts from the Qur'an and Sunnah. One of these words is *islam*, the meaning of which shifted from "surrending" and "submission" to connote the formal religion of Islam. The evidence of this transition in meaning can be found in the Qur'an, where God says: "This day I have perfected for you your religion, and completed My Blessing upon you, and have approved for you *islām* as a religion" (al-Māʾidah 5: 3). And when He says: "Whosoever seeks a religion other than *islām*, it shall not be accepted of him, and in the Hereafter, he shall be among the losers" (Āl ʿImrān 3: 85).

After this transition of the term "Islam" and its derivatives, the word "muslim" refers to the follower of Islam, and it has one meaning: the follower of the religion that God revealed to Muhammad. To answer the question "who is a Muslim?" from the religious perspective, we can

refer to the hadith of Gabriel about Islam. ʻUmar ibn al Khattab said: "One day when we were with God's messenger, a man with very white clothing and very black hair came up to us. No mark of travel was visible on him, and none of us recognized him. Sitting down before the Prophet, leaning his knees against his, and placing his hands on his thighs, he said, 'Tell me, Muhammad, about Islām (religion)." He replied, "Islam means that you should bear witness that there is no god but God and that Muhammad is God's messenger, that you should perform the ritual prayer (ṣalāt), pay the alms tax (zakāt), fast during Ramadan, and make the pilgrimage (ḥajj) to the House if you are able to go there." The man said, "You have spoken the truth."[61]

The question of religious identity is a central topic in all religious traditions. In Judaism, identity is translated through the responses God gave to Moses in Torah. In Christianity, the answer of identity can be traced through Gospel texts and the New Testament. In Islam, "muslim" means the one who surrenders and submits his or her will to God by following the Islamic traditions derived from Qur'an and Sunnah. This religion "Islam" is an answer to the questions "Who am I?" and "Who are we?" It defines all that constitutes the identity of the member of that religion.

While social scientists have explored identity and different approaches to identity construction over the past decade, most reviews of identity theory and research have clearly overlooked the importance of religion in constructing individual and group identities. For the Islamic nation (*ummah*), religion is identity. It is its values, ideas, customs, behaviors, and a way of life in most aspects of human activities. The other evidence of the importance of religion in constructing a "muslim" identity is language. Language is the form of Islam, and Islam is

[61] ʻUmar ibn Al-Khattāb was one of the closest "companions" of Muhammad and the 2nd Caliph of Islam. Bukharī, *Ṣaḥīḥ al-Bukhāri, Kitāb al-tafsīr,* hadith#4777, https://sunnah.com/bukhari:4777.

represented by language (the Arabic language). Arabic and Islam are inseparable. In this way, the intertwined relationship between language and religion, which are two of the most important elements of identity construction, highlights the importance of taking them into account as central factors in the construction of identity.

CHAPTER SIX

GENERAL CONCLUSION

In conclusion, in the twentieth century, in public institutions of learning, as a result of secularism, religious content was often marginalized from language learning contexts. In such contexts, language learning programs were reticent to consider students' religious identity while teaching the target language. In contrast, in this thesis I have explored the role of language and religion in the construction of religious and linguistic identity, arguing that 1) though language and religion seem to be different and separate, I argue that they are reciprocal and interrelated, and that they both affect identity construction. 2) though language is one of the main factors of identity construction, religion also plays a crucial role in the construction of identity. 3) Though language is one of the main factors of identity construction, liturgical language in particular plays a crucial role in the construction of identity. And 4) though some language learning experts might recommend that the learning context should be religion-free, the incorporation of religious context can motivate language learners to create, build, and express their identity, and that identity, be it religious or linguistic, can enhance language learning motivation.

Language goes beyond its abstract linguistic and technical meaning and becomes a symbol expressing a society's identity and a tool for its interaction and the way its people think and express themselves.[62] In addition to being important and related to society, culture, and ethnicity, language also relates closely to the state and the personality of its speakers, and can be a factor that

[62] Norton, *Identity and Language Learning*, 4-5.

contributes to expressing, constructing, and strengthening their affiliation and identity. Linguistic identity contributes to communicative behaviors, interactions, expressions of feelings and unify the community. In addition to that, other aspects of identity are embodied and portrayed by the language. Those aspect include but not limited to culture, ethnicity, and religion.

Identity for every nation involves its languages, ideas, values, customs, patterns of behavior, and belief systems.[63] However, as I argued earlier, identity can be related to language and religion more than it is related to other aspects. In Islam and Islamic nations for example, one's Islamic identity suggests a way of life, encompassing all its different aspects and consisting of two basic elements: the first of which is the form that is its communicative means, represented, first and foremost, by the Arabic language; while the second is the content derived from Arabic Islamic sources, principally Qur'an, *ḥadīth*, and commentaries on such primary sources, which gave rise to the various Islamic disciplines or Islamic "sciences," such as law (*fiqh*) and theology (*kalam*). Hence the close connection between the Arabic language on the one hand, and the Islamic religion on the other hand, which illustrates how religion and language are inextricably intertwined and mutually interrelated. When it comes to what effects this reciprocality can have on learning a language, religion and religious identity can be one the most important motives in language learning. The relationship between Arabic and Islam, for example, motivates Arabic non-native speakers to learn the language. Their interest in the language is driven by the values (and related practices) that construct a Muslim's religious identity. One such value is the need to perform the five daily prayers, a requirement of which is to perform them in Arabic and not in any other

[63] Edwards, *Language, and Identity*, 52-55.

language.[64] Therefore, the interdependent relationship between religion and language as an important factor in identity construction highlights the importance of taking into account not only language—but also religion— in the language learning context, rather than the common secular practice of divorcing religion from such a context. This interdependent relationship also explains, as has been shown in the previous chapters, how religion affects linguistic identity and how integrating religion and faith within education can enhance language learning motivation. The reciprocality of Arabic and Islam also explains how learning the liturgical language, in particular, might influence and affect the construction, co-construction, and negotiation of religious identity.

[64] Seymour-Jorn "Arabic Language," 109–22.

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