Why students in the U.S. are learning Arabic: A study of motivation at the college-level

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Abstract

Arabic language learners (N=326) at eleven institutions of higher education across the U.S. were asked about their primary motivations for learning Arabic. Ten primary motivation categories emerged from the data. By using chi-squares and one-way ANOVAs, it was established that learners who were at higher levels of study or who obtained higher levels of proficiency articulated motivations that differed from those at lower levels, which corresponded to a processing conceptualization of motivation (Dörnyei, 2000, 2001, 2005). Further chi-square analyses revealed that Arabic heritage learners had motivations distinct from non-heritage learners, and those with other (non-Arabic and non-English) first language (L1) backgrounds differed in their motivations as well. The findings showed motivations varied according to proficiency and L1 background. Discussed are results which indicate that certain motivations may be more salient than others after learners progress to upper levels of instruction and/or after the socio-political context of the second language (L2) changes.

Introduction

Research into individual learner differences has positioned motivation as one of the key components of a language learner's profile. Originally the socio-psychological model of Gardner and Lambert (1972), which emphasized the instrumental versus integrative aspects of motivation, dominated motivation studies and emerged from the specific bicultural, Canadian context of Montreal English monolinguals learning French. Researchers in the 1990s be-

gan calling for the need to reexamine the construct to make it more sensitive to current and varied classroom pedagogical needs (see a review in Crookes & Schmidt, 1991). In addition to looking at how motivation relates to instrumental versus integrative learning needs (Masgoret & Gardner, 2003), researchers have now looked at how learners' motivation relates to Foreign Language aptitude (Gardner, Tremblay, & Masgoret, 1997; Kiss & Nikolov, 2005), in-class group dynamics (Crookes & Schmidt, 1991; Ushioda, 2001), anxiety (including a willingness to communicate) (MacIntyre, Baker, Clément, & Conrod, 2001; MacIntyre, Dörnyei, Clément, & Noels, 1998), and attitudes towards the target language and culture (Dörnyei & Csizér, 2002; Gardner, 1985; Gardner & Lambert, 1972; Krashen, 1981; Masgoret & Gardner, 2003; Niehoff, 1999; Schmidt, 1991).

Motivation studies conducted in an EFL environment by Dörneyi and his colleagues (Dörnyei, 2002; Dörnyei & Cisér, 2002; Dörnyei & Kormos, 2000; Dörnyei & Ottó, 1998) have emphasized a temporal dimension to motivation and distinguished initial motivation from long-term motivation that leads to persistence in reaching one's end-goal. According to this dynamic, the process-oriented approach to motivation, in either small- or large-scale time frames, language learners' motivation consists of three stages: preactional, actional, and postactional (Dörneyi, 2005). The first stage, preactional, involves an establishment of motivation, which leads towards the selection of a task, or motivates the learner to pursue a specific goal or embark on a task. The actional stage, according to Dörnyei, refers to motivation that keeps the learner on task. The postactional stage is when the learner reflects back on his or her work or actions to evaluate how things went, which will motivate the learner to move on to the next phase of learning. Each of these three stages of motivation, Dörnyei reported, can be influenced not only by the learner, but also by the language learning environment external to the learner.

Ueno (2005) also examined the dynamic and changing nature of motivation in her investigation of 24 beginning learners of Chinese, Japanese, and Russian at a major U.S. university. Twice, she administered motivation questionnaires based on those used by Ushioda (1994) (during the first weeks of the fall and spring semesters), and she interviewed a subset of the learners during the weeks after each questionnaire administration. She found that the majority of the

learners were initially learning less commonly taught languages (LCTLs) out of a desire to study something unique; however, by the second semester, many felt motivated to learn because they felt a sense of accomplishment, which is more of an intrinsic (defined as a motivation to engage in an activity because it is personally enjoyable and satisfying; Noels, Pelletier, Clément & Vallerand, 2003, p. 38) than initial motivation. This change in motivation, Ueno stated, was necessary for language learning to continue successfully. Ueno encouraged teachers to incorporate into the course curriculum different ways in which LCTL learners can gain a sense of accomplishment.

Inbar, Donsita-Schmidt, and Shohamy (2001) investigated the motivation paradigm as it relates to politicized language learning, such as the study of Arabic by Israeli middle school learners (See also Donitsa-Schmidt, Inbar, & Shohamy, 2004). Inbar et al. found that "learning a foreign language in a school context enhances students' motivations towards the culture and the language being studied" (2001, p. 307). These studies and others demonstrate the multi-facetted dimensions of motivation. Motivation is not only related to the learners' end goals, but may also be influenced by aspects of the language learning process itself (see Dörnyei, 2000, 2002, and Manolopoulou-Sergi, 2004, for more information on the information processing model of motivation) and by political and cultural values placed upon the target language. Thus, it is important to position motivation studies within the whole FL learning context. Motivation studies should not just look at the particular motivations of the learners and the language learning processes in which they are engaged, but should also contextualize the learners' motivations within the historical and political situation at hand, especially if the FL being learned is highly politicized, thrust into popularity by world events, or culturally stigmatized.

The events of 9/11 and the actions that have since followed have awakened this nation's interest in FL learning, and in Arabic FL learning in particular. For example, from 1998 to 2002, the number of college students studying Arabic almost doubled, jumping from 5,505 to 10,584 (Welles, 2004). Morrison (2003) argues that a good way to gauge the nation's interest in FLs is to look at federal funding increases. She noted that since 2001, education appropriations have included a 26% increase for Title VI of the Higher Education Act

and the Fulbright-Hays International Studies Program. In addition, she reported that, in 2002, the Department of Education funded the National Middle East Language Resource Center at Brigham Young University, the first Title VI Language Resource Center to focus solely on Middle East languages. Most reports on this expanding group of FL learners has focused on the increased numbers and have not investigated the students' individual motivation for learning, which may or may not be shaped by the historical and political nature of our times. Reports have also noted that language enrollment swells at the first and second year level, but dramatically drops off at higher levels of study (Freedman, 2004; Zehr, 2004). For example, although enrollment in Arabic classes at the college level have nearly doubled, of more than 1.8 million 2003 college graduates, only 22 graduated with Arabic degrees (Freedman, 2004). A study of the motivation of Arabic language learners may help us understand the attrition rate in Arabic programs, which mimics the trend of enrollment in many other LCTL programs (Belnap, 1995; Kubler, 1997).

The last well-documented study on the motivation of Arabic learners in the U.S. occurred over 20 years ago (Belnap, 1987, reviewed in Belnap, 1995) in a political context where cold war politics dominated the country's consciousness, and the "war on terror" was not yet a part of our community's lexicon. In the 1987 study, Belnap presented Arabic language learners at 24 North American universities with a list of 12 possible motivations for learning Arabic and asked the students to rank the choices according to their own personal motivations for learning Arabic. The survey was part of a larger study to describe as accurately as possible the state of Arabic language teaching in the U.S. The three motivations most highly ranked by the students were (a) to learn about Arab "literature and culture," (b) "to travel/live in Middle East" and (c) "to talk to Arabs." Given that this study occurred almost 20 years ago, and due to the recent expansion of Arabic language programs in post 9/11 America, we believe it is time to re-examine the findings of Belnap's study. In addition, Belnap did not compare the learners' motivations to any measures of proficiency or to the learners' academic year of study, nor did he compare the learners' motivations to their individual language learning backgrounds. Therefore, the present study aimed to (a) describe the demographics of those learning Arabic in the U.S. today, (b) find out

what their motivations for learning Arabic were, and (c) ascertain if learners' proficiency levels corresponded to any particular self-reported motivation. The research questions were:

1. What are the demographics of students studying Arabic at U.S. colleges and universities?
2. What are their primary motivations for learning Arabic?
3. Are motivations for learning Arabic related to proficiency levels?

Method

Participants

The participants were 326 learners of Arabic at 11 colleges and universities across the U.S.[1] with varying levels of proficiency, from beginning to advanced level. They were polled regarding their primary motivations for learning Arabic. Reflective of the distribution of students in Arabic language programs in the U.S., most of the participants in this study were currently in the first or second year of Arabic studies (N=253). Another 54 were in their third or fourth year, and 19 were in post-graduate Arabic language programs. Of the learners, 159 (49%) were male and 167 (51%) were female.

Materials & Procedure

During their normal Arabic classes, participants filled out an online questionnaire and completed the Online Arabic Proficiency Tests of listening and reading (for more information on this test, see Winke, 2006; Winke & Aquil, in press), which was developed by the Center for Applied Linguistics in Washington, DC. The questionnaire asked about their personal background, including their academic level in Arabic, general education level, home language background, and past language studies. It also included an open-ended essay question that asked, "What are your primary motivations for learning Arabic?" Learners were able to describe as many primary motivations as they wanted; they were not instructed to rank them. Out of the 326

learners, 217 (67%) described one primary motivation, 86 (26%) described two, 20 (6%) described three, and 3 (1%) described four; thus a total of 461 primary motivations were described by the 326 learners.

Coding

The motivation categories were established independently by three researchers who qualitatively analyzed the participants' data. After coming to a consensus concerning the number and types of categories, the raters coded the participants' responses. Because more than one category was possible for each participant's essay response, inter-rater reliability was calculated as percentages. Raters A and B agreed on 80% of the coded data; raters B and C agreed on 83%; and raters A and C agreed on 85% of the data. The average inter-rater reliability was 82%.

Results

1. What are the demographics of students studying Arabic at U.S. colleges and universities?

The majority of students were native English speakers (NESs) who indicated that an L2 was not spoken in the home (N=176, 54%). An additional 10% of the participants (N=31) were identified as Arabic heritage learners (AHLs); these learners indicated either that (a) Arabic or an Arabic dialect was spoken in the home or (b) Arabic was used by immediate or extended family members either as a primary or secondary language[2]. A third group reported that a language other than English or Arabic was spoken in the home as either the primary or secondary language (N=119, 37%). Designated as native speakers of other languages (NSOLs) by the researchers who qualitatively analyzed their linguistic background data, this group included native speakers of at least 15 other languages, with the largest majority of learners being Malay speakers (N=32; 27% of the NSOLs). See Table 1 for a summary of the background languages.

Table 1

Language Background of Learners in the Study (N=326)

NESs	176 (54%)		
AHLs	31 (10%)		
NSOLs	119 (37%)	Malay	32
		Armenian/Russian	1
		Bangla	2
		Bulgarian	1
		Dutch	1
		French	3
		Hebrew	3
		Hindi	1
		Italian	2
		Japanese	2
		Kiswahili	2
		Persian	1
		Somali	2
		Spanish	4
		Turkish	1
		Urdu/Punjabi	5
		Unknown	56

Note. 56 learners indicated that they spoke a language at home other than English or Arabic, but they did not specify which language.

2. Why are students learning Arabic? (What are their primary motivations?)

The findings summarized in Table 2 indicate that the participants in this study were learning Arabic primarily for ten reasons. Of the 461 responses, 98% fell into 10 broad categories. The most frequently cited response was *better employment options* (26%), followed by *improved cultural understanding* (21%), *personal enjoyment* (18%), *religious reasons* (18%), *academic reasons* (17%), and *traveling or living abroad* (15%). Responses also included the motivations to learn Arabic *to improve linguistic abilities* (10%)[3] and *to communicate better with family members* (8%). Additionally, 3% of the responses concerned learning Arabic *for political or military reasons* and another 3% included *humanitarian reasons.* Since the specific military or political reasons given for learning Arabic were in fact job or employment related, the category of learning Arabic for political or military reasons was identified as a specific subset of the broader category of employment. When these categories are collapsed, the most frequently cited reason for learning Arabic, learning for employment reasons, increases to 29% of all responses.

Table 2
Motivational Categories, Frequency, and Sample Responses (N=457 responses by 326 learners)

Motivation	Frequency	Sample responses
A. Employment/job	86 (26%)	"For my future employment." "I also am interested in conducting business in the Middle East."
B. Cultural understanding	67 (21%)	"I want to learn how to speak to Arabs in order to promote cultural understanding."
C. Enjoyment/curiosity	61 (18%)	"...and because I enjoy learning languages: especially non-romance languages." "I am curious because it is so different." "...the Arabic script and way to write is so beautiful."
D. Religious	58 (18%)	"I want to learn more about Islam." "...to read the Koran." "...for my religion."
E. Academic	56 (17%)	"I want to learn the language that dominates my academic area of study: the Middle East."
F. Travel/live abroad	48 (15%)	"I really want to live in an Arabic speaking country." "I plan on studying and working in Israel, where Arabic is one of the official languages."
G. Linguistic	32 (10%)	"I want to finish my masters and Ph.D. in Arabic grammar." "I want to improve my reading ability."
H. Family	26 (8%)	"I want to be able to communicate with family more efficiently." "I am getting married to an Arab and will travel to his country frequently."
I. Political/military	9 (3%)	"I am in the AFROTC program and hope to become some sort of Middle Eastern Intelligence officer in the US Air Force."
J. Humanitarian	8 (3%)	"I want to go on a missionary trip to the Middle East to help people." "For missionary purposes." "To work with a human rights organization."
K. Other	10 (3%)	"I am taking Arabic because of the amount of knowledge contained in it."

3. Are motivations for learning Arabic related to proficiency levels?

One-way Analysis of Variance (ANOVA) compared the relationships among the participants' mean listening and reading proficiency test scores and their motivations for learning Arabic. The results are presented in Table 3. While, in this study, no relationship was found between reading proficiency and the learners' motivations, a significant relationship between listening proficiency and the collapsed variable of *better employment options* and *political/military reasons* was found[4] (F=5.79, p=.02). This shows that those who are learning Arabic for extrinsic motivational reasons pertaining to employment tend to perform better in listening comprehension. The descriptives pertaining to this statistic are in Table 4.

Table 3

One-Way Analysis of Variance of Motivations by Proficiency Levels

		Proficiency Levels									
		Reading ability					Listening ability				
Motivations		SS	*df*	MS	F	*p*	SS	*df*	MS	F	*p*
A. Employment/job & political/military	Between groups	2.30	1	2.30	1.25	0.27	6.69	1	6.66	5.79	0.02 *
	Within groups	351.05	190	1.85			264.34	230	1.15		
	Total	353.35	191				271.04	231			
B. Cultural understanding	Between groups	2.65	1	2.65	1.43	0.23	0.00	1	0.00	0.00	0.97
	Within groups	350.71	190	1.85			271.03	230	1.18		
	Total	353.35	191				271.04	231			
C. Enjoyment	Between groups	0.18	1	0.18	0.10	0.76	0.53	1	0.53	0.45	0.51
	Within groups	353.17	190	1.86			270.51	230	1.18		
	Total	353.35	191				271.04	231			
D. Academics	Between groups	0.21	1	0.21	0.11	0.74	0.78	1	0.78	0.67	0.42
	Within groups	353.14	190	1.86			270.25	230	1.18		
	Total	353.35	191				271.04	231			
E. Religion	Between groups	1.73	1	1.73	0.93	0.34	3.67	1	3.67	3.15	0.08
	Within groups	351.63	190	1.85			267.37	230	1.16		
	Total	353.35	191				271.04	231			
F. Travel/live abroad	Between groups	0.56	1	0.56	0.30	0.58	0.76	1	0.76	0.65	0.42
	Within groups	353.79	190	1.86			270.27	230			
	Total	353.35	191				271.04	231			
G. Linguistics	Between groups	1.12	1	1.12	0.61	0.44	0.03	1	0.03	0.03	0.87
	Within groups	352.23	190	1.85			271.00	230	1.18		
	Total	353.35	191				271.04	231			
H. Family	Between groups	0.05	1	0.05	0.03	0.87	0.04	1	0.04	0.03	0.85
	Within groups	353.31	190	1.86			270.99	230	1.18		
	Total	353.35	191				271.04	231			
I. Humanitarian	Between groups	0.01	1	0.01	0.00	0.95	0.77	1	0.77	0.66	0.42
	Within groups	353.35	190	1.86			270.26	230	1.18		
	Total	353.35	191				271.04	231			
K. Other	Between groups	0.19	1	0.19	0.10	0.75	0.09	1	0.09	0.07	0.79
	Within groups	353.17	190	1.86			270.95	230	1.18		
	Total	353.35	191				271.04	231			

Note. Category J (Political/miltary) was collapsed into category A (Employment/job).

*Correlation is significant at the 0.05 level (2-tailed).

Table 4
Mean, Standard Deviation, and Standard Error for Employment/job-Political/military Motivation by Listening Proficiency

A. Employment/job-political/military	N	M	SD	SE
Not listed as a motivation	172	4.10	1.01	0.08
Listed as a motivation	60	4.49	1.24	0.16
Total	232	4.20	1.08	0.07

When participants' motivations were compared to the proficiency measures of academic level (first two years, second two years, and post-graduate study) using chi-square analysis, there were two significant relationships. First, as can be seen in Table 5, there was a significant relationship between academic level and the motivation of *enjoyment* (X^2=7.78, *df*=2, *p*=.02). In other words, those beyond the second year of study tended *not* to list *enjoyment* of the language learning process as a primary motivation for learning Arabic. The effect size was small to medium (Cramer's V=.154, *p*=.02; Cohen, 1988). Second, there was a significant relationship between academic level and the motivation of learning Arabic for *religious reasons* (X^2=12.06, *df*=2, *p*=.002). That is, those in the first two years of study listed *religion* as a reason for studying Arabic more than those at the upper levels of study. (See Table 6 below.) The effect size was medium (Cramer's V=.192, *p*=.00).

Table 5

Chi-square of "Enjoyment" as Motivation by Academic Level

Motivation	Group		Academic Level of Arabic Study			Total
			1st two years college	2nd two years college	Post-graduate	
C. Enjoyment	Not listed as a motivation	Count	198	51	16	265
		Expected Count	205.7	43.9	15.4	265
		% of Total	60.7%	15.6%	4.9%	81.3%
	Listed as a motivation	Count	55	3	3	61
		Expected Count	47.3	10.1	3.6	61
		% of Total	16.9%	.9%	.9%	18.7%

Table 6

Chi-square of Religion as Motivation by Academic Level

Motivation	Group		Academic Level of Arabic Study			Total
			1st two years college	2nd two years college	Post-graduate	
E. Religion	Not listed as a motivation	Count	198	52	18	268
		Expected Count	208.0	44.4	15.6	268
		% of Total	60.7%	16.0%	5.5%	82.2%
	Listed as a motivation	Count	55	2	1	58
		Expected Count	45.0	9.6	3.4	58
		% of Total	16.9%	.6%	.3%	17.8%

4. Other findings

In order to determine if any stated motivations were associated with particular language backgrounds, the present study conducted chi-square analyses. The results of the chi-squares yielded three significant relationships—namely, there was a relationship between language background and learning Arabic (1) for religious reasons, (2) for reasons pertaining to communication with family members, and (3) for travel/living abroad (Table 7). The first two relationships were of medium effect size (Cramer's V=.231, p=.00 and Cramer's V=.196, p=.00 respectively), while the third relationship had a small effect size (Cramer's V=.167, p=.01). These results indicate that we can be quite certain that there is a relationship between an Arabic language learners' language background and their reasons for learning Arabic.

Table 7

Chi-square of Motivation by L1 Background (N=326)

Motivations	L1 Background NESs, NSOLs, & AHLs		
	X^2	*df*	*p*
A. Employment/job & military/political	2.18	2	0.26
B. Cultural understanding	1.73	2	0.42
C. Enjoyment	4.09	2	0.13
D. Academics	0.83	2	0.66
E. Religion	17.38	2	0.00 *
F. Travel/Live abroad	9.40	2	0.01 *
G. Linguistics	0.63	2	0.73
H. Family	12.53	2	0.00 *
I. Humanitarian	0.49	2	0.79
K. Other	2.03	2	0.36

*Chi-square is significant at the 0.05 level.

The chi-square between home language background and the motivation of learning Arabic for religious purposes (X^2 (2, N=326)=17.38, p=.00) showed that NSOLs were primarily learning Arabic for religious reasons, while NESs were not (Table 8). Similarly, the chi-square analysis between language background and the motivation of learning Arabic for reasons pertaining to family communica-

tion (X^2=12.53, *df*=2, *p*=.00) showed that AHLs were learning Arabic for family reasons in significantly greater numbers than NSOLs (Table 9). In the case of learning Arabic in order to travel/live abroad, the chi-square analysis (X^2=9.04, *df*=2, *p*=.01) revealed that NESs noted this reason significantly more than both AHLs and NSOLs (Table 10).

Table 8
Chi-square of Religion as Motivation by L1 Background

Motivation	Group		L1 Background			Total
			NESs	AHLs	NSOLs	
E. Religion	Not listed as a motivation	Count	157	27	84	268
		Expected Count	144	25.5	97.8	268.0
		% of Total	48.2%	8.3%	25.8%	82.2%
	Listed as a motivation	Count	19	4	35	58
		Expected Count	31.3	5.5	21.2	58.0
		% of Total	5.8%	1.2%	10.7	17.8%

Table 9
Chi-square of Family as Motivation by L1 Background

Motivation	Group		L1 Background			Total
			NESs	AHLs	NSOLs	
H. Family	Not listed as a motivation	Count	161	24	115	300
		Expected Count	162.0	28.5	109.5	300.0
		% of Total	49.4	7.4%	35.3%	92.0%
	Listed as a motivation	Count	15	7	4	26
		Expected Count	14.0	2.5	9.5	26.0
		% of Total	4.6%	2.1%	1.2%	8.0%

Table 10
Chi-square of Travel/Live Abroad as Motivation by L1 Background

Motivation	Group		L1 Background			Total
			NESs	AHLs	NSOLs	
F. Travel/live abroad	Not listed as a motivation	Count	141	30	107	278
		Expected Count	150.1	26.4	101.5	278.0
		% of Total	43.3%	9.2%	32.8%	85.3%
	Listed as a motivation	Count	30	1	12	48
		Expected Count	26.4	4.6	17.5	48.0
		% of Total	9.2%	.3%	3.7%	14.7%

Summary of the Results

The present study examined the context of Arabic language learning among college-age students in the U.S. in order to provide a descriptive profile of these learners and to investigate any relationships between motivation and proficiency measures. In sum, the majority of the students were native English speakers (NESs, 54%), 10% were Arabic heritage learners (AHLs), and a substantial number of these learners were native speakers of other languages (NSOLs, N=119, 37%). The participants articulated ten primary motivations for learning Arabic. However, the category of *political/military* motivation could be considered as a more specialized subcategory of the *employment/job* motivation. For example, a prototypical response of a learner with *political/military* goals was "I am in the AFROTC program and hope to become some sort of Middle Eastern Intelligence officer in the US Air Force" (participant 136). Additionally, none of the learners who articulated military or political reasons indicated a separate, general employment or job-related motivation for learning Arabic.

When the motivation categories were compared with the measures of proficiency, three significant relationships emerged. The

motivation of *employment/job* (when collapsed with *political/military*) was significantly related to listening proficiency as measured by the Online Arabic Proficiency Test. *Enjoyment* and *religion* were significantly related to proficiency as measured by the learners' three levels of academic study (first two years of Arabic, third or fourth year of Arabic, and above).

Additionally, a post-hoc analysis of learners' language backgrounds indicated that particular motivations were articulated more frequently by learners with a particular language background—including the finding that those who reported a native or home language other than English or Arabic were learning Arabic for religious purposes.

Discussion

The results of the present study suggest that there has been an overall change in what learners of Arabic in the U.S. context are reporting as the primary motivations for learning Arabic. The last well-known survey of college-aged Arabic learners (Belnap 1987, cited in Belnap 1995) reported that learners were learning Arabic mostly to read Arabic literature and to understand Arabic culture, as well as out of a desire to travel or live in the Middle East. In this study, the learners demonstrated a high interest in learning Arabic for employment reasons. In fact, having better employment options was the most frequently articulated motivation and accounted for 26% (N=86) of the 457 motivations listed (29%, N=95, when *employment/job* includes *political/military*). Additionally, 36 of the 95 learners who listed employment (or *political/military*) as a motivation (38%) did not describe any other primary motivation for learning Arabic. In contrast, Belnap's 1987 survey of North American university students, in which students were asked to rank their motivations for learning from a prepared list of options, found the category of *to prepare for a career* was selected as one of the learners' top three choices in only 8.8% of the cases. Also, it was chosen as a reason (regardless of rank) only 19.9% of the time. The differences between the data sets suggest a strong growth in instrumental or extrinsic, career-oriented motivation for L2 Arabic learning over the past decade. Therefore, this study illustrates that, at least in the American university context,

Arabic is increasingly perceived as a tool for employment gains. This finding concurs with observations that motivations for learning Arabic have shifted, most likely in response to the current political situation, and align with Freedman's (2004) contention that motivations for learning an L2 shift as the societal, cultural, and economic interests in the target language change.

This study also found that certain integrative and instrumental motivations for learning an L2 may be more commonly articulated for particular L2s, as Dörnyei and Clément (2001) claimed. An example of this is the motivational factor of learning Arabic *for religious purposes*. While most surveys of motivation for L2 learning, such as Gardner's (1985) Attitude/Motivation Test Battery (AMTB) and Schmidt and Watanabe's (2001) motivation questionnaire, do not ask if the learners are learning for religious purposes, we found that 18% (N=58) of the 457 motivations reported by the participants in this study were categorized as learning Arabic *for religious purposes*. Indeed, 45 (78%) of these 58 participants, who indicated they were learning Arabic for religious reasons, did not list a second motivation. That is, for 14% of the total participants (45 of 326), a religious motivation was reported as the sole factor driving learner behavior.

The emergence of this heretofore understudied motivation is important for two reasons. First, it shows the benefit of collecting additional, free-response, qualitative data from students when investigating motivations rather than primarily using a standardized questionnaire to do so. This has been suggested before: Dörnyei (2001) and Vandergrift (2005) have mentioned that interviews and other introspective methods should be used in addition to questionnaires to investigate the "internal dynamics" of learners' motivation (Vandergrift, 2005, p. 85). Limit-to-list surveys may not capture all motivations for learning an L2, especially those that are specific to the sociopolitical climate in which the survey is administered. However, preprepared (and extensive) lists developed specifically for the particular L2 context, such as that used by Belnap (1987, cited in Belnap 1995), might be effective at tapping into the web of motivations of individual learners in that L2 context. For example, in our study, learners listed at most four motivations, and the majority listed only one; while, in Belnap's study, learners ranked 12 possible motivations, one of which was religious in nature. Thus, a future study that combines

the open-ended question of this study's design, followed by a pre-prepared list of questions, might be useful in coming closer to accurately tapping into the complex motivations that students have for learning a particular language in a particular context at a given time or stage of learning.

Second, taking a closer look at the demographics of those who indicated *religion* as one of their (or their sole) motivation, suggests an interesting trend. This study included a large number of NSOLs (N=119, 37%); that is, those who reported a native or home language other than English or Arabic. Of this 37%, the motivation factor most frequently listed was *religion* (35 out of the 119 NSOLs, or 29%, listed *religion* as their primary motivation). Or, to examine this issue from the opposite perspective, of the 58% who indicated *religion*, only 7% (N=4) were AHLs, 33% (N=19) were NESs, and the majority (60%, N=35) were NSOLs. One possible reason for this trend may be that NSOLs learning Arabic in the U.S. may be Islamics for whom reading the Qur'an in Arabic is a priority. In fact, of the 60% (N=35) of NSOLs who indicated *religious* reasons for learning Arabic, 71% (N=25) spoke Malay as a home language (one of Malaysia's major religions and its only official religion is Islam (Hasan, 2005)). It is interesting to note that Malaysian speaking participants learning Arabic for *religious* reasons studied Arabic at seven of the eleven institutions surveyed; therefore, they were not clustered at any one institution or in any one demographic area. As far as we have been able to ascertain, NSOLs learning Arabic in a U.S. context have not been studied before. The detection of this group in this study, and the specificity of their motives for Arabic learning, indicate that this group of learners may be in need of further investigation. It also points out that, as written by Syed (2001), "motivation, or the desire and investment, in learning a language, is far more complex than the static constructs usually used to measure it" (p. 143). Syed noted that social and familiar expectations can be extremely important motivational considerations, and that language learning for such reasons is often tied to self-identification. The data from our study may provide support for this argument.

Ushioda (2001) suggested that motivation is likely to change as a learner develops (or gains proficiency) in the target language. Our data agreed with this, showing that some motivations were re-

ported more by learners at particular levels of proficiency. Specifically, in our study, students who indicated that they were studying Arabic for *enjoyment* or for *religious* reasons tended to cluster in the first two years of study (see Tables 5 and 6), while learners who indicated the instrumental motivation of learning for *employment/job-political military* reasons where those with higher listening proficiency scores (see Table 4). One explanation for this may be that learners who are motivated by religious concerns have met those needs within the first two-year window of learning and are no longer enrolled in classes or have replaced those goals with new goals. On the other hand, it may also be that the desire to study a language in order to progress in one's religious practices is a motivation that has become internalized for those in the upper levels, such that it is not the case that learners with religious motives have dropped out of studying or have moved on to new goals, but that that motive is no longer foregrounded in the learners' consciousness and is not salient for the student based on the simple open-ended survey prompt of "Why are you learning Arabic?" On the other hand, the trend of finding fewer learners listing *enjoyment* as a primary motivation at the higher levels of learning may coincide with Ueno's (2005) observation that initial, intrinsic motivation may not be enough to sustain learning at the higher levels, especially when learning a language that takes a considerable amount of time and effort. Dörnyei (2001) would probably agree. He said that "unless motivation is actively maintained and protected..., the natural tendency is to lose sight of the goal, to get tired or bored of the activity... [which] will result in the initial motivation gradually petering out" (p. 71). Thus, our study might be showing some evidence for the temporal dimension to motivation and may show that there is a distinction between initial motivation and long-term motivation that leads to L2 success (Dörnyei, 2000, 2002, 2005; Dörnyei & Cisér, 2002; Dörnyei & Ottó, 1998; Manolopoulou-Sergi, 2004).

Limitations and Conclusions

While many motivation studies have looked at motivation within the same level of learners (Clément, Dörnyei, Noels, 1994; Dörnyei and Kormos, 2000; Gardner & Lambert 1972; MacIntyre,

Baker, Clément, & Conrod, 2001), our study investigated motivation as it related to reading and listening proficiency and as it related to different levels of college study (first two years, second two years, and beyond). We did this because Dörnyei (2002) and Manolopoulou-Sergei (2004) suggested that motivation may not only be related to the learners' end goals, but also to aspects of the language learning process itself. We looked at motivation for learning Arabic in particular because there is a lack of studies that have investigated students' motivations for learning Arabic in the post-9/11 U.S. context.

We found that listening ability was related to the extrinsic motivation of learning to obtain employment. However, the directionality of this correlation cannot be ascertained from our data. That is, we do not know if those who learn Arabic for such an extrinsic reason tend to do better overall in listening comprehension, or if those who obtain very high listening abilities are those that then become interested in using the language in an employment setting. We also found that reading ability did not correlate with any of the motivational categories identified in this data set. The reason for this might be that reading ability is more related to L2 aptitude than motivation, or perhaps because reading proficiency in Arabic is more dependent on the type of instruction than on individual students' motivations. Our learners were at 11 different institutions, and thus were not all receiving the same type of instruction, which could have lead to varying scores on the proficiency tests unrelated to their motivations. Further study regarding L2 motivation and skill-specific L2 proficiency is needed, perhaps in a more controlled setting.

Nonetheless, this study contributed to our understanding of issues related to L2 motivation, L1 background, and level of L2 proficiency. The goal of the study was not to reveal specific findings that we could generalize to other L2 contexts; rather, the study aimed to investigate what motivates learners of L2 Arabic in American universities today, and how their proficiency levels and L1 backgrounds may be related to those motivations. In this sense, the study made some small contribution to the field of L2 motivation, suggesting that reported L2 motivations do seem to shift or change over time, due to, perhaps, the changing socio-political context for the L2 in the community at large, or to the learners' levels of proficiency.

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Endnotes

[1] Statistical analyses (chi-squares) found no significant differences between the participants from the 11 institutions regarding sex, age, L1 background, or proficiency level.

[2] AHL identification was based on students' responses to three questions. The first question (What is the primary language spoken in your family's home?) was multiple choice, and participants could choose among English, Arabic (and Arabic dialects) or "other." If the primary language chosen was Arabic or a dialect of Arabic, then the participant was labeled as an AHL. Participants were also asked to identify *any* secondary languages, other than English, that were spoken in the home and (if identified) were asked to explain the home context in which the language was used. Participants who, for example, wrote that English was the primary language in the home, but that Arabic or a dialect of Arabic was also spoken in the home because one or both parents spoke the language or were from an Arabic speaking country, then the participant was labeled as an AHL. Therefore, this study tried to capture a larger sense of "heritageness" in recognition that heritage language learners have a range of exposure to and connection with the heritage language (see Weger-Guntharp, in press, for a discussion of this issue).

[3] Included in the *linguistic* category were explicit statements about learning or improving specific Arabic language skills or abilities (such as improving one's Arabic reading or writing skills or improving one's grammar or pronunciation).

[4] In contrast, the *academic* category was reserved for those statements about learning Arabic in order to study a specific academic content area—such as studying Middle East or Arabic literature.