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Appropriating Hans-Georg Gadamer's Hermeneutical Concept towards Reformulating Christian Theological Education Curriculum via Vernaculars in Africa: Examples from Hausa- Positive-Contexts

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Abstract

This study appropriates Hans-Georg Gadamer's concept of language and hermeneutics toward reformulating the curriculum of Christian theological education in vernacular contexts of Africa, using Hausa-Positive Contexts as an example. Three research questions guide the study. First: How can Gadamer's hermeneutical concept be appropriated via translation and communication in support of reformulating the curriculum of Christian theological education via vernaculars in Africa? Second: What emerging questions need to be addressed in appropriating Gadamer's hermeneutical concept in reformulating the curriculum of Christian theological education via vernaculars in Africa? Third: What strategies need to be engaged consequent to appropriating Gadamer's hermeneutical concept towards reformulating the curriculum of Christian theological education via vernaculars in Africa? The study concludes that those going through formal theological education in many vernacular contexts of Africa have a more effective hermeneutical experience when an appropriate vernacular is engaged as a pedagogical facility for curriculum delivery.

Background of the Study

Introduction

Though the work of Hans-Georg Gadamer can also be appropriated in other areas of theory and practice, as attestable by other studies, this paper focuses on appropriating Gadamer's concept of language and hermeneutics as a step towards reformulating the curriculum of Christian theological education in vernacular contexts of Africa, using Hausa-Positive Contexts as an example. An important area to which Hans-Georg Gadamer pays attention in his seminal work *Truth and Method* is the ontological shift of hermeneutics guided by language. The major focus of this important work is on language and hermeneutics. Gadamer's main thesis is that *language is the medium of hermeneutic experience*.

Gadamer is a strong proponent of the relationship between language and hermeneutics. At the opening of his discourse in this area, he borrows the words of Schleiermacher to express the strength of his advocacy: "Everything presupposed in hermeneutics is but language" (Gadamer, 2006:383). Biblical hermeneutics is an attempt to understand verbal communication made through the use of language; Scripture is a written record of such communication. Understanding the essential role of language in hermeneutics, according to Gadamerian thought, is key to doing hermeneutics.

An immediate example comes to mind in discussing the relationship between language and hermeneutics, in line with Gadamer's advocacy. A significant number of those who desire and pursue theological education in Hausa-Positive-Contexts have a better hermeneutical experience when Hausa is engaged as a pedagogical facility for delivering the curriculum. Although theological students and even teachers are forced by circumstances to "function" using English or other foreign languages, Hausa is the language that makes them to feel most at home in the formal learning environment. In support of these students and teachers this paper attempts to appropriate Gadamer's concept of language and hermeneutics toward reformulating the curriculum of Christian theological education in Hausa-Positive Contexts. In Northern Nigeria, Hausa is even replacing some of the people's native languages and is fast becoming their "heart language" to the extent that their

worldview is being affected in various ways. As Richards and O'Brien (2012:71) note, "Linguists generally conclude that our *heart language*—the language we learn first (up to about age seven)—sets most of the parameters of our worldview."

Thesis Statement

In line with the Gadamerian concept of language and hermeneutics, this paper argues that vernaculars, such as the Hausa language, are qualified in both hermeneutical and pedagogical terms to deliver curriculum in post-secondary, graduate, and post-graduate theological education in African contexts where they are the dominant language of communication—either as a person's first or second language.

Purpose of Study

This study first aims considers how Gadamer's hermeneutical concept can be appropriated via translation and communication in support of reformulating the curriculum of Christian theological education via vernaculars in Africa, using Hausa-Positive-Contexts as a case-study. Second, the study discusses emerging questions that need to be addressed in appropriating Gadamer's hermeneutical concept in reformulating the curriculum of Christian theological education via vernaculars in Africa, engaging Hausa-Positive-Contexts as an example. Third, the study aims to develop strategies that can be engaged as a consequence of appropriating Gadamer's hermeneutical concept towards reformulating the curriculum of Christian theological education via vernaculars in Africa, with Hausa-Positive-Contexts engaged as an example.

Research Questions

Three questions guide this study:

1. How can Hans-Georg Gadamer's hermeneutical concept be appropriated via translation and communication to support reformulating the curriculum of Christian theological education via vernaculars in Africa, using Hausa-Positive-Contexts as a case study?
2. What emerging questions need to be addressed in appropriating Hans-Georg Gadamer's hermeneutical concept in reformulating the

curriculum of Christian theological education via vernaculars in Africa, using Hausa-Positive-Contexts as an example?

3. What strategies need to be engaged consequent to appropriating Hans-Georg Gadamer's hermeneutical concept towards reformulating the curriculum of Christian theological education via vernaculars in Africa, using Hausa-Positive-Contexts as an example?

Significance of the Study

This study will benefit theological schools, language development and literacy agencies, and Bible-translating agencies in Hausa-Positive-Contexts. Theological schools in vernacular contexts of Africa will find this study helpful for engaging languages other than English in effectively delivering the curriculum. Hausa language will be used as a model to facilitate such delivery. This study will motivate theological schools to review and reformulate their curricula to allow integrating various local and regional vernaculars in regular pedagogical processes and to design and construct new courses that could be delivered through various linguistic channels.

This study will help language development and literacy agencies in the creation of literacy materials for use in formal teaching-learning processes in schools. One such agency is the Kuvori Language Development and Literacy Project in Kuru Local Government Area of Kaduna State. This study comes at the right time as countries like Nigeria are putting more emphasis on engaging local languages for teaching-learning, especially at primary school levels. Learners in Hausa-Positive Contexts already have an advantage in that most of them can speak Hausa (second language) and their mother tongue (first language). This study will encourage the development of necessary literacy materials to facilitate such teaching-learning processes for participants from first or second language backgrounds.

This study will also benefit Bible-translating agencies working in Hausa Positive Contexts, such as Wycliffe Bible Translators and Nigeria Bible Translation Trust. These agencies will benefit from suggestions that may help solidify their various Bible translation initiatives.

Delimitation of Study

The study limits itself to Gadamer's seminal work *Truth and Method* in a manner that can be applied towards discussing the interconnection that runs through theological education, curriculum, and language (in this case, Hausa as a case-study language) in vernacular communities of Africa. This means, for brevity, the study does not concern itself with other works by Gadamer, just as it also does not concern itself with other influential regional languages of Africa that could also serve as case-studies. The researcher is more conversant with the interconnection between Hausa and other vernaculars over or within which it has influence, which is the the reason for using Hausa-Positive Contexts as a linguistic exemplar in this study. Furthermore, the study is limited to the relationship of the English language to other vernaculars in Africa, especially in Hausa-Positive-Contexts. Other international languages, such as French, do not attract close attention in this study.

Operational Definition of Terms

Key operational terms in this study are: Hermeneutics, Curriculum, Theological Education, Vernacular, and Hausa-Positive-Contexts.

Hermeneutics. In this study, the term “hermeneutics” is used to refer to the process and reality of understanding. Jensen (2007:2) also defines hermeneutics in this broadest possible way as a “reflection on how we understand, usually with regard to text or speech, and what we need to do in order to avoid misunderstanding. In this respect, hermeneutics is understood as the identification, analysis and removal of obstacles to understanding”.

This study does not consider the complex and fundamental obstacles that need to be addressed towards achieving understanding— “our understanding is always impeded, even our self-understanding” (Jensen, 2007:2). Rather it considers aspects of hermeneutics which relate to language.

Curriculum. “Curriculum” refers to the encapsulation of everything considerable as a learning experience. However the learning experience should be justifiable in educational terms based on particular educational criteria set for such justification (Kelly, 2010:3). As Onwuka (1996:3) notes: “[Curriculum] embraces purposeful experience provided and directed by educational institutions to achieve predetermined goals”. This study considers

churches and their agencies as educational institutions that are part of the total environment in which education takes place.

Theological Education. In line with the Apostle Paul's instruction to Timothy, "And the things you have heard me say in the presence of many witnesses entrust to reliable men who will also be qualified to teach others" (2 Timothy 2:2), theological education can be defined as the communication of biblical truth from "Paul" to "others" or from generation to generation.

Theological education is all the Bible studies and/or communication that is done contextually by the "Pauls," "Timothys," "Trustees" and "others" in every generation of Christians, either professionally and/or formally in theological institutions, educational and research contexts, or generally in churches, Christian and church educational ministries, families, individual basis, and other similar situations with a view to strengthening Christians, both individually and as a church, to be, prepare, and express themselves locally, nationally, internationally, globally and relevantly in Christ's ambassadorial services (Dogara, 2018:24).

Vernacular. According to Crystal (2008:511), "vernacular" is "a term used in sociolinguistics to refer to the indigenous language or dialect of a speech community." In this study "vernacular" refers to the indigenous languages or/and other languages excluding English, French, or other colonial languages that are accepted for day-to-day communication in speech communities in Africa. Some vernaculars such as Hausa have already developed qualities acceptable for consideration as a lingua franca.

Hausa-Positive-Contexts. In this study the term "Hausa Positive Contexts" refers to

Situations in which the limited or unlimited use of the Hausa language is often considered necessary. Within such situations, Hausa is called to use consciously or unconsciously, deliberately or by the dictates of the circumstances, with a view to communicating ideas, facts, information or

knowledge. The said contexts also refer to situations, whether within or without the Hausa world, where Hausa has already achieved definition, qualification, and currency as the language of the people (Dogara, 2018:24).

Methodology and Procedure of Study

The study uses the document analysis approach of the qualitative research methodology. Specifically, Gadamer's *Truth and Method* is a primary document from which relevant sections are extracted for the study. The extractions are organized into three groups, corresponding to the three research questions. The first group engages selected parts of Gadamer's thoughts on language and hermeneutics to address how Gadamer's hermeneutical concept can be appropriated via translation and communication in support of reformulating the curriculum of Christian theological education via vernaculars in Africa, using Hausa-Positive-Contexts as a case study. The second group deals with selected parts of Gadamer's thoughts which are questionable when considered from the perspective of evangelical Christianity. The selected parts are engaged to consider emerging questions that need to be addressed in appropriating Gadamer's hermeneutical concept towards reformulating the curriculum of Christian theological education via vernaculars in Africa, using Hausa-Positive-Contexts as a case study. The third group focuses on the application of relevant Gadamer's points in reformulating the curriculum of Christian theological education via vernaculars in Africa, using Hausa-Positive-Contexts as an example.

Discussion of Research Questions

Appropriating Hans-Georg Gadamer's Hermeneutical Concept

Research Question 1: How can Hans-Georg Gadamer's hermeneutical concept be appropriated via translation and communication to support reformulating the curriculum of Christian theological education via vernaculars in Africa, using Hausa-Positive-Contexts as an example?

Here the study focuses on how "Gadamerizing" can be done via translation and communication in relation to text, so as to provide support for reformulating

the curriculum of Christian theological education via vernaculars in Africa. The study uses the term “Gadamerizing” to refer to the application of Gadamer’s ideas on language and hermeneutics in general, and on language and hermeneutics as they relate to Scriptural understanding, which is a focus of this study.

Translation

Four key statements from Gadamer, as they relate to translation, are being considered. Each has implication for hermeneutics.

First, “The translation must establish its validity within the new language in a new way” (Gadamer, 2006:386). In other words, the meaning to be understood must be translated into the context in which the speaker of the language into which the text is being translated lives. In simple terms, while every translation needs to represent the translated work as accurately as possible, it also needs to be readable and conscious of the linguistic context of the people for whom the translation is being made. When it becomes necessary to translate books for curricular use via a vernacular in Africa, the translation must communicate knowledge in the language of the learners without compromising the source language.

Second,

Every translation is at the same time an interpretation. We can even say that the translation is the culmination of the interpretation that the translator has made of the words given him (Gadamer, 2006:386).

This leads to the question: an interpretation from what or from whose perspective? For example, the various versions of the Hausa Bible were generally translated from English versions, which are themselves translations from what are considered the original languages of the Bible. Thus, it can be said that the Hausa Bible is an *interpretation* of the Bible from an English-speaking or Western perspective. This interpretive consequence should be noted in handling works translated from more recognized international languages into vernacular contexts of Africa.

The same thing can be said of the English versions that are based on the original languages. They are also an *interpretation* from the perspective of the original speakers of the Biblical languages. In this sense, then, the Hausa Bible is a *reinterpretation* of an interpretation; it is a book that represents how speakers of English interpreted what speakers of the biblical languages originally said. Furthermore, if one were to understand the exchanges of speeches between Moses and Pharaoh or between Pharaoh and the Egyptians in the book of Exodus, as occurring in a language *different* from the Hebrew language, it would amount to Moses *translating* the speeches from a different language to Hebrew. The consequence is that it can be said, with reference to such passages, that the Hausa Bible is a reinterpretation (of English version) of a reinterpretation (of Hebrew original) of an interpretation (language from which Moses interpreted to Hebrew). The same outlook applies to the translation of theological textbooks and resources from other languages to Hausa or any other vernacular in Africa.

Third,

Where a translation is necessary, the gap between the spirit of the original words and that of their reproduction must be taken into account. It is a gap that can never be completely closed (Gadamer, 2006:386).

If the gap of translation can never be completely closed, how can it be further shortened? Perhaps, with respect to the Hausa Bible as an example of a curricular facility for theological education in a vernacular it is to attempt to produce a translation of the Bible that is relevant to contemporary readership directly from the original languages instead of translating from the English versions. This also applies where a necessity arises for the translation of theological books from English or other languages into Hausa.

Fourth,

To understand a foreign language means that we do not need to translate it into our own. When we really master a language, then no translation is necessary—in fact, any translation seems impossible (Gadamer, 2006:386).

Gadamer argues that translation is not necessary where there is understanding. The evidence of understanding is not translation but speech. Is there any need, then, for translating the Bible to vernacular languages for people living in the Hausa-Positive Contexts since many people in these contexts are conversant and conversationally at home with Hausa *more* than they are with their native languages? This question is more relevant given that many vernacular-speaking people groups in Hausa-Positive Contexts show interest in having a Bible translation in their vernacular languages just to have a permanent document of their language, even when the *aliveness* of the language is not evident in their daily communication. In such situations, the need for Bible translation into these native languages may not really be there, unless, of course, there is a corresponding active use of the language in *living* communication by the native speakers concerned. But if native speakers of a language—for example, Kuvori-Surubu in Kuru Local Government Area of Kaduna State, Northwestern Nigeria—understood both spoken and written Hausa, though it is their second language, so well, in fact better than their first language, would that amount to *thinking* in Hausa? In terms of biblical hermeneutics, would that amount to thinking and arriving at Scriptural understanding in a non-native language? Gadamer's response to this question is in the affirmative:

Every language can be learned so perfectly that using it no longer means translating from or into one's native tongue, but thinking in the foreign language (Gadamer, 2006:386).

Communication

Four key statements from Gadamer related communication are considered. Each has implications for hermeneutics.

First,

It is well known that nothing is more difficult than a dialogue in two different languages in which one person speaks one, and the other person the other, each understanding the other's language but not speaking it (Gadamer, 2006:386).

Linguists David Crozier and Stephen Dettweiler also ask: “Do speakers of two or more different language varieties understand each other when they each speak in their own way?” (David Crozier and Stephen Dettweiler, 2005:42)

The difficulty above, especially for vernacular speakers in Africa, can be explained with a few examples from Hausa-Positive Contexts. A great number of Hausa speakers in both English-speaking and Hausa-speaking theological schools do not *speak* English language with competence, though they can read English language materials with reasonable understanding and can hear and understand English reasonably well. This could mean that English language theological textbooks and other resources can be used in Hausa-speaking theological schools. But in the Gadamerian conception, real understanding only comes through speech. While it is possible for a Hausa speaker to read English language materials with reasonable understanding, real understanding comes when the Hausa speaker translates his grasp of English materials into coherent speech or conversation in Hausa.

There are many former and current theological students who cannot reasonably communicate in English, but who can read English language Bibles and textbooks in a manner that assists them to do proper interpretation of Scripture in Hausa language. For this category of students, hermeneutics means getting a working grasp (although not necessarily a full grasp) of the contents of the English language materials, then *translating* (which Gadamer considers as reinterpreting) them to Hausa language.

Second,

Understanding how to speak is not yet of itself real understanding and does not involve an interpretive process; it is an accomplishment of life. For you understand a language by living in it—a statement that is true, as we know, not only of living but dead languages as well (Gadamer, 2006:386-387).

To interpret is to achieve a proper understanding of the subject matter.

Thus the hermeneutical problem concerns not the correct mastery of language but coming to a proper understanding

about the subject matter, which takes place in the medium of language (Gadamer, 2006:387).

In view of the connection between mastery of language and real understanding, this question needs to be raised: do theological students in Hausa-Positive Contexts, who are at home with communication in Hausa properly understand the content of their teaching in a manner that they can also communicate it to others? Some case studies from Hausa-Positive Contexts show that some preachers, who have been trained in an English language-based theological education system, are more “at home” preaching in Hausa than they are with preaching in English. A key process of understanding is through communication, which in this case, is what is happening. This is possible because, according to Gadamer, they are now “living” in a language of their interpretive process; this also warrants saying that for the English language-trained theologian who communicates more and better in Hausa language, the language of his or her hermeneutical understanding is Hausa.

At least one more question needs to be asked with regard to the connection between mastery of language and real understanding: What does it mean to master a language? From the Gadamerian perspective, mastery of language is the situation in which the speaker has no need of an interpreter because he or she is now the interpreter; he or she can also engage in reasonable conversation with others who presumably communicate in the same language.

Every conversation obviously presupposes that the two speakers speak the same language. Only when two people can make themselves understood through language by talking together can the problem of understanding and agreement even be raised. Having to depend on an interpreter's translation is an extreme case that doubles the hermeneutical process, namely the conversation: there is one conversation between the interpreter and the other, and a second between the interpreter and oneself (Gadamer, 2006:387).

Third, communication is basically verbal even when represented by a written text. Communication is a verbal tradition handed from one generation to

another, and, as in the case of Scripture, made “permanent” through writing. As such, Scripture is a written text which symbolizes a verbal text or speech.

Gadamer notes this about the verbal nature of all communication:

What has come down to us as verbal tradition is not left over but given to us, told us—whether through direct retelling, in which myth, legend, and custom have their life, or through written tradition, whose signs are, as it were, immediately clear to every reader who can read them (Gadamer, 2006:391).

Gadamer’s conception here, when considered within the context of divine communication, should be readily understandable to Africans who are very familiar with “tales by moonlight.”

The things which God said and the knowledge of other events were passed from one generation to another by word of mouth (oral tradition). Perhaps it took place in much the same way that stories are passed from one generation to another around the fire at night in African villages. There were no written scrolls or books at that time (O’Donovan, 1997:31).

The implication of Gadamer’s view on the verbal nature of communication for biblical hermeneutics, particularly in theological schools in vernacular contexts of Africa, is that whenever we read the written word of God, we should focus on hearing His voice, the verbal utterance which brought about the written text. A key goal of hermeneutics is to understand the verbal tradition, using the written text as a bridge. Ultimately, it should lead us to divine speech acts and God himself, who is the source of such speeches: How can we study “the many and various things done with words” (Briggs, 2008:75) in the Bible so as to hear God’s voice through the text?

There arises a key question from a Hausa-Positive Context of theological education: are Hausa-speaking people using the Hausa Bible and theological resources—many of which have been translated from English—also capable, when compared with their English-speaking counterparts, of understanding

the written text in a manner that leads them to hear God's voice speaking through the text? The response to this question is, no doubt, affirmative as is attested by the many excellent expository sermons one hears from pulpits in various Hausa-speaking churches, based on the Hausa Bible which, for close to ninety years now, has achieved recognition as the "book of the people".

Following the publication of the complete Hausa Bible in 1932, an inter-missions conference was held at Miango in 1935. Turaki notes that at the conference a resolution was passed which made the Hausa translation of the Bible "the book of the people" of Northern Nigeria and other Hausa-speaking contexts (Turaki, 1999:445). Like other translations of the Bible into African languages, this "book of the people" has contributed much to advancement of Christianity in Africa. As Molola (2006:1315) writes: "There can be no doubt that the phenomenal growth of Christianity in Africa owes an enormous debt to Bible translation".

It should also be noted that the written text in Hausa has captured and represented God's verbal communication in a manner that ensures credibility and effectiveness in Hausa-based hermeneutical processes and preaching. Nevertheless, it has not exhausted all of God's communication. In fact,

it does not capture the full richness of the language, cannot capture either the full richness of personhood, or the full richness of God the infinite person in whose image we human persons are made (Poythress, 2009:369).

Fourth, there is a need to consider this question that Gadamer asks: "How can we possibly understand anything written in a foreign language if we are thus imprisoned in our own?" (Gadamer, 2006:403) In Nigeria,

Talking of literature and instructional material, a majority of the literature available in theological institutions in Nigeria today are Western imported. The concepts and reasoning patterns are foreign. Both students and teachers have to wrestle with them and even bend some of the ideas to fit their own cultural contexts (Kafang, 2009:2).

Accordingly, Gadamer notes that the ability of a person to reason in any language constitutes one's capacity to achieve hermeneutical experience. If a person cannot reason in a language in which he is at home with, there is no guarantee that he will do that in a different language.

The question of understanding in a foreign language can also be asked with reference to Hausa-Positive Contexts of theological education: How can people who are more at home with Hausa possibly understand anything pertaining to education in general, and theological education in particular, that is written in English, French, or any other foreign language, if they are thus imprisoned in their own? Many people in these contexts are still struggling with the ability to reason in Hausa language, nevertheless these are the same people who are found studying in English language-based theological schools in Hausa-Positive Contexts. In line with Gadamer's thoughts, there is no guarantee that they can achieve any meaningful hermeneutical experience in their foreign language situationx.

Questions Arising in Appropriating Hans-Georg Gadamer's Hermeneutical Concept

Research Question 2: What emerging questions need to be addressed in appropriating Hans-Georg Gadamer's hermeneutical concept in reformulating the curriculum of Christian theological education via vernaculars in Africa, using Hausa-Positive-Contexts as an example?

The section focuses on "de-Gadamerizing" language and hermeneutics, based on selected issues from Gadamer's thoughts that could be questionable from a Christian perspective in terms of the interconnection between language and hermeneutics. The term "de-Gadamerizing" refers to those areas of Gadamer's ideas on language and hermeneutics that this study considers either questionable or in need of further clarification. Four of these issues shall be considered.

First, Gadamer holds that a key goal of interpretation is to "make" the text to communicate on our behalf; that is, it must "speak for us".

The text is made to speak through interpretation. But no text and no book speaks if it does not speak a language that

reaches the other person. Thus interpretation must find the right language if it really wants to make the text speak (Gadamer, 2006:398).

From a Christian perspective, especially with reference to Scripture, the text—whether in oral or written form—has always been speaking. There is no need to “make” it speak again. On the contrary, the need is for people to learn to hear the voice of God as he speaks through the text; herein lies a key point of Christian hermeneutics. If humans can “make” the text to speak, that would amount to exercising authority over the text and possibly over God, the divine and ultimate author of Scripture. We can then “make” Scripture say whatever we want—which effectively means, hearing our own voice as we speak. For Gadamer “to interpret means precisely to bring one’s own preconceptions into play so that the text’s meaning can really be made to speak for us” (Gadamer, 2006:398).

Second, Gadamer holds that the text, by virtue of its being fixed, has no connection either to its author or to its history.

What is fixed in writing has detached itself from the contingency of its origin and its author and made itself free for new relationships. Normative concepts such as the author’s meaning or the original reader’s understanding in fact represent only an empty space that is filled from time to time in understanding (Gadamer, 2006:397).

Gadamer holds that to understand, in a hermeneutical sense, does not mean primarily that one should reason his or her way back into the past, such as through a reader relating with the authors of the written text. Oeming (2006:55) explains the linguistic-structuralist method in a manner that illumines this Gadamerian concept:

A text must exist on its own as a linguistic world, a world of language. The interpreter should not loose himself in an obscure reconstruction of history, nor in an author’s inner life only guessed at, nor in chaos of personal subjectivity. Only the

concentration on the text itself brings security and objectivity.
We can take back only what exists black and white.

For Gadamer understanding is to have a present involvement in what is said. It is about sharing in what the text shares with us. It does not really matter whether the text gives us a picture of the author or whether we want to interpret the text as a historical source. What matters is that we are participating in a conversation and sharing in a present meaning. Consequently, “the horizon of understanding cannot be limited either by what the writer originally had in mind or by the horizon of the person to whom the text was originally addressed” (Gadamer, 2006:396).

Especially with reference to Scripture, evangelical Christian hermeneutics differs from this position, which detaches the text from the author and its authority. Understanding the author and original recipients is essential to Scriptural understanding. Otherwise, interpretation denigrates into *eisegesis*, reading into the Scripture whatever we desire to read out from it.

Third, Gadamer holds that the reader is the basis for the validity of a written text. The reader achieves this position when he is able to reawaken the written word and bring it back to life by detaching it from its author. From a Christian perspective, the tenability of Gadamer’s placement of the reader as the arbiter of a text’s claim to truth is, when applied to the Scriptural text, groundless. Scripture originates from God and

God is not a man, that he should lie, nor a son of man, that he should change his mind. Does he speak and then not act? Does he promise and not fulfill? (Numbers 23:19, NIV).

As such there is nothing to arbitrate in matters of Scriptural validity or authority. Furthermore, the fact that human beings are themselves sinners makes them thoroughly unqualified to be arbiters in matters concerning the truthfulness of Scripture. Gadamer, however, says otherwise: “It does not occur to people who are not used to reading that what is written down could be wrong, since to them anything written seems like a self-authenticating document” (Gadamer, 2006:396).

Fourth, Gadamer holds that interpretation is fundamentally accidental. The interpretation itself does not replace the interpreted work, the written word, which is fixed and permanent. Gadamer (2006:402) holds that “since interpretation as a whole is made up of a thousand little decisions which all claim to be correct” it is most possibly by accident that one can arrive, if ever, at a correct interpretation. Consequently, says Gadamer (2006:398),

There cannot, therefore, be any single interpretation that is correct “in itself,” precisely because every interpretation is concerned with the text itself. The historical life of a tradition depends on being constantly assimilated and interpreted. An interpretation that was correct in itself would be a foolish ideal that mistook the nature of tradition. Every interpretation has to adapt itself to the hermeneutical situation to which it belongs.

Contrary to Gadamer’s view of the accidental nature of interpretation, evangelical biblical hermeneutics subscribes to a hermeneutico-historical process of interpretation. This means interpretation is not guesswork. When propositions or conclusions with regard to the meaning of texts are made, they are made in a manner that appropriately represents the meaning of the text as intended by the author and as understood by original recipients of a text— as faithfully, *not accidentally*, as possible. However, it is not necessarily always true that evangelical hermeneutics subscribe to the hermeneutico-historical process of interpretation; there are occurrences misinterpretations of Scripture was made by evangelicals either consciously or obliviously.

Consequences of Appropriating Hans-Georg Gadamer’s Hermeneutical Concept

Research Question 3: What strategies need to be engaged consequent upon appropriating Hans-Georg Gadamer’s hermeneutical concept towards reformulating the curriculum of Christian theological education via vernaculars in Africa, using Hausa-Positive-Contexts as an example?

This study now discusses strategies to apply relevant Gadamerian concepts to the reformulating the curriculum of Christian theological education via vernaculars in Africa. Four possible strategies are discussed below.

First, more theological textbooks of key importance need to be translated from an international language such as English into local languages such as Hausa. Since every translation is an interpretation from the perspective of the translator, it is appropriate that those who translate English language materials represent an evangelical Christian point of view and be people who are theologically grounded because “translators are regularly called upon to make choices regarding meanings, and their choices are going to affect how you understand” (Fee and Stuart, 2003:19). Without credible translators, evangelical Christianity will be misrepresented by the misinterpretations of translators.

Second, teachers in English language-based theological schools need to translate their class notes and key resources into the vernacular to supplement both English language materials and the verbal process of teaching in the class.

Third, there is need to create conditions in English-speaking theological schools in which students can be more adequately prepared for various Christian ministries via vernaculars. Many students of these theological schools are involved in Hausa-Positive ministries after they graduate. In line with Gadamerian conception, to understand a language is to live in it. For the Hausa-Positive Contexts, this calls for teaching Hausa as a core general course in pre-degree and degree programs of English-speaking theological schools. This should be supported by appropriate practical ministry experiences in Hausa-speaking areas. In this manner, conditions will be created in which students are trained for Christian service in Hausa-Positive Contexts, thereby giving them practical preparation for post-graduation ministry in such contexts.

Fourth, there is need to employ Hausa in teaching in English-speaking theological schools in vernacular contexts. This takes into consideration the Gadamerian concept that communication is basically verbal, even when it is in written text.

All societies, including those having a highly literate segment, have oral communication at their core. Oral communication is the basic function on which writing and literacy is based (Network, 2009:314).

Accordingly, teachers in English-language theological schools should consider making regular summaries or remarks in Hausa to help their students *think* in terms that are closer at home to their native languages.¹

Conclusion

Summary

A noteworthy category of those who go through formal theological education in many vernacular contexts of Africa have more effective hermeneutical experience when an appropriate vernacular is engaged as a pedagogical facility for delivering the curriculum. This statement is without prejudicing the awareness that there are theological students and even teachers in this category who are forced by circumstances to learn, teach, or communicate using English or other foreign languages. Nevertheless, learners and teachers in this category still find the vernacular more appropriate to make them feel at home in the formal learning environment. This study highlighted the need to reformulate the curriculum of theological education in vernacular contexts of Africa so that this category of academic participants have the support necessary to be more effective handlers of knowledge.

Recommendations

The following recommendations, resultant from appropriating Hans Georg Gadamer’s hermeneutical concept, are targeted at stakeholders in reformulating the curriculum of Christian theological education via vernaculars in Africa..

1. Recommendation to Theological Schools in Vernacular Contexts of Africa.

A basic Pauline church edification principle holds that “whatever builds the church up—enlarges its understanding, deepens its worship, strengthens its love—is to be encouraged” (Stott, 1994:101). Lamin Sanneh (2002:174) notes that, “God, who has no linguistic favorites, has determined that we should all

¹Distinguished Professor Janvier, an English-speaking American, was re-known for applying Hausa language in a very effective manner, to facilitate teaching-learning while he taught at the prestigious English-speaking Jos ECWA Theological Seminary (JETS) in Plateau State Nigeria, which is located in a Hausa-Positive Context of Northern Nigeria.

hear the Good News ‘in our own native tongue,’. Vernaculars of Africa are also a church-building language. They are *equally*, and at many times *better*, able to facilitate the achievement of effective hermeneutical experience in learning situations that English or other foreign languages. Therefore, they should be encouraged in theological education in African vernacular contexts.

This recommendation could be achieved if the curriculum is reformulated to include at least three provisions. First, there should be two versions of each course guide: one using an international language facility such as English, and a second engaging a vernacular such as Hausa language. This would allow students with more competence in vernaculars to be well-oriented to the course right from its commencement. Second, a five-minute summary of the course material should be delivered in a vernacular at the conclusion of each class clock hour where teaching-learning processes are conducted in English or other international languages. This will allow learners with less competence in international languages to better comprehend the content of learning. Third, an alternative set of assessment could be given in each course: one option in an international language, and another option in an appropriate vernacular. Depending on the provisions of the course guide, learners could take one or both alternative; this would allow learners to reveal their best, while also giving teachers a more effective tool of knowing whether learning has actually occurred.

2. Recommendation to Language Development and Literacy Agencies.

It was observed in the study that many vernacular-speaking people groups in vernacular context show an interest in having a Bible translation in their vernacular languages just to have a permanent document of their language, even when the language is not evident in their daily communication. In order to make such languages active in *living* communication, language development and Bible translating agencies need to consider developing and/or translating additional materials into the vernacular concerned: Bibles, hymnbooks, Christian educational ministry materials etc. These should be provided in hard-copies, soft-copies, as well as audio and video versions. If this is done, it will be a foundation block for designing and constructing the curriculum for church-based theological education using local vernaculars.

3. Recommendation to Bible Translation Agencies in Hausa-Positive Contexts.

Generally, people in Hausa-Positive Contexts are closer to Hausa cultural contexts than they are to English or Western cultures. Even if they cannot have a Bible translation in their local vernaculars, it is recommended that they use the Hausa Bible and Hausa resources. Given that a large number of people in Hausa Positive Contexts are conversant and more conversationally at home with Hausa than they are with English or their native languages, Bible translation agencies should assist them to have Bibles and other theological education resources in Hausa. While the number of Hausa-speaking theological schools in Hausa-Positive Contexts has been reducing since the end of the twentieth century, Bible translation agencies in Hausa-Positive Contexts should liaise or partner with churches in said contexts to ensure the survival of some of the Bible schools, supported with a specially reformulated curriculum that is designed to fit the contexts. This step should further help in consolidating Biblical Christianity via African vernacular contexts.

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