

N.B.T.S.
M.Div. Miss
AK — 313

THE ROLES OF LANGUAGE IN CROSS CULTURAL MISSIONS

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UJ/05/NB/0042

A THESIS IN THE DEPARTMENT OF MISSIOLOGY
SUBMITTED TO THE FACULTY OF THEOLOGICAL STUDIES
THE NIGERIAN BAPTIST THEOLOGICAL SEMINARY,
OGBOMOSO

IN AFFILIATION WITH THE UNIVERSITY OF JOS IN PARTIAL
FULFILLMENT OF THE REQUIREMENT FOR THE AWARD
OF
MASTERS OF DIVINITY IN MISSIOLOGY
UNIVERSITY OF JOS

2014 — 0805

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JUNE 2008

ABSTRACT

The writer sets out to examine the Role of language in Cross Cultural Missions, which would serve as an impetus for encouraging and motivating the contemporary missionaries in various mission fields all over the world.

The work was carried out through library research by considering the real meaning of cross cultural missions and that missionaries should be aware of before reporting to any field.

The writer found out that many missionaries failed to perform on mission fields because of language barriers. They have not been able to communicate in the simple language of people.

Therefore, it has been recommended that missionaries should learn and understand the language of people for effective performance.

5.2 Conclusion

Therefore, language is the vehicle for communication. We use it to convey God's truth. However, some claim that language learning is unnecessary. Meanwhile what they have forgotten is that Apostle Paul for instance gained the ear of Roman commander by speaking Greek (Act 21:37) and the attention of a large crowd by speaking Hebrew (Acts 22:2). Language learning is not acquiring some "peculiar" sound pattern only. It involves much more than that. It is a process by which we make important contacts with a new community, a new manner of life and a new system of thinking. Usually, we can only persuade a man to the extent that we can talk his language by speech, gestures, intonation, order, image, attitude and ideas, identifying our ways with him. This is a basic requirement of effective missionary endeavour, especially in a cross cultural society which this research work focuses upon.

Language is an integral aspect of culture and cannot be separated from culture. Therefore, it is impossible to communicate adequately in any language without some knowledge of the "thought-forms" whom that language is the mother tongue. Thus, technical competency in a language is not sufficient, but the language learner must become a learner of the culture which the target language represents, and become "fluent" in the culture (Orville 71).

5.2 Recommendations

In learning language, missionaries may obtain interpreters who might be employed for a time and where such is possible, they must have patience, and mingle with the people, till they have learned so much of their language as to be able to communicate their ideas to them. Language acquisition is essentially a social activity, not an academic one. As a result gaining proficiency in the language is

normal for the person who is deeply contesting and has his sense of belonging in the new society. But language study will often be a burden and frustration for the one who is bonded to other foreign missionaries (Ralph 234).

It is therefore important to facilitate an opportunity for new missionaries to become bonded with their new community. New missionaries should be challenged with the bonding objective and prepared to respond to the opportunity to become a belonged.

Preparation should include an orientation to the importance of bonding, with a commitment to do so. A few sentences of the new language that will be helpful for entry purposes could be learned. Also, skill should be developed in how to carry on language learning in the context of community (458)

Language – culture learning should center around meeting people, developing friendships, earning a place in the society, and acceptance by the local people. The new missionary has to slowly gain their confidence and be proven trustworthy by the local people. The new comer begins with the role of alien learner and moves to acceptance as a member of the community, and finally may earn an acceptance in the role of contributor, or “Change Agent”, a level allowing full participation in the culture. It is only at the contributor stage of acceptance and involvement that effective communication can occur, that ideas can be exchanged and information communicated at the level that can bring about meaningful change in the community (Orville 71)

A major problem facing learners of many languages in Africa and other area is the lack of materials for language learning. Often there are no bi-lingual dictionaries or text books for foreigners to learn the local language. But if the language has a

writing system and any materials, there are usually some that can be adapted to the learner's need (43).

Major method of supporting missions remains that of motivating the church members to give financially to missionary courses. "The more people know, the more the people will give." People cannot give to meet needs unless they know these needs exist. Therefore, missionaries should always inform the church of the needs on the field so as to give rooms for financial support.