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**THE USE OF CHRISTIAN TEXTS
IN GRADING LANGUAGE**

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INTRODUCTION

The testing and teaching of modern languages are so closely related that it is impossible to work in either field without being constantly concerned with the other¹. This simply means that testing and teaching are two sides of a coin. We cannot therefore, talk about the teaching of modern languages from a christian perspective while keeping aside the testing of these languages, since testing and teaching move hand in hand. The integration of faith and learning as far as the teaching of modern languages is concerned, will only be possible if the christian modern language teacher knows the importance and influence of tests in language teaching and learning. He has to know that the success or failure of teaching and learning is determined to a large extent by the result of progress tests that serve the purpose of diagnosis. Areas of weakness and strength in the learner can be determined after such tests and remedial teaching effected.

This paper examines the various test types and the extent to which they are important in integrating faith, values and learning. The aim is to portray the various language tests as useful tools to the christian modern language teacher who apart from teaching the language is concerned with making the learner acquire a christian culture. This can be achieved through evaluation exercises considering that the learner has the highest degree of concentration when writing tests and examinations. There is a special focus on tests of comprehension. The use of christian texts is expected to create a very high level of student familiarity not only with the Bible which is at the center of christian beliefs and practices but with christian literature in general.

This paper therefore, sets out to examine how language tests can be

¹ J.B Heaton, *Writing English Language Tests*, Longman Group Limited (1975) , p1

handled from a christian perspective. The write-up is divided into four main parts:

- (i)- the specificity of language as a school subject
- (ii)- the importance of testing and evaluation to the christian language teacher
- (iii)- types of language tests and their impact on the integration of faith and learning.
 - Comprehension tests
 - Vocabulary
 - Grammar and
 - Composition
- (iv)- the use of christian texts in language teaching

I-THE SPECIFICITY OF LANGUAGE AS A SCHOOL SUBJECT

Language unlike other school subjects is needed in the first days of every human existence. This means that for one to acquire knowledge about society, science and technology, he has to acquire and learn a language first. Culture, customs, traditions and knowledge as a whole are transmitted from one generation to another via the medium of language; verbal or non-verbal language. This being the case, we cannot doubt the fact that moral or religious values will be better transmitted to learners in a language class more than in most classes. God knew the importance of language to human existence. This is explained in the destruction of the tower of Babel which according to Siegbert Lothar Hohn, (1989), was seen as a violation of God's will, that of asking man to "replenish the earth" as expressed in Genesis 1:28. The tower was intended to prevent the dispersion of the human race encouraging at the same time an irrational occupation of the earth. This was of course due to the fact that the first occupants of earth spoke one language and felt a strong attachment to one another and would not like to be dispersed. The only way for God to ensure that these descendants of Adam and Eve would occupy the earth as He had wished, that is, replenish the earth, was to reduce their blind solidarity by mixing up their language so that they do

not understand one another. Language thus from the beginning of the human race has been presented as a unifying factor. Man easily agrees with fellow man even without careful reflection just because they speak one language. This makes language to be more than just a school subject.

The acquisition of a given culture, if it has to be complete, should include the acquisition of the language of the people. Language is thus considered as a subset of culture.² In order to be a faithful follower of Judaism, it is necessary to have a good knowledge of the Jewish Language which is an important aspect of the Jewish culture and religion. The christian culture has an advantage in that it has been lived and transmitted through many modern languages. The christian teachers of these languages can successfully shape a world view for the learners in the curricula, schemes, lesson plans and lectures. Christian values assimilated through the medium of language will have a more long lasting effect considering that language is the medium of instruction for other subjects. This argument would be better understood if we look at Casson's (1981:73) definition of culture.

*Cultures are systems of socially transmitted behavior patterns that serve to relate human communities to their ecological settings. These ways-of-life of communities include technologies and modes of economic organization, religious beliefs and practices, behavior patterns and social relationships. Cultures are those environmental and social realities which are not under direct genetic control.*³

Culture is therefore tangible and intangible and when it is internalized, it guides interpersonal interactions. Most important about the cultural aspects enumerated in the above definition is that they can be expressed linguistically. This goes a long way to show to what extent values, beliefs and norms can be transmitted through language. The 'ways-of-life' as cited by Casson have no better channel of transmission than language. Subsequent areas of studies to our students who already have a

² Stepehn Jikong, *Steps to interpersonal communication*, U.Y (November 1990) , p 10

³ Ibid 2

christian culture through language would naturally be handled with an approach influenced by this world view. This means that the task of integrating faith and learning in other areas like history, anthropology, mathematics etc, will be easier if the teacher is dealing with students who have had to acquire religious and moral values at a tender age through language.

II. THE IMPORTANCE OF TESTING AND EVALUATION TO THE CHRISTIAN LANGUAGE TEACHER

Our interest in this paper lies especially in classroom or progress assessments because of their direct bearing on teaching. While external examinations like certificate and school leaving examinations are administered with the purpose of selection, the classroom assessments are concerned with evaluation for the purpose of enabling the teacher to maximize his own effectiveness by making adjustments in his teaching to enable certain groups of students or individuals in the class to benefit more.⁴ In addition to serving the objective of reinforcing learning, assessments are also a very important motivating factor to students. It therefore, means that if the christian language teacher fails to exploit the area of assessment and evaluation in his attempt to integrate faith and learning, he would be making a great error. This is so because for the teaching and learning process to be complete, tests and quizzes have to be administered. They are an important barometer to both the teacher and the learner. Just as a doctor has to first diagnose his patient's illness, so it is equally necessary for the teacher to diagnose his students' weaknesses and difficulties⁵. He also has to go further to carry out control tests to see if the drug administered has cured the illness in order to know what to do next. This is exactly what the language teacher does. This cannot be done without evaluation, assessment or test.

A careful exploitation of this aspect of language teaching and learning will yield very great dividend as far as the integration of christian values

⁴ Ibid 1, p 2

⁵ Ibid 1, p2

and learning is concerned. The periods when assessments are administered are always moments we can derive the highest degree of attention span, concentration and involvement from the students. What they grasp during such moments generally sticks. This is great occasion for the language teacher to make his students familiar with dignified notions and concepts expressed in refined language. The teacher should not paint in his test samples the picture of an ideal world in which only morally acceptable things are heard or spoken. Rather, he should present the picture of a world in which both good and evil co-exist, while bringing out the lesson that evil should not have a place in the child of God. Comprehension texts and passages for this purpose have to be carefully selected so that they end up teaching morals. A text which has the intention of exposing the ills of prostitution, for example, should also in a way show what man gains by avoiding this immorality. Students who on a constant basis are familiarized with religious and ethical values during their assessments become very much aware, than would be the case during normal teaching. This is because experience has shown that the degree of attention, concentration, and involvement we get from our students during evaluation exercises is far more than what we will get during teaching. The christian language teacher should therefore, make maximum use of this great chance. This experience could pay off more if we introduce audio-visual methods in our assessment of students.

Modern language teaching has made a lot of progress with the use of computers. It would be wrong not to utilize this wonderful tool in our language tests. A listening comprehension assessment exercise in which the student does not only listen to a conversation between two persons but sees them talking with varying gestures that are all important in communication, will paint an indelible picture in their minds. What they retain from this exercise whether good or bad has the tendency to stick. The language teacher here makes the choice of conversations that carry a clear message. If the christian language teacher makes judicious use of this, its effects or results would even surpass what we would obtain from a Satellite Evangelization Campaign.

Evaluations play an important role in life of the learner because they are a motivating factor to them. This certainly explains why they concentrate so much during this activity. They are able to know how much successful their learning has been from test results and they react in consequence. A pass or fail in a quiz would serve as a motivation to a learner depending on the circumstances surrounding such a performance. A pass would be an encouragement for him no doubt. But an unmerited pass instead of bringing satisfaction would arouse worries. A failure will naturally be an indicator that he has to work harder. If failure or success in a quiz completely discourages a student, then the student is not satisfied with either the teaching done before the test or the methods of evaluation. The christian language teacher is expected to know the qualities of good evaluation and respect them. This will help him avoid being taken in by the desire to integrate faith, learning and assessment to such an extent that he forgets to keep to the characteristics of a good evaluation.

Assessment and evaluation provide a good opportunity for teachers to do a self-evaluation of their teaching. The overall results of a quiz should let the teacher know the degree of assimilation of his lessons by students and adjust accordingly. If testing is such an important indicator in the act of teaching and learning, then it goes without saying that it is a vital tool for the christian language teacher. In the same way as no effective learning can take place without a good knowledge of language which is the medium of instruction, so also no effective learning would take place without tests because they help diagnose learning difficulties. They help the teacher to carry out remedial teaching where and when necessary. The christian Language teacher has to be made to understand how instrumental his tests should be in his drive to bring Christ into his classroom.

In normal circumstances results of examinations are expected to encourage students to strive to reach attainable goals, increase the probability that they will progress further as well as help them develop more positive attitudes toward the school and education.

III. TYPES OF LANGUAGE TESTS AND THEIR

IMPORTANCE TO THE CHRISTIAN LANGUAGE TEACHER

This paper is concerned largely with foreign language testing. It is for this reason that some of the examples used might not apply when testing the native language. The problems to be tested with the native speakers would not be the same problems with the non-native speakers. Robert Lado (1961), states the theory of language testing which assumes that language is a system of habits of communication. These habits he further states, “ permit the communicant to give his conscious attention to the overall meaning he is conveying or perceiving. These habits involve matters of form, meaning, and distribution at several levels of structure, namely those of the sentence, clause, phrase, word, morpheme and phoneme. Within these levels are structures of modification, sequence, parts of sentences. Associated with them and sometimes as part of them are patterns of intonation, stress and rhythm.”⁶

This being the case, it is obvious that the christian language teacher who makes a careful choice of the material to be used for tests, will be able to apply this to matters of form, meaning and structure, even the smallest structures like the morpheme and phoneme. Christian texts can provide sufficient material for testing at all of these levels. The aim of this write-up is not to examine exhaustively how this material can be utilized for every test type. It examines basically the most familiar objective and subjective tests on comprehension, grammar, vocabulary and composition.

III.1.COMPREHENSION TESTS

Comprehension assessments unlike assessments within the area of grammar, Lexis and phonology require that the student either listens to or reads a conversation, text, dialogue or passage. In order to answer the questions that follow the listening or reading event, the testee has to comprehend what is said. He is guided by his knowledge of the language, that is, his ability to understand utterances in the particular

⁶ Robert Lado, *Language Testing*, Longmans, 1961, p21,22

language and not by any rules, as would be the case with grammar and lexis where guessing, approximations and the use of rules can help a student pass without necessarily being able to carry out exchanges in the language. The grammar test item below administered to a beginner class can best illustrate the point:

Choose the best option to fill the blank:

My friend Hudson never.....when he is eating.

- (a) talk (b) talked (c) talks

A student who revises his rules of grammar will, without necessarily having any communication abilities, choose the right answer.

The language teacher is able to assess through comprehension tests the auditory skills of the learner which are closely linked to the oral skills, as well as the reading skills.⁷ When these language skills are developed in a learner, he is largely able to function in the language. This explains the importance of these language skills to the language teacher and learner. Auditory comprehension tests provide another unique dimension of comprehension tests as compared to other tests. The physical presence of the speaker in some cases makes it more communicative as meaning might also be conveyed, emphasized, and repeated by means of gestures, eye movements, etc all very important features of non-verbal communication.

III.1.1. How to use christian texts in evaluating aural, oral and reading skills.

The kind of comprehension assessment used in every test situation is determined to a reasonable extent by the level of the learner. We generally would want to know if the learner is a beginner, intermediate, upper intermediate or senior student. As we move up the ladder the material used for these assessments becomes more and more complicated and sophisticated. The quality of material used for the grading of this aspect of language, that is, the aural/oral skills and the reading skills also

⁷ Ibid 1, p83

has to be good. These texts should be selected because of the attitudes and values they convey. If this material is on biographies of individuals, then there should be individuals whose lives were positive and uplifting. Children love to read stories and experience vicariously the victories and positive deeds of the persons they are reading about. Students can also realize that this person overcame a handicap or difficulty and so derive hope in overcoming their own problems.

If the texts we use for these evaluations reflect Christian norms, values and attitudes, then we should be able to ask questions like these:

What would you have done in these circumstances?

What do you think is the right thing to do?

The tendency is that when students present a positive solution, they are more likely to take this course of action when confronted with a situation like the one in the text.⁸

Christian literature is vast and varied. The text used may either be biblical or not but should constitute Christian literature with its values. We will not be able to examine all the types of comprehension texts in this paper but what interests us most is the impact of these texts in integrating faith and language learning.

III.1.2 Phoneme discrimination in comprehension tests

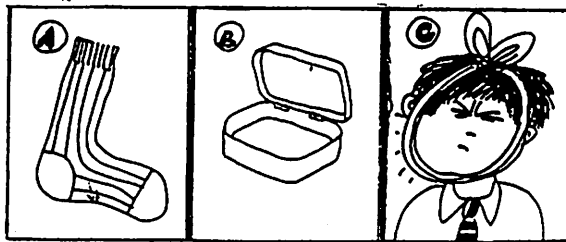
The lexical items used should suit the purpose. It is true that language learners have to learn the entire lexis of a language without discrimination. However, what is certain is that we will be gaining if we first of all fill the repertoire of our learners with what is sane. It is generally easier to assimilate or inculcate evil than good. This explains why our priority should be developing in our students vocabulary that carries virtue rather than vice. This type generally involves the use of

⁸*Christ in the class room* , Vol. 8. P 22

why our priority should be developing in our students vocabulary that carries virtue rather than vice. This type generally involves the use of pictures accompanied by a certain number of words spoken by the examiner.

Example: Listen to the following words and identify the picture that stands for any of the words read. Write down the letter of the picture representing your choice.

The examiner reads the following words: (a) Pen (b) Pain (c) Pin



III.1.3 The use of biblical texts in comprehension evaluations

The Bible constitutes the richest source of Christian literature. Parables, stories, epistles, sermons etc. will all constitute a rich source. Modern language versions of the Bible are advisable for this purpose.

Example: *Read the following text and answer the questions that follow.*

“You have heard that it was said, ‘Love your neighbor and hate your enemy.’ But I tell you: Love your enemies and pray for those who persecute you, that you may be sons of your Father in heaven. He causes his sun to rise on the evil and the good, and sends rain on the righteous and the unrighteous. If you love those who love you, what reward would you get? Are not even the tax collectors doing that? And if you greet only your brothers, what are you doing more than others? Do not even pagans do that? Be perfect, therefore, as your heavenly Father is

Questions:

- 1) Provide a title for this passage.
- 2) What is particular about the type of love prescribed in the text?
- 3) How does God show his love for those who do not even honor Him?
- 4) Provide an antonym for the word 'pagan.'
- 5) Would you make the sacrifices recommended by the speaker in this text? Why?

The text is drawn from the Book of Matthew chapter 5: 43 – 48. It is meant for children doing the third year in a 'Francophone' Secondary School in Cameroon. The big lesson of love that comes out of this text would obviously shape their understanding of what love should be. In struggling to understand the text and answer the questions, they are unconsciously assimilating certain values we sometimes take for granted. They are unconsciously trying to memorize a world view that is Christ centered.

Whether read or listened to, this text will undoubtedly have an influence no matter how small, on the children. We might notice no immediate changes in their approaches to life, but sooner or later what some of them hear in passing tends to have a bearing on their lives.

III.1.4. The use of other christian literature in comprehension evaluation

The proper use of carefully selected christian literature other than the Bible can bring about far reaching results. I administered a reading comprehension examination to the Upper Sixth Francophone class of the Adventist College in Yaounde in 1998 and what I got as feedback was remarkable. The text for this examination as shown below is drawn from an old edition of The Adventist Review. This text talks about aging diseases and the relationship between these diseases and our eating habits and living styles. At the end of the day the reaction was tremendous. The students were so interested in the text that they pressured me until I came for a correction of the exam. They learned

with a lot of interest and enthusiasm some Adventist eating habits and their importance to health. They learned about scientifically proven facts on this issue as well as the fact that the Bible advises man on healthy living. Some would argue which is normal but at the end of the day, the teacher reads a lot of learning on the faces of the students. This is exactly what I experienced in this case. This is what the test item looked like.

Read the following text and answer the questions that follow. You are advised to read the text before answering the questions.

DISEASES OF AGING

About one fourth of American men who die between ages 35 and 40 die of heart and blood vessel diseases that are primarily diseases of aging. This means that if we haven't taken definite steps toward a healthy lifestyle much earlier than 40, we're on our way to old age by then.

Twenty-five percent of all adults have chronic high blood pressure, another degenerative disease, and most of them don't even know it. This problem could often be avoided simply by bringing one's weight down to normal. High blood pressure is also associated with excessive salt and fat intake. The obvious solution is to cut down on salt and fat in the diet.

Even in a stressful city environment, persons on a low-fat vegetarian diet have been found to have lower incidence of high blood pressure. While stress may be an aggravating factor, there is some question as to its being a major factor by itself.

Stress isn't all bad. It depends on how a person reacts to it, and this reaction is subject to control. Here a Christian has a great advantage. If you accept the promises of inspired word of God, a thousand problems can be solved and the stress factor greatly reduced. "Words cannot describe the peace and joy possessed by him who takes God at His word." Read the Bible, claim its promises, and see what happens to your tensions.

So whatever your age or degenerative problem, there's probably still

something you can do about it. You can improve your prospects of high-quality living in the years ahead if you are willing to make some simple changes. And the earlier you start the better.

The good news is that you often may delay or reduce disabling chronic diseases and sometimes even eliminate them. Select a balanced meat-free diet with an abundance of fruits, vegetables, legumes, and whole-grain products. Also, include regular exercise in your daily program, with proper rest, fresh air, and sunshine. Regularity in your habits is very important.

How about those calories? They tend to result in obesity, which is a major factor in the aging process. If you're interested in keeping your youth as long as possible and looking at your best, watch your weight. Be careful of those rich foods – sugars and fats that can sneak into commercial products. Learn to read labels.

A good diet avoids the common excesses of our society : too much salt and sugar, too much fat and cholesterol. But it makes use of the good things our Creator gave us to eat – the natural foods as grown. Use fewer manufactured products.

Eat some high-fiber food each day to help eliminate constipation and reduce the risk of diverticulitis and even colon cancer. Fiber also may play an important role in reducing blood cholesterol and blood fats, which can aid in cutting the risk of heart attacks and strokes.

(From Adventist Review, October 8, 1992)

Questions:

- 1) What else apart from controlling our diet, should be done to avoid aging diseases?
- 2) At what age is one expected to start taking measures to avoid contacting an aging disease?
- 3) Does man's eating habit respect God's plan? Why?
- 4) Name two major signs on the body which show that a person may eventually develop an aging disease.

5) Why according to the author is a Christian free from the negative effects of stress?

III.2. TESTS OF GRAMMAR

These tests measure the student’s ability to manipulate structures and to distinguish appropriate grammatical forms from inappropriate ones.¹⁰ The examples used below are limited to rearrangement and completion test items. This is not however exhaustive. Use can also be made of multiple choice and transformation test items as well as many other grammar test-types that are not treated in this paper.

a) Change the order of the words to make meaningful sentences. The first one is done for you.

- 1) born Jesus was Bethlehem, in
Jesus was born in Bethlehem
- 2) Synagogue as on usual went day to Sabbath the he the
.....
- 3) Is for what scripture ever true the says
.....
- 4) I shepherd, good am the willing sheep die the who to for is
.....
- 5) Who forgive God sins the one only is can
.....
- 6) God, come to you near he come near and will to
.....

b) Read the following text and fill in each blank space with an appropriate verb in the appropriate form. Note that the passage is a story.

MIRACLES AND WONDERS

¹⁰ Ibid, p5

Many miracles and wonders were being among the people by the apostles. All the believers together in Solomon's Porch. Nobody outside the group dared to join them, even though the people well of them. But as time went on more and more people were to the group. As a result of what the apostles were, sick people were out into the streets and placed on mats and beds so that at least Peter's shadow might fall on some of them as he..... by. And crowds of people in from the towns around Jerusalem bringing those who were ill or who evil spirits in them. And they were all

III.3. VOCABULARY

A test of vocabulary measures the student's knowledge of the meaning of certain words and word groups. Such a test may test a student's active vocabulary (the words he should be able to use in speaking and writing) or his passive vocabulary (the words he should be able to recognize and understand when he is listening to someone or when he is reading).¹¹

The choice of lexical items to be used in a test is generally the most exacting task. The teacher's choice of items for vocabulary tests should be determined by the level of the student as well as his desire to integrate faith and learning. The more elementary the level of the test, the greater the number of lexical items associated with spoken language. Also, the more advanced the level of the test the easier the possibility of introducing christian vocabulary. This does not however mean that enough christian literature or vocabulary items will not easily be found when testing at the elementary level. The examples used below are multiple-choice and completion items.

a) In each of the following sentences, choose the word or expression in brackets that carries the meaning of the word underlined in each sentence. Write the word in the space provided.

¹¹ Ibid 1, p5

- 1) The wages of sin is death.(salary, pay, reward, stipend)
- 2) For forty years in the desert God provided all that they needed. (supplied, swallowed, achieved, enjoyed)
- 3) We don't merit the good things God gives us because we are too sinful (appease, deserve, afford, ensure)
- 4) God wants you to be holy and completely free from sexual immorality. (liberate, abstain, clear, terrify)
- 5) All scripture will be accomplished before the coming of Christ (filled, fulfilled, assumed, handed)
- 6) He had a lot compassion for the poor (apathy, mercy, chubby, pleasure)
- 7) We've got to pardon others if we expect same from God (forgive, incriminate, support, subdue)
- 8) Christian parents should offer their children to God immediately after birth (dedicate, set, accord, assign)
- 9) The man was crippled all his life (agile, lame, potent, terse)
- 10) A good servant is the one who runs the household well and gives other servants their share of the food at proper time. (savior, steward, sneer, sham)

b) Complete the sentences by putting the most appropriate word in each sentence.

- 1) In order to resist Satan's we've got to pray everyday.
- 2) The Kingdom of God is not for the
- 3) If we really want to be we should believe in God and keep his laws.
- 4) Sometimes our prayers are fruitless because we do not have in God.
- 5) The choice of church shouldn't be influenced by interest and emotion .
- 6) It is useless for man to gain everything here on earth and the Kingdom of God.
- 7) God has nofor the evil man.

- 8) The Bible says there will be a lot of Prophets
in the last days.
- 9) Christians are supposed to beof Christ.
- 10) Only Christ can us our sins.

III.4. COMPOSITON

Topics for composition tests can either help the teacher to guide or misguide the students in their perception of the world. It is for this reason that the christian language teacher has to make a careful choice of topics for a composition examination. There are topics that would naturally push the student to writing immoral language e.g. “the first time I met her.” The examples below will help the teacher know the student’s spiritual life and work towards improving it.

Write an essay on any one of the following topics:

- a) Walking with God
- b) No reason to worry
- c) In your opinion what does it mean to be good?

IV. THE USE OF CHRISTIAN TEXTS IN LANGUAGE TEACHING

The same basic understanding of the facts of language learning applies to language teaching. This means that what the student has to learn constitutes the corpus of what we have to test. Even though the focus of this paper is on testing, we are not saying that christian texts cannot or should not be used when teaching. Christian texts certainly will have a good effect on teaching as well. If teachers make a conscious effort to illustrate their language lessons with christian literature the effect will no doubt be good. Though limited to language grading, this write-up will be incomplete if we fail to point out the fact that a lot would be gained by the christian language teacher if he uses christian literature both in language teaching and testing. The focus is on grading for two main reasons. Firstly, the fact that testing has been less utilized by the christian

language teacher in the drive to integrate faith and learning. Secondly testing and evaluation is expected to have a more far-reaching effect in that the student's attention span is highest when writing tests.

A good text used for teaching would not yield the same effect when used in testing. However, the fact is that language learners who are familiar with christian values in their classes during both teaching and grading will consciously or unconsciously be aware of vice and virtue. Awareness is what matters most from the beginning. This awareness resultantly pushes the learner to search for the truth. He who seeks for the truth would naturally know the truth which in turn liberates. This desire to know more about certain facts would not exist if learners do not confront another world view different from what the society gives them.

CONCLUSION

We cannot pretend to have examined exhaustively the possibility of applying christian literature to the various test situations and the usefulness of this literature in integrating faith and learning. We however, expect or hope to make the christian language teacher aware of the importance of testing in language teaching and learning and as such make use of it extensively.

Evaluation, whether in the area of comprehension, grammar, vocabulary, composition or phonology, if well handled, will slowly, steadily and successfully inculcate a christian world view in learners of our modern languages if well handled. The acquisition of a given culture as we have seen can only be complete if this is accompanied by the acquisition of the language of the people. This means that if we integrate faith with learning, teaching and testing of languages, then we are in a way building in the learners of our modern languages a christian culture.

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