

Handling the Word of Truth

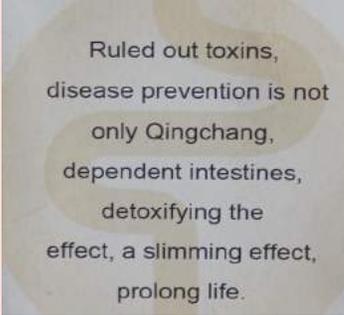
Supporting Theological Education in Togo and West Africa

Missionary Rev. Jacob W. Gaugert

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Vol.5 Issue 3

Clear Communication?



Ruled out toxins,
disease prevention is not
only Qingchang,
dependent intestines,
detoxifying the
effect, a slimming effect,
prolong life.

Does the sentence in this picture above sound appealing? It is the side label of a box of Chinese green tea that I purchased in Togo. This is an example of "Chinglish," Chinese words and sentences rendered into very poor English. The producers of this tea wanted to communicate that their product is beneficial for your health. However, the use of certain words and poor placement of commas makes the sentence difficult to understand. It does not encourage anyone who speaks and understands English to buy this product. The risk of poorly communicating the Gospel also exists when teachers and translators do not clearly understand the background and details of the language in which they are working.

As the Spirit gives Utterance

When the day of Pentecost arrived, they were all together in one place. And suddenly there came from heaven a sound like a mighty rushing wind, and it filled the entire house where they were sitting. And divided tongues as of fire appeared to them and rested on each one of them. And they were all filled with the Holy Spirit and began to speak in other tongues as the Spirit gave them utterance. - Acts 2:1-4

Dear friends in Christ,

The Lord now speaks my language! This is an expression of joy that is often exclaimed by individuals and communities when they first receive a translation of the Bible in their own language. The gift of the Spirit on Pentecost to share the Good News of Jesus Christ to all people in their own language continues today. This takes place when Bible societies such as Wycliffe Bible Translators or Lutheran Bible Translators publish a new translation, but also when believers, evangelists, and pastors share the Good News face to face in the language of the people. The Spirit works through the printed Word, the publicly proclaimed Word, and the Word of one-on-one witness to kindle and strengthen faith in the hearers.

At our CLET seminary in Dapaong, we gather faithful men from all over countries in Africa where French is the official language of government, education, and business. However, in most of these countries the French language is not the first language of the people; most people speak one or more local languages before they learn and use French in school. Many countries have dozens of local languages and the most neutral and efficient way to unite diverse populations – who frequently have violent histories between one another - is to force everyone to step outside of their comfort



Discussing Greek spelling form with a student.

Pray:

Thanksgiving for the generous gifts that support my work and the mission of the CLET seminary.

Thanksgiving for the work of Lutheran Bible Translators and the various partners of Wycliffe Bible Translators in Africa.

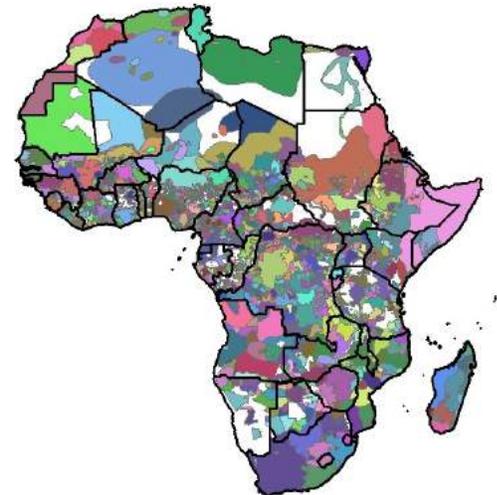
That our students would remain humble and use the education they receive at our seminary to serve rather than be served.

That our students and the community in Dapaong, Togo would celebrate the Christmas season in a responsible way that gives witness to the hope we have in Christ alone.

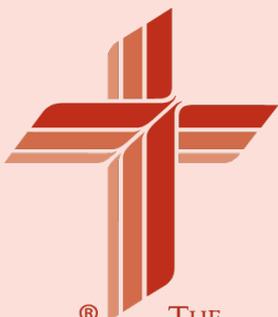
For continued guidance and wisdom for our CLET faculty and the presidents and bishops of the francophone partner churches in Africa.

zone to speak a “foreign” language, French. A negative side to this sort of policy is that as certain members of the population gain access to higher education and professional opportunities, they will set aside their local languages more and more and they lose the ability to think and communicate well in the mindset of their elders and relatives in the village. A well-educated person may be able to speak and communicate very clearly and efficiently in French, but if he or she begins to try to communicate with less educated friends and relatives in their local language, the person may no longer understand the nuances and the vocabulary needed to express himself or herself clearly. Certainly, they may be using words that are intelligible to the hearers, but they are actually speaking and thinking in French, just using the local words. Often these conversations do not make sense. You may have had a similar experience if you have read the poorly-translated label of a product from China – often known as “Chinglish.” Running a phrase through Google translate or Facebook online will also often give confusing results.

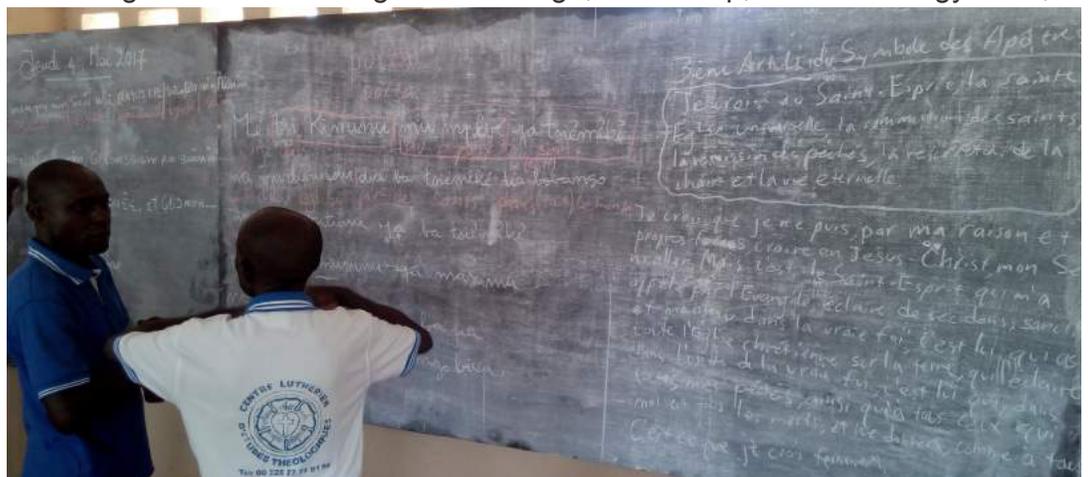
Of course, the best way to avoid this kind of language confusion is to train pastors and local leaders in their local languages. Many missionaries and Bible translators did and still do just that. Missionaries take years to learn and master a language to evangelize and to provide faithful translations. However, for a regional seminary such as CLET, we simply cannot do that. According to our current twenty-eight students, among them there are over fifty local African languages that they speak and understand to varying degrees. It would be impossible for our faculty to master those languages to teach in the three years the students are with us at CLET. So, we do what is most efficient, we teach in French – a language they all speak at a conversant level. But we do not want the students to leave the CLET knowing all the good theology they studied in French, but impaired in their ability to transmit these teachings faithfully to their parishes and fellow church leaders. This is why at the same time we encourage the students to gain knowledge, leadership, and technology skills,



A map of local languages in Africa



THE LUTHERAN CHURCH
Missouri Synod



Students discuss a song in a local language that covers the third article of the Apostle's Creed.

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we also encourage them to stay rooted in their local languages in their student groups and in their families. We encourage the students to pray and do devotions with each other in their local languages. Often in class the students are given assignments that require translating vocabulary lists of theological terms into their local languages. To do this, though, they need access to the Bible in their own languages. Bibles in local languages are often expensive and reprints are quickly sold out and distributed. Before students come to CLET they often leave their only Bible back home for their families or other church leaders to use in ministry. It is too difficult to search for and obtain printed copies of all of the Bible translations that would be needed for the students. What to do?

We recently discovered that the Bible translation organization *Wycliffe Togo* has tablets available that contain commentaries and Bible translation tools. On November 20, 21, and 22 two tech assistants from Wycliffe came to CLET

to offer a workshop on the use of the tablets on the Android platform and to teach the students about various Bible apps. Now each student can have access to numerous African languages on their tablets for immediate use. The tablets will be easier to take back to their home countries than heavy printed Bibles. The students now have access to several Bibles without overcrowding their desks and workspaces. The tablets also lessen noisy distractions from the turning of pages during class.

During the three years of resident studies at CLET we continually encourage the students to consider ways to translate Lutheran theology into an intelligible way to their hearers. We commonly will give homework to look up key theological terms in local languages in their Bibles. The students are encouraged to try to set the content of the six chief parts of the Small Catechism to local music and local language.

We hope and pray that our students will be able to incorporate more of their local languages with their teaching in French and their theological conversations, resulting in them being easily able to cross the cultural and communication bridge from the seminary in their home countries.

May the Spirit continue to work through the Lord's people in their witness in word and deed to His love and mercy in Jesus Christ!

In Christ,



**Students using Android tablets
from Wycliffe Togo**





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