

A hermeneutical approach to researching multilingually

Victor Manuel

I completed my PhD at Liverpool/ Chester University and my Master's at the University of the Free State in Bloemfontein, South Africa. Both doctoral and master's these were on the subject of hermeneutics. Although both were written in English, I worked extensively with sources in German, French, Dutch, Afrikaans, Italian, Spanish, New Testament Greek and Latin.

My own academic work has benefitted from multilingual and interdisciplinary approaches.

I could contribute to the project in terms of an exploration of the multilingual contexts of research projects in the areas of reception studies and hermeneutics. I shall focus on the work of Hans Robert Jauss and Hans-Georg Gadamer, who opened up a new area of research in the humanities by working out the implications of the interface between language and history, and understanding. This is particularly important for the humanities since their objects of enquiry are precisely the product of human actions which always display meaning and call for interpretation.

From a hermeneutical point of view, meaning is never settled once and for all, but is always the result of the interaction of interpreters and their objects of knowledge within a given context. In this respect, a plurality of languages implies a plurality of perspectives and approaches pointing out the limitations of any attempt of ever reaching absolute knowledge of anything at all including self-knowledge. Researchers can never distance themselves from their objects of enquiry because of the effects language (or languages) and history have on their own understanding and on the research questions they formulate.

Every language entails world-views, stories and presuppositions which are part and parcel of the way we come to understand the world and ourselves. If this is true, researching multilingually is not only a valuable asset to any research programme but a fundamental condition for research in global and intercultural contexts.

Particularly, in the humanities, there must be an awareness of the communicative aspect of academic life. Researchers communicate with their contemporary peers as well as with a host of forerunners and their works through which new avenues of research are laid open. Here is where the concept of reception plays such a key role since it highlights not only the interconnections between fellow researchers, past and present, but also between disciplines. This amounts to a constant fusion of horizons occurring at different levels, that is, between researchers and their object of enquiry, on the one hand, and, on the other hand, among academic disciplines.

This is how I have experienced scholarly work. As I researched the reception history of the Epistle to the Romans, accessing a cluster of texts in various languages written at various times was of fundamental importance for my methodology.

My experience researching multilingually did not stop with using sources in various languages, but also included personal conversations with academics world-wide as well as with fellow doctoral students in English, German, Dutch and of course in Spanish.

All these experiences contributed not only to a better understanding of my own doctoral research topic, but also of what doing research is all about.

I hold that researching multilingually is a methodological paradigm most suitable for the interests and goals of the humanities which are *per se* interpretative sciences. It is definitely a fundamental skill which ought to be fostered.

After having published in Spanish and English, my next step is to publish in German. This opportunity will come with my *Habilitation*.