

EVALUATION OF TESTIMONY AND THE RELIABILITY OF A YORUBA- AFRICAN ORAL-BASED EPISTEMOLOGY

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Abstract

This article explores the assessment of orally transmitted knowledge in African epistemology, employing testimony as a basis of evaluation. It aims to contribute to African philosophy by offering research rooted in African perspectives, enhancing its epistemology. While scholars recognize the significance of oral tradition in knowledge transmission in Africa, they often lack appropriate theoretical and methodological frameworks to evaluate it, leading to biases and incomplete arguments. This limits contemporary epistemological discussions in African Philosophy, overlooking the diverse oral indigenous knowledge. This article justifies oral testimony as an appropriate source of knowledge acquisition that will serve as the most reliable foundation of Oral-based African epistemology which will help substantiating the other existing challenges in the validation of substance of African Philosophy. This is done by exposing the relationship between African modes and means of knowing and oral testimony, arising from proverbial knowledge, mystical knowledge, mythical knowledge, symbolic knowledge, old-age knowledge, folklore knowledge, intuitive knowledge, religious knowledge and oral tradition as context-based theory which can be epistemologically justified through the testimonial theories of reductionist and non-reductionist approaches. Our methodology lies in the analysis and interpretation of various materials drawn from Yoruba sages and Ifa oracle knowledge acquisition and disseminating systems which led to the conclusion that oral testimony is as much a justification for believing and claiming to know in a Yoruba African context and is arguably a veritable, valuable and authentic means of acquiring, retaining and disseminating knowledge.

Keywords: Oral Testimony, African Epistemology, Knowledge, Oral Tradition, Epistemology, African Philosophy

Introduction

Orality has played and still playing important role in every facet of African life due to the unpopularity of writing tradition. Such is evident in the African oral tradition. This tradition has preserved the cultures, traditions, heritages, norms, ethics and almost every structural making of the African people. History-laden as it may seem, it has served and still serving as the basic source of most African philosophical exercises.¹ Prominent amongst these Philosophical exercises is epistemology, which some African scholars have identified to be largely traceable to the African Oral tradition. Oral traditions on the other hand rely solely on the testimony of another. Whereas Testimony contains statements that are based on personal experience or personal knowledge, intentional transfer of a belief from one agent to another, whether in the usual way via a verbal or oral assertion made by the one agent to the other, or by some other means, such as through a note.² Oral tradition as we know is basically

¹ Ihuah, A. S. (1999). Philosophy in African oral text. *Journal of African Philosophy and Studies* 2(3), pp. 124-140

² Coady, C. A. J. (1992). *Testimony: A Philosophical Study*, Oxford: Clarendon Press,

historical aid which barely has strong philosophical influence in the justification of African epistemology. If epistemology seeks justification and reliability of our knowledge claims, how reliable and justified are the beliefs we acquire via oral means and how do they become knowledge? This is the major issue this article seeks to address. It is thus pertinent to shed more light on what Oral African Epistemology is all about, and the relationship it has with testimony.

Oral African Epistemology

Epistemology as one of the core branches of philosophy deals with the systematic inquiry into the nature, possibility, kinds, and scope of knowledge.³ Epistemology deals with the nature, origin and basis of human knowledge. Epistemology as a branch of philosophy has as its main focus the analysis and evaluation of claims of knowledge.⁴ As a major branch of philosophy, it is “the study of human knowledge, the study of the nature of human knowledge, its origin, its scope, its limits, its justification, its reliability or otherwise, its certainty or otherwise”.⁵ Questions about the status and extent of our knowledge of the world, of us and other people, not to speak of particular branches of knowledge, like history and mathematics, have occupied the attention of philosophers for nearly as long as philosophy itself has been in existence. Such questions and the answers that may be given to them form part of that important branch of philosophy known as epistemology, or the theory of knowledge.⁶

African epistemology on the other hand has to do with “Africa’s own way of carrying out its enquiries into the nature, scope and limits of knowledge.”⁷ African epistemology is one of the major areas of African philosophy; which is a subset of African philosophy.⁸ And since African philosophy encompasses all forms and types of philosophizing, it therefore follows that it does make sense to talk of an African epistemology.⁹ We must note that African philosophy, in sum, has to do with a critical reflection on the African and the African world.¹⁰ African epistemology is the concretization of what is known in the African world. It is all about the way the African reflects on the reality within the African world. It also has to do with the ways and manners the African makes effort to justify what he claims to know.¹¹

It is pertinent to ask how Africa’s own way of knowledge acquisition is accomplished. Ozumba argues that “it is simply the mode or manner through which the African talks about reality in the African world.”^{12,13} And this leads to a further question, what are these means and manners of knowledge acquisition?

³ Nicholas Bunnin and Jiyuan Yu (2004), *The Blackwell Dictionary of Western Philosophy*, Oxford: Blackwell Publishing, p. 374

⁴ Joseph Omoregbe (1998), *Epistemology: A Systematic and Historical Study*, Lagos: Joja Educational Research & Publications Ltd., p. vi

⁵ Kaphagawani, DN & J Malherbe (2002), *Epistemology and the Tradition in Africa*. In: Coetzee, PH & APJ Roux (eds): *Philosophy from Africa: A Text with Readings (Second Edition)*. Cape Town: Oxford University Press, p. 260

⁶ D. W. Hamlyn (1970), *The Theory of Knowledge*, New York: The Macmillan Press Ltd., p. 1

⁷ Ozumba G. O. (2001), *A Concise Introduction to Epistemology*, Calabar: Ebenezer Printing Press, p. 171

⁸ Didier N. Kaphagawani and Jeanette G. Malherbe (2003), p. 259

⁹ Ibid, p. 259

¹⁰ Ozumba G. O. (2004), p. 35

¹¹ Uduigwomen, A. F. (ed.) (2002), *Footmarks on African Philosophy*, Lagos: Obaroh and Ogbinaka Publishers Ltd., p. 40

¹² Ozumba G. O. (2001), p. 171

¹³ Peter Narh, *Philosophical foundation of knowledge creation on Africa, Farafina Institute’s Discussion Papers Series, Discussion Papers, Nr.3, June 2013*

Aside the argument that Knowledge is co-extensive with material and spiritual realms, seen and unseen, empirical and rationalistic, psychological and religious,¹⁴ in African epistemological discourse, Ozumba argues that its potentials draw strength from the rich cultural, linguistic and social heritage since Africa is endowed with rich culture. And culture is the sum total and the end result of the socializations and the hobnobbing of all the integral component elements of a culture.¹⁵ By so doing, Ozumba further illustrated that it is from words, wise sayings, proverbs and mythical sayings that we are able to understand the logic, the profundity of people's epistemic rigours. African proverbs and pithy sayings reveal the depth of African's knowledge in virtually all areas of life- namely; psychology, religion, biology, philosophy, science and politics.¹⁶

The above implies that epistemology in African does not work without metaphysics since Metaphysics is important as an integral aspect of the whole package we call Philosophy; Metaphysics provides the substance and the cosmology of reality. Epistemology is the philosophic enterprise that makes metaphysics intellectually significant and communicable.¹⁷¹⁸¹⁹ Likewise from the above, some means and manners of knowledge acquisition can be noted namely; words, wise sayings, proverbs and mythical sayings and pithy sayings. In addition, Uduigwomen argues that in African epistemology, myths serve as a means of acquiring and transmitting knowledge,²¹ Ejikemeuwa J. O. also argues that there are varied forms of knowledge in African epistemology. They include: perceptual knowledge, common sense knowledge, old age knowledge, Inferential Knowledge, mystical knowledge, Oral Tradition, wholistic knowledge, etc.²²

From the foregoing, we can safely claim that intuitive, religious, mythological, perceptual common sense, old age knowledge, inferential knowledge, mystical knowledge, oral tradition to name few are the means and manners of knowledge acquisition and can be said to be what is mostly obtainable in African epistemology.

It is also observable that these modes and manners of knowledge acquisition are largely dependent on what has been transferred to us from previous generations via oral means in relation with the spiritual, mystical or rather, metaphysical aid. How reliable then are the knowledge we claim to acquire from these means and manners of knowledge acquisition and how can we adequately provide justification to them since they are largely embedded in African Oral tradition?

From the foregoing, it is worthy to note at this juncture that African Epistemology has been closely connected with Orality, which also presupposes that it deals with the testimony of others passed across from one person to another. This is not tantamount to saying that all alleged evidences are rational basis for knowledge claim in Africa or that evidences, good or bad, can replace the positions of reason or experience, but that Orality plays crucial roles in the acquisition, transmission and retention of knowledge in Africa and thus requires justification.

¹⁴ Ozumba, G. O. (2004), p. 44

¹⁵ Ozumba, G. O. (2001), p. 171

¹⁶ Ozumba, G. O. (2001), p. 171

¹⁷ Ozumba, G. O. (2004), p. 38

¹⁸ Bakari S. R. (1997), *Epistemology from an Afrocentric Perspective: Enhancing Black Students Consciousness through an Afrocentric way of Knowing. People of Colour in Predominantly White Institutions: Different Perspectives on Majority Rules*. Lincoln: University of Nebraska, p. 3

¹⁹ M. F. Asiegbu & J. C. Agbakoba (ed.) (2008), *Four Decades of African Philosophy: Issues and Perspectives* (Ibadan: Hope Publications Ltd., p. 91

²⁰ Badru R. O. (2010), pp.67-80

²¹ Uduigwomen A. F. (ed.) (2002), p. 40

²² Ejikemeuwa J. O. Ndubisi, (2014), pp. 32-36

Oral tradition encompasses the means, modes and manners of traditional knowledge acquisition in Africa. Be that as it may, it is worthy to make some clarifications concerning the role it has played in the life of Africans in relation to culture, traditions, norms, morality and most importantly on its transmission of this knowledge from older generations to the new.

Oral tradition is a process of transmission of recollected facts from one individual to the other through oral messages which are based on previous information.²³ The oral tradition is present in songs, poems, proverbial sayings, etc.²⁴ Such recollected facts from the past should be commonly known in a given society and should be transmitted over a period longer than the contemporary generation.²⁵

Joseph C. Miller refers to an oral tradition as a "narrative describing or purporting to describe eras before the time of the person who relates it."²⁶ According to Dioulde Laya the oral tradition is the whole of all testimony types verbally transmitted by a people on their past.²⁷

Similarly, Ademola Ajayi closely describes Oral tradition as having a relationship with testimony when he argues that;

An indispensable source of reconstructing the early culture and civilization of Africa is Oral tradition. Oral traditions are **testimonies** of past events transmitted from one generation to the other through the words of mouth. ²⁸ (Emphasis mine)

In the same vein Vansina argues that oral tradition is "the **testimony** of the past which are transmitted from mouth to mouth."²⁹ From these we can safely argue that oral tradition necessarily must be of the past, and transmitted through spoken words from one generation to the other.

Oral tradition as earlier stated is peculiar to history of past events, Ademola and Vansina partially recognise the role of testimony in the transmission of knowledge from one generation to another. Ademola however went further to outline its epistemological import when he argues

...that Oral tradition may take the form of myths and legends, songs, folklore, proverbs and poems, epigrammatic sayings, popular history or stories. These are usually passed on by a **special people** such as Lineage heads, ballad singers and court chroniclers, drummers, priests, chiefs and other categories of **knowledgeable men and women**.³⁰ (Emphasis mine)

It is thus observable that the forms which Oral tradition takes as argued by Ademola above are the basic modes and manner of knowledge acquisition in African epistemology,

²³ Nwankwo Uchenna Martins (2012), The Position of Oral Tradition (Myths, Mythology and Legends) in Historical Records. *International Conference on Humanity, History and Society IPEDR vol.34 (2012)*, p. 159

²⁴ Teodros Kiros (2004), Zera Yacob and Traditional Ethiopian Philosophy, In: Kwasi Wiredu ed. (2004), *A Companion to African Philosophy*, Oxford: Blackwell Publishing Ltd, p. 183

²⁵ Monica Dorothy King (2012), The role of Oral Traditions in African History, *The Dyke Vol. 2.2*, p. 43

²⁶ Joseph C. Miller (1971), King Lists and History in Kasanje, *Journal of African History*, xii, p. 2

²⁷ Dioulde Laya (1972), The Oral Tradition: Problematic and Methodology of Sources of African History, UNESCO, Paris, p. 100

²⁸ Ademola Ajayi, (2005) Sources for the Study of Early African Culture and Civilization, In: Ademola Ajayi, (ed.), *African Culture and Civilization*, Ibadan: Atlantis Books, p. 24

²⁹ Vansina, J. (1985). Oral tradition: A study in historical methodology. H. M. Wright. (Trans.). London, p. 12 cited In: Fayemi A. K., Babajide O.D.(2015), Oral Tradition in African Philosophical Discourse: A Critique Of Sophie Oluwole's Account, *The African Symposium: An online journal of the African Educational Research Network*, 57 Volume 15, No. 1, July 2015, p. 24

³⁰ Ibid, p. 24

which in turn is a sign that a probable theory is accountable for African modes and manners of knowledge acquisition.

Eye witness accounts are supposedly the basic component of oral tradition³¹; eye witness accounts are always a direct and personal experience as well and involve not only perception but also emotions.³²

Despite the roles and shortcomings of oral tradition and its importance, historians and philosophers alike warn that “historian should be aware of the weakness of oral tradition”³³

The bias against tradition has always been epistemological. What was said to be distinctive about African oral tradition was the relatively uncritical manner in which they were inherited from the past, preserved in the present, and passed on to future generations. So regarded, traditions resembled “rules” governing the “game of life” that determined in a relatively absolute manner what Africans believed and how they behaved, and which they therefore had no intellectual incentive to articulate, explain, or challenge.³⁴

While Sophie Oluwole argues that certain aspects of oral tradition constitute philosophy in themselves. Some other scholars such as p’Bitek, Gyekye, Ozumba, Kimmerle, Imbo and Adegbindin have maintained a safe position by holding that oral tradition as it were can only serve as source materials for philosophizing.³⁵ This in turn is a way of avoiding the ambiguities in oral tradition which historians and philosophers have warned against.

As it has been rightly said, even when the culture and tradition of the people open a way for its philosophy, such traditions requires *reason* for it to attain such philosophical realm with the use of philosophical tools and methods.³⁶

The obvious difference between oral testimony and oral tradition at this juncture lies in their justifications they provide for the beliefs we form from the words of others. While oral tradition struggles to provide explanation, testimony gives epistemological justifications for our beliefs which are based on philosophical bedrock. This in turn takes us to the justification of Oral African epistemology adopting epistemology of testimony.

Justification of Oral African Epistemology

The central question we have been trying to evaluate is how hearers acquire justified beliefs from the testimony of others? Suppose that an audience could acquire testimonial knowledge only if his believing of a truth expressed by testimony is justified, it should clearly be justified if the speaker expressed something mutually or already known. Or something that on reflection the audience has sufficient reason to believe.³⁷ But the fundamental case is one where the speaker expresses something that audience does not have otherwise sufficient reason to believe, which permeate our everyday life. The question is what justifies accepting testimony rather than merely agreeing with it? In this fundamental case, how is the audience’s testimonial belief justified? Answers to this question have traditionally fallen into one of two camps namely; non-reductionism or reductionism.

4.3.1 Non-reductionist or Anti-reductionist Approach

³¹ Kenneth Dike (1976), *African Historiography*. Vol. 6, London Macmillan and Free Press, cited by Nwankwo Uchenna Martins (2012), p. 159

³² Jan Vasira (1935), *Oral Tradition as History*. London: James Currency Books, p. 30

³³ Monica Dorothy King (2012), *The role of Oral Traditions in African History*, The Dyke Vol. 2.2, p. 42

³⁴ Barry Hallen (2004), p. 300

³⁵ Fayemi A. K., Babajide O.D. (2005), p.59

³⁶ Paulin Hountondji J. (1983), p. 136

³⁷ This supposition brackets the question of whether knowledge can be analysed as justified true belief. It is not supposed that a true belief is knowledge if justified. See Gettier (1963)

The non-reductionist approach is also regarded as anti-reductionist approach. Non-reductionists maintain that acceptance of testimony is justified in itself; unless there is some reason to think that the testimony is false.³⁸ According to non-reductionist, as long as there are no relevant undefeated defeaters, hearers can be justified in accepting what they are told merely on the basis of the testimony of speakers.³⁹

For instance, Tyler Burge writes that “a person is entitled to accept as true something that is presented as true and that is intelligible to him, **unless there are stronger reasons not to do so**” (emphasis mine)⁴⁰. Similarly, Matthew Weiner argues that “we are justified in accepting anything that we are told unless there is positive evidence against doing so”.⁴¹ And Robert Audi claims that ‘...gaining testimonially grounded knowledge normally requires **only having no reason for doubt about the credibility of the attester**’, (emphasis mine).⁴² In all of these works, we find endorsements of non-reductionism.⁴³

Paul Faulkner summarizes Anti-reductionism by explaining that;

Suppose a speaker utters "U" and intelligibly express that *p*. Antireductionism could then be characterised as the claim that the fact that the speaker intelligibly expressed that *p* provides a reason to accept that *p*. Thus an audience, who understood the speaker's utterance "U", would be justified in believing that *p*, other things being equal. Testimony should then be a source of both knowledge and justification.⁴⁴

Sanford Goldberg offers the following characterisation of testimonial knowledge, intending it as a neutral starting point for debate about (anti) reductionism:

A has testimonial knowledge that *p* if and only if;

(A) A knows that *p*;

(B) There is a speaker *S* whom A observed to offer testimony on occasion *O*, such that the proposition that *p* was understood by A to be presented-as-true in *S*'s testimony on *O*; and

(C) A's knowledge that *p* depends for its status as knowledge on both (i) the reliability of *S*'s testimony on *O*, as well as (ii) A's epistemic right to rely on that testimony.⁴⁵

There are two central kinds of defeaters that are typically taken to be relevant to the non-reductionist's view namely; psychological and normative defeaters.

Psychological Defeaters

A psychological defeater is a doubt or belief that is had by *S*, and indicates that *S*'s belief that *p* is either false or unreliably formed or sustained. Defeaters in this sense function by virtue of being had by *S*, regardless of their truth-value or epistemic status.⁴⁶

Normative Defeaters

³⁸ Paul Thagard (2005), p. 312,

³⁹ Lackey J. (2005), p. 4

⁴⁰ Tyler Burge (1993), "Content Preservation." *The Philosophical Review* 102, p. 467

⁴¹ Matthew Weiner (2003), "Accepting Testimony." *The Philosophical Quarterly* 53, p. 257

⁴² Robert Audi (1998), *Epistemology: A Contemporary Introduction to the Theory of Knowledge*. London: Routledge. p. 142

⁴³ Tyler Burge (1993), "Content Preservation." *The Philosophical Review* 102: 457-488. Quoted by Lackey J. (2005), *Testimony: Acquiring Knowledge from Others*, Forthcoming in Alvin Goldman and Dennis Whitcomb (eds.), *Social Epistemology: An Anthology*, Oxford: Oxford University Press. P. 4

⁴⁴ Paul Faulkner (1998), p. 22

⁴⁵ Goldberg, S. (2006). Reductionism and the Distinctiveness of Testimonial Knowledge, In: Lackey and Sosa (eds.) (2006), p. 128

⁴⁶ Lackey J. (2005), p. 5

A normative defeater is a doubt or belief that *S* ought to have, and indicates that *S*'s belief that *p* is either false or unreliably formed or sustained. Defeaters in this sense function by virtue of being doubts or beliefs that *S* should have (whether or not *S* does have them) given the presence of certain available evidence.⁴⁷

The underlying thought here is that certain kinds of doubts and beliefs contribute epistemically unacceptable irrationality to doxastic systems and, accordingly, justification can be defeated or undermined by their presence.

4.3.2 Reductionist Approach

Reductionist views hold that the justification of beliefs based on testimony is not special to testimony, but rather relies on the independent justifiability of beliefs based on perception, memory, or inductive inference. Reductionists in this sense include Hume, Fricker, Lipton, and Lyons.⁴⁸ Reductionists argue, roughly, that the justification of an agent's Testimony Based Belief is always dependent upon that agent possessing further independent grounds, i.e., at the very least, grounds that are independent of the instance of testimony in question.⁴⁹

In contrast to non-reductionism or anti-reductionism, reductionists, in addition to the absence of undefeated defeaters, hearers must also possess **non-testimonially based positive reasons** in order to be justified in accepting the testimony of speakers. These reasons are typically the result of induction.⁵⁰

For instance, hearers observe a general conformity between reports and the corresponding facts and, with the assistance of memory and reason, they inductively infer that certain speakers, contexts, or types of reports are reliable sources of information. In this way, the justification of testimony is **reduced** to the justification for sense perception, memory, and inductive inference.⁵¹

Paul Faulkner summarizes;

A Speaker utters "U" and intelligibly expresses that *p*. Reductionism could then be characterised as the claim that the mere fact that the speaker intelligibly expressed that *p* provides no reason to believe that *p*. An audience who understands the speaker's utterance "U" is justified in believing that *p* only insofar as he possesses reasons to accept the speaker's testimony. Insofar as testimony is a source of knowledge audiences must possess reasons for accepting testimony.⁵²

There are two different versions of reductionism. According to **global reductionism**, the justification of testimony as a source of belief reduces to the justification of sense perception, memory, and inductive inference.⁵³ We can formulate global reductionism as follows;

For all of one's TBBs, if one's TBB is justified, then one is able to offer sufficient non-testimonial grounds in support of that TBB.⁵⁴

⁴⁷ Ibid, p. 5

⁴⁸ Paul Thagard (2005), p. 312,

⁴⁹ Duncan Pritchard (2004), p. 327

⁵⁰ Lackey J. (2005), P. 6

⁵¹ Lackey J. (2005), p. 6

⁵² Paul Faulkner (1998), p. 24

⁵³ See Lackey J. (2005), p. 6

⁵⁴ See Paul Thagard (2005), p. 328

Thus, in order to be justified in accepting the testimony of speakers, hearers must possess non-testimonially based positive reasons for believing that testimony is generally reliable.⁵⁵

According to **local reductionism**, which is the more widely accepted of the two versions, the justification of each instance of testimony reduces to the justification of instances of sense perception, memory, and inductive inference. So, in order to be justified in accepting the testimony of speakers, hearers must have non-testimonially based positive reasons for accepting the particular report in question.

Paul Faulkner, writes;

Given that a speaker's intentions in communicating need not be informative and given the relevance of these intentions to the acquisition of testimonial knowledge...it is doxastically irresponsible to accept testimony without **some background belief in the testimony's credibility or truth**. In the case of perception and memory, rational acceptance requires only the absence of defeating background beliefs. In the case of testimony, rational acceptance requires the presence of supporting background beliefs. This demand of responsibility may be expressed as a criterion of justification. **An audience is justified in forming a testimonial belief if and only if he is justified in accepting the speaker's testimony.**⁵⁶ (first emphasis added)

Similarly, Elizabeth Fricker maintains, "In claiming that a hearer is required to assess a speaker for trustworthiness, I [mean]...that the hearer should be discriminating in her attitude to the speaker, in that she should be continually evaluating him for trustworthiness throughout their exchange, in the light of the evidence, or cues, available to her. This will be partly a matter of her being disposed to deploy background knowledge which is relevant, partly a matter of her monitoring the speaker for any tell-tale signs revealing likely untrustworthiness"⁵⁷

We can roughly formulate such a position on Local Reductionism as follows;

For all of one's TBBs, if one's TBB is justified, then one is able to offer sufficient independent grounds in support of that TBB⁵⁸

Objections to Non-Reductionism and Reductionism

Both non-reductionism and reductionism have been subject to various objections, objections that opponents use to motivate their own preferred views. The central problem raised against non-reductionism is that it is said to sometimes sanction gullibility, epistemic irrationality, and intellectual irresponsibility.⁵⁹ For given that, on such a view, hearers can acquire testimonially justified beliefs in the complete absence of any relevant positive reasons, randomly selected speakers, arbitrarily chosen postings on the internet, and unidentified telemarketers can be trusted, so long as there is no negative evidence against such sources. Yet surely, the opponent of non-reductionism argues, accepting testimony in these kinds of cases is a paradigm of gullibility, epistemic irrationality, and irresponsibility.⁶⁰

⁵⁵ See Lackey J. (2005),p. 6

⁵⁶ Faulkner, Paul. (2000) pp. 587-8

⁵⁷ Elizabeth Fricker (1994), pp. 149-50

⁵⁸ Duncan Pritchard (2004), p. 331

⁵⁹ Faulkner, Paul. (2000), pp. 581-601

⁶⁰ See Lackey J. (2005),p. 7

Against reductionism, it is frequently argued that young children clearly acquire a great deal of knowledge from their parents and teachers and yet it is said to be doubtful that they possess—or even could possess—non-testimonially based positive reasons for accepting much of what they are told.⁶¹ For instance, an 18-month-old baby may come to know that the stove is hot from the testimony of her mother, but it is unclear whether she has the cognitive sophistication to have reasons for believing her mother to be a reliable source of information, let alone for believing that testimony is generally reliable.⁶² Given this, reductionists, of both the global and the local stripes may be hard-pressed to explain how such young subjects could acquire all of the testimonial knowledge they at least seem to possess.

Conclusion

The justification of our Oral based testimonial beliefs in Africa epistemology as it relates to the acquisition, retention and transmission of knowledge are basically of two contending approaches namely; non-reductionist or anti-reductionist and reductionist approach. The two approaches are largely expressed and understood in the nature of Africa as an epistemic community and its dependence on epistemic authority.

The major loopholes in the two approaches as identified earlier become less a problem in African epistemology. While transmission of knowledge from older generation to the younger generation is favoured by the non-reductionist or anti-reductionist approach which holds that; so as long as there are no relevant undefeated defeaters that is, insofar we have no reason to doubt the testimony of others, hearers can be justified in accepting what they are told merely on the basis of the testimony of speakers, since these knowledge acquisitions are guided by the dependence on epistemic authorities namely; the sages and elders such as parents and teachers, the reductionist approach becomes less problematic as it favours conversational processes and formation of beliefs from the words of others, which is further based on perception, memory, or inductive inference as argued.

⁶¹ Audi, Robert. (1997), pp. 405-22.

⁶² Example given by Lackey J. (2005), p. 7

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