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**CAN TYMOCZKO BE TRANSLATED INTO AFRICA?
REFRACTIONS OF RESEARCH METHODOLOGY IN TRANSLATION
STUDIES IN AFRICAN CONTEXTS**

Abstract

This article considers the implications of current developments in research methodology in translation studies for translation studies in Africa. It makes use of Tymoczko's arguments in favour for the internationalisation of translation studies as well as her notions on the underlying logic of research and definition in translation studies. Tymoczko's suggestions are combined with that of Susam-Sarajevo's travel theory and Gentzler's identity theory of translation to ponder the implications of postpositivist research methodology for the African context. The article suggest IKS, case study, ethnography, and historiography as research methods that would support the notion that translation research in Africa should be contextualised. It further suggests alternative forms of logic in an effort to decolonise the perspective of the field of study in Africa.

Research methodology in translation studies has received much attention¹ since Holmes' (2006) map of translation studies. Holmes' paper is generally regarded as the founding document of translation studies as science and of the methodologies used in the field. As approaches to translation studies increased,² methodologies for doing research in these fields proliferated. These methodologies range from the micro-level, if you wish, i.e. the linguistic approach, to ever widening perspectives (Tymoczko 2002:11), such as the literary, sociological, ideological, as well as cultural turns.

My aim in this article is neither an overview of the current state of the art of research methodology in translation studies nor a criticism of the state of this art. I have a much more localised, contextual, even ideological interest to explore. I am picking up a theme and some related sub-themes in Maria Tymoczko's recent work, and on the basis of these themes, I am enquiring about the nature of research methodology in African contexts. Put differently, I intend asking whether and in which ways current views on research methodology need to be 'translated' to be relevant to African contexts of research in translation studies. Put differently yet again, what happens when Tymoczko's theory travels to Africa (Susam-Sarajevo 2002)? As was Tymoczko's (2007:140) intent, my intent is a meta-exploration of matters of a methodological nature, with particular consideration given to factoring in the African context. At this stage, I shall suggest very few answers; my aim is more to open up a debate than to conclude one. It is my contention that Tymoczko's line of thought is asking translation scholars to consider context in translation studies. I shall argue that her postpositivist assumptions as well as the implications of her line of argument forces us to ask: If we want to create contextual knowledge, can we use universal methodologies in the process? If not, what would methodologies for engaging with contextual data look like?

Considering the methodological issues in translation studies that may be relevant to African contexts is something that, to my knowledge, has not been attempted before. It may well be that

¹ Olohan (2000a) and Hermans (2002) are examples.

² The field has been subjected to a number of turns, such as a pragmatic turn, a cultural turn, an ideological turn, etc.

some consider it unnecessary because they are of the opinion that research methods are universal and applicable to all contexts and all times. Following a general postpositivist approach (Tymoczko 2007:19-24), my assumption is that given that knowledge is contextually determined, it follows logically that the methods by which that knowledge is generated should be able to deal with contextually determined data. As Western forms of logic are being questioned by Westerners themselves, the implication is that scholars should not only look at alternative knowledge but also alternative methods of generating the knowledge, a position which Tymoczko (2007:279; see also 180-186) does not state in so many words but which her line of argument implies.

It may be that the sceptics of this project of mine are correct, i.e. that knowledge and methodologies are or should be universal. Looking at the debates raging on this matter, it seems that it is far from being settled (see as an example Olivier de Sardan 2005, Cloete 2001). To my mind, it is still too early to come to any conclusion. On the contrary, the whole development in scholarly studies on epistemology and research methodology is to give priority to contextual factors that influence knowledge and the production thereof – hence my use of Tymoczko's arguments.

In this article, I attempt two things. First, I am considering methodologies in the technical sense of the word, i.e. methods or tools which would be appropriate or best suited to research in translation studies in African contexts. I argue for these on the basis of Tymoczko's work on the de-westernisation of translation studies. Second, I am considering alternative forms of conceptualisation, i.e. the particular type(s) of logic that may inform research in translation studies in the African contexts. Here the focus is not on the method of obtaining data but on the logic that is supposed to be implied in the data or the logic by which the data is interpreted. I hope to make it clear in the article that this second aim relates to the logic by which data is explained.

This I shall do by relating my understanding of conceptualisations by other scholars to my understanding of the contexts in which research is done in Africa. For this endeavour, I shall be selecting three sets of arguments, i.e. the internationalisation theory of Tymoczko, the travel theory of Susam-Sarajevo, and the identity theory of Gentzler. The logic of my argument runs along the following lines: If the arguments of these scholars hold, and for the moment we accept that they do, what are the implications for research methodology in the African context? What context has

to do with research methodology, I shall hopefully illustrate by way of exploring the theories mentioned above.

Perceptive readers would by now have noticed that I am talking about ‘the African contexts’ and that I am not using ‘African’ as an adjective with ‘translation studies’ or ‘methodology’. The reason is that I am not using ‘African’ in an ideological sense, but in a contextual, geopolitical sense. Africa is the context in which I and a number of other translation scholars are doing research, and we need to consider the influence of our contexts on our research and the methodologies we use. Furthermore, when I use ‘the African contexts’, I allow for the fact that Africa is a huge continent with widely varying contexts. Obviously, when I use ‘African’ rather than South-African or Nigerian or Egyptian, I am taking a particular stand – a stand that demarcates a contrast to other continents. This stand does, however, not assume that Africa is ‘one’, but it is a strategic decision to contrast this continent with other continents, as Gentzler (2008) has, for instance, done in his book *Translation and Identity in the Americas*. It is a working concept, not an ontological one.

In her book *Enlarging Translation; Empowering Translators* (Tymoczko 2007) and in her article *Reconceptualising Translation Theory: Integrating Non-Western Thought about Translation* (Tymoczko 2006), Maria Tymoczko argues that translation studies is in the process of expanding its boundaries. It does this by, firstly, fostering its identity as a cluster concept with no clear rational definition; rather, Tymoczko uses Wittgensteinian notions of concept formation to argue that translation is a cluster concept (2007:83-100). She contrasts cluster concepts with the notion of prototype concepts which are popular in cognitive theory. On the basis of Wittgenstein, she argues that the typical form of definitions, i.e. a category with necessary and sufficient conditions, does not suffice for translation because it is a global concept determined locally by cultural difference (Tymoczko 2007:84). Wittgenstein’s notion of relatedness rather than essence is developed by Tymoczko to argue that all translations are related to one another in a number of different ways but that it is virtually impossible to find a necessary and sufficient definition of translation. Cluster concepts, which are what Tymoczko is proposing for translation, operates on the basis of similarities or family resemblances. They are embedded in cultural practice and can thus not be ‘thought of’, but has to be ‘looked at’ (Tymoczko 2007:86).

I am of the opinion that Tymoczko is suggesting a revolutionary shift in logic here. I have followed her lead by conceptualising translation as an emergent cluster concept from a complexity perspective (Marais 2011). Not only is the idea of cluster concepts a deviation from the positivist notion of definition, Wittgenstein's idea of observation and description rather than logical definition is equally deviant. It reminds one of Jousse's (2000) idea that the anthropos interacts with the cosmos by intussusceptions, i.e. taking the cosmos into itself by observation. I have argued elsewhere that this position to an extent relativises absolutist notions of constructivism (Marais 2010). I think that we have a similar notion here. Rather than 'construct' a definition of translation that fits certain necessary and sufficient categories, Wittgenstein advises us to observe the complex cultural reality and, while seeing similarities, honour the differences. This is in itself a subversion of positivist logic and actually relates to the second aim of my article, i.e. rethinking the logic by which translation data are conceptualised.

The second way in which Tymoczko suggest we enlarge translation is by including non-Western perspectives on translation and translation studies. She cites a number of examples from across the globe of notions of translation that differ from Western notions. She uses these examples to argue that, when forming a cluster concept, the Western notion of a source text as primary and a target text as a derivative, with a strong requirement of equivalence between them, does not suffice. Translation as a concept should be enlarged to make room for concepts such as reworking, breaking down and rebuilding, and cannibalism. Gentzler (2008) is another recent example of how concepts of translation in the Americas differ from Western notions.

Tymoczko has criticised the assumptions of Western theory of translation³ at least twice (Tymoczko 2006, 2007). She firstly summarises these assumptions in eight statements. The

³ I am indebted to Peter Flynn, who in a discussion pointed out that this debate is mainly a debate amongst Westerners. While I am taking up the debate, I am also calling on Africans to take part in it, and I am hopefully taking it further than a mere mudd-slinging battle by including references to studies done in Africa according to the lines I am proposing here.

technological influence of Western culture is clearly seen in these notions on translation. In Western translation studies, Tymoczko (2006:16-24) says:

- translators are seen a necessary factor in interlingual communication;
- translation involves written texts;
- the primary text types with which translators work is seen to have been defined and categorised;
- translation is seen as an individual activity;
- professional translation is seen as the only model worth striving for;
- culture in the current global world is, all of a sudden, seen as being hybrid; and
- the object of translation studies is seen to have been adequately identified

She proposes a thorough rethinking of these assumptions in light of new evidence from translation contexts other than Western ones. In summary, her suggestions entail that (Tymoczko 2006:24-30):

- the nature of plurilingual and pluricultural life be studied to see how people interact in these situations where there are not necessarily translators available;
- knowledge of oral cultures be integrated into translation studies;
- translation studies be open to a greater diversity of text types;
- translation studies be open to the processes of translation in other cultures;
- knowledge of the history of cultural movements and cultural interface be expanded; and
- the object of study for translation studies be expanded (which she did in her 2007 book

Research on most of these suggestions is already underway. One of the most recent examples of this is Gentzler's book on translation and identity in the Americas. If one relates Tymoczko's suggestions to Gentzler's (2008) indications of translation as resistance and how resistance had fostered identity in American contexts, serious questions arise for translation studies in the African contexts. Apart from Bandia (2008), very little has been done on resistance in translation in Africa. Furthermore, translation studies itself in Africa, and particularly in South Africa, does not have a resistant or engaged (Tymoczko 2007) relationship to Western theory and theorising. Scholars

from Africa have been too docile in accepting theories from the West, transferring them and not translating them (see the work of Meintjies and Inggs for an effort to redress this situation).

The question is then: What happens when Tymoczko travels to Africa? Or using another metaphor: Can Tymoczko be translated into “African”? If Tymoczko represents a trend in global translation studies, why is there so little about Africa in her book? In other words, how far is she able to travel? How does she have to be translated to be able to communicate in Africa? Why is what Africans have produced in translation studies not really worth the attention of scholars such as Mona Baker in her anthology (2010)? It is thus not clear whether Tymoczko or Baker or Gentzler is in fact able to be translated into Africa. It is not clear whether they have taken seriously the African case, because serious work has been done by Africans in the field of translation studies. Is it a matter of a lack of academic development in translation studies in Africa? Or is it a Western debate that says something about Western translation studies and very little if anything about translation studies in Africa.

Could one perhaps say that translation studies is now where the colonising Western political powers were in the seventeenth to nineteenth centuries? Could one say that the field is exploring the ‘other’ and sparing no effort to go to the ends of the earth to see how ‘other’ cultures translate? Is the current interest of Western scholars in ‘the rest of the world’ not merely a symptom of a culture – subculture, i.e. translation studies – that has become bored with itself and that is looking for new facts to counter the boredom or to enrich the own intellectual poverty (Susam-Sarajevo 2002)?

To leave behind the questions and to return Tymoczko’s theory again, Tymoczko (2007) discusses the implications of her arguments for research methods by arguing that the process of selecting data is in itself a complex interpretive act. My question is, once again, what happens if this theory travels to Africa. The postpositivist movement in theory of science has had as its agenda the subversion of Western “grand” schemes, “grand” narratives. This means that neither the knowledge nor the methods by which knowledge is created or constructed can be of the “grand” nature anymore. The implication would be that the methods used in African contexts to do research in translation studies should answer to the requirements of the African context. It should at least

answer to the requirement to investigate the phenomena⁴ in the African context, not only those phenomena which resemble Western translation phenomena. It further means that the very logic by which translation studies operates in African contexts should be local, contextualised. The ways in which this knowledge becomes or is made relevant to other contexts is the problem of those contexts.

The point I am trying to make is that Africans themselves should take up the challenge put by global translation studies. They should further explore the contextual nature of translations and notions and practices of translation in their context. Having another look at their context and trying to define the unique nature of this context would enhance this project. African scholars in translation studies should question whether the object of study as defined in other contexts holds for the African context. I thus suggest a much stronger methodological programme amongst Africans to study the translation condition in the African context. Translation scholars in Africa need to come together in some way to discuss the methods required by research in their contexts, as well as the implications of their context for their methods. Perhaps the time has come for a translation studies association in Africa which is similar to EST, the European Society for Translation Studies. Or perhaps it is time for a journal focusing on an agenda such as set out above. Apart from seriously engaging with the African context, moves such as those suggested above could stop the one-sided tapping of translation knowledge by non-Africans for use in Western theories of translation (Susam-Sarajevo 2002).

So, what does the African context look like? It may be that we know a number of things about the African context as far as translation studies is concerned, but there are many things that we do not know. In this section, I shall, from a translation studies point of view, provide a tentative understanding of the nature of the African context. My aim here is not a final definition but the opening up of a discursive space in which to talk further about how we understand our context.

⁴ I shall indicate what kind of phenomena I have in mind in the next section.

Firstly, the African context is a developing context. I am aware of the fact that development is a highly contentious issue, and I am definitely not proposing any particular model of development here – of even that Africa should be ‘developed’. I am merely claiming that one of the differences between the African context and Europe and the USA as contexts is that the one is usually described as ‘developing’ and the other as ‘developed’. I shall elsewhere try to conceptualise the implications of this difference for translation. Suffice it to say now that, if Tymoczko is correct, different contexts as far as development is concerned would have different influences on translation activities. This is a historical, economical, and social fact of all forms of culture in Africa (see Apostel 1981; Mudimbe 1988). Translation scholars need to adapt their research methodology and refocus the purview of their interest, i.e. their scientific perspective, to include developmental matters in translation studies. As an example, I cite a study by one of my students⁵ in which she researched informal advertisements in a multilingual context. Her focus, however, is a developmental one, drawing attention to the living standard index and how people on different levels of this index relate differently to language practice matters. Importantly, this study is shifting the focus of translation studies from the formal to the informal sector. It is not only asking questions about translations, but also about the people involved in them and their social and economic position. This difference in perspective is, to my mind, urgently needed in research on translation in Africa.

Secondly, the African context represents a significant percentage of the economy in the informal sector. This reality in Africa is largely related to the previous comment. As much as 30% of South Africa’s economy and much more for the rest of Africa are informal. Factoring in this reality does not mean ignoring the formal side of the economy. I am merely arguing, in line with Tymoczko, that there is more to translation than what the eye looking through the lens of formal economic activity perceives.

Thirdly, the African context represents forms of society/culture that are different from other contexts. Ong (1995) and Jousse (2000) before him have argued convincingly that orality is

⁵ I am referring here to Motsie (2010), who did a very small but, to my mind, conceptually revolutionary study on informal advertisements and their translation.

embedded in other social structures than literacy. Thinking even wider than orality, postpositivist arguments have pointed out the importance of difference, locality, and the materiality of each context. In African contexts, aridity, informal settlements, rurality, etc. is part of the reality in which translation functions – or does not function. The geopolitical scope of translation studies thus has to be expanded to include more than the urban, developed community.

Fourthly, the African context represents a history that differs from that of the West. One could at least claim that African communities and ethnic groups have different political and social histories, including a particular history of colonisation (Mudimbe 1988). What is more, if one studies African histories with the same conceptual framework as one uses for studying European, nation-state, histories, one would have to assume a connection between language and nation state as one would in Europe or the USA. If one did, your view would result in you not being able to see large amount of linguistic data in Africa where nation states do not coincide with languages, i.e. the lens one use for looking determines what you see. In the African context, local histories are much more relevant and have to be explored with particular methodological approaches – otherwise researchers in Africa will obviously find the same ‘facts’ as researchers in other parts of the world. My argument is thus that one also has to research the local histories as it pertains to translation (e.g. Marais forthcoming).

Fifthly, the African context represents a unique hybridity of culture. Because Africa has a unique context or unique contexts, a unique history or unique histories, and because it has with this uniqueness made contact with other cultures, it seems to follow logically that the nature of the hybridity of cultures in Africa would be unique (see, for instance, the work of Bandia 2008, Ricard 2004).

On the basis of Tymoczko’s theory and the pointers regarding the African context, I suggest a contextual, grounded research methodology that will be able to take cognisance of the features of these particular contexts. These methodologies should render knowledge that is particular to their context and designed to be able to perceive the uniqueness of the context. Some of the research done in Africa should obviously be done in formal economies, in globalised settings in which there will be similarities with Western notions. This cannot be denied. If, however, African translation

scholars wish to also find that which is different about Africa, they will need to adjust their perspectives to find difference too, not only similarity (Tymoczko 2007).

I thus suggest that the research methodology of translation scholars in Africa should include, but not be limited to, the following research methodologies, in the first, technical sense indicated in the introduction. My aim here is not to provide an extensive overview of the particular methodologies. Reading material on this is freely available. I am rather arguing the relevance of the particular methods for the (ideological) aim for research on translation studies in Africa as expounded above. I am contending that the nature of these methodologies make them more suitable for the particular research aim in African contexts. I shall explain below how I see research methodology do justice to the contextual features I have highlighted in the previous section.

Firstly, research in translation studies in Africa should include the methodologies of research into indigenous knowledge (see for instance Silito, Dixon and Barr 2007). Focusing their attention on indigenous knowledge will force researchers to contextualise the perspective of their research on translation phenomena. Theoretically, this should enable researchers to see difference. Indigenous knowledge is, by definition, local and contextualised, placing knowledge within a social context. One obviously has to question the validity of the knowledge for other contexts, and indigenous knowledge is not a problem-free concept, but it may be useful as a strategic choice to attain the aim of decentring Western notions of translation. This type of research should acknowledge difference, negotiate power relationships, adopt a holistic or systemic understanding of phenomena under research, and be able to focus on narrower knowledge and an in-depth understanding thereof (Silito, Dixon and Barr 2007:7). The type of research I advocate should be sensitive to hybrid forms of knowledge – between western, scientific knowledge and indigenous knowledge. It should consider skill and/or practice as knowledge as well as oral knowledge (Silito, Dixon and Barr 2007:4). In short, it should be sensitive to both locality/contextuality and universality. Practical examples of this kind of work could include the translation of anthropology data, the translation of indigenous categories of, say, plants, the translation of indigenous agricultural knowledge, and the translation of oral communication.

Secondly, case study as a research methodology should work against the generalising tendencies in Western research (see for instance Koskinen 2007:5-11). It is precisely the weak points of case study, as methodology, that makes it fit for the purposes of the research agenda for Africa that I am envisaging. It does not easily allow for generalisation (Duff 2008) and, claims Tymoczko, it generally allows for weaker conclusions (2007:166). This feature, together with its propensity to allow for rich description of data (see also Appiah 2006), makes for its suitability as research methodology. This methodology can also be linked to other forms of localised research, i.e. action research (Hubscher-Davidson 2008), community service learning (Marais 2009), and participatory research (Coetzee 2001). These are all research methods that allow multiple, powerless voices, other than the traditional scientific ones, to be heard.

Ethnography or auto-ethnography is also applicable to what I perceive should be the aims of research in translation studies in Africa (Flynn 2005). With its roots in anthropology, it is ideally suitable for researching local forms of knowledge (Olivier de Sardan 2007). It has in its very structure the interest in the 'other', which when applied to the African situation, should make scholars in the African context aware of difference in their situation (Tymoczko 2007:166). Tymoczko further argues that the inability to attend to difference leads to the loss of information (2007:205). Ethnography should be explored for this very reason. I here refer to another study done by a student of mine. Makhado (2011) interviewed five Tshivenda translators in rural areas concerning the constraints that their rural environment has on the quality of their translations. By definition, ethnography focuses on the local, which enables researchers to move their view from the general to the particular (see also Koskinen 2007). Ethnography also allows researchers to study phenomena and people who are not necessarily part of the mainstream society and economy (Coetzee 2001).

Lastly, historical research into translation phenomena in Africa holds the potential to focus on local data. Historical research is not only limited to a particular time, but also to place (see for example Pym 1998). For this very reason, historical research will look at particulars: particular concepts or practices or products of translation in particular places at particular times. Pym (1998:4) argues convincingly that 'the translator' has to be central to historical enquiry, espousing more systemic approaches in which individual humans disappear or become factors of larger

societal systems. This focus on individual translators in an historical approach further serves the research aim of creating contextualised knowledge of translation in African context.

In this last section of the article, I am closing by taking up another point raised by Tymoczko. This point pertains to more than methodology and asks about the very logic used in translation studies. In her latest book, Tymoczko (2007:179-186) suggests that the very logic used in translation studies and translation studies research should be reconsidered. To recap, she does it by, amongst others, considering Wittgenstein's notion of family resemblance to discuss a definition of translation. By using a postpositivist approach to definition, as supplied by Wittgenstein, she broadens the definition of translation to be able to call it a cluster concept. She ends her argument on methodology by questioning the very nature of theory (2007:179) and the logic used to construct these theories. She refers to complex phenomena such as translations, and she proposes theories that account for this complexity as well as indeterminacies, inconsistencies, and randomness (Tymoczko 2007:183).

I wish to take her argument one step further. In translation studies, Andrew Chesterman's (2008) causal model has been propounded on various stages and seems to have gained general acceptance. He posits causality as the underlying principle to studying translation, i.e. a translation being the effect of some cause and causing some effect (Chesterman 2000:20). This position seems steeped in what Wittgenstein criticises, i.e. it favours a reductionist rationale to the observation of complexity (Tymoczko 2007:85-86).

What I want to argue is that translation scholars may consider other forms of logic that may enrich translation studies. I here refer to work that I have done quite a while ago on representation in ancient Hebrew narratives. In this study, I found causality not to be the dominant form of logic in the explanations of reality I studied (Marais 1998:145-164). Rather, perspectivism (propagated by Tymoczko), juxtaposition, and paradox were the main driving factors in these narratives. The implication is a perspective on life which does not assume that everything is immediately explicable, at least not as being the cause or being caused by some identifiable factor. It represents a view of life in which logically paradoxical views are able to hold simultaneously, or where views

are juxtaposed without necessarily explaining their relationship, or at least not necessarily embracing a particular explanation. This type of 'alternative' logic (see also the logical structure of Brueggemann's (1997) *Theology of the Old Testament: Testimony, Dispute, Advocacy*, which is in line with Tymoczko's notions of counterdiscourse and resistant actions (2007:237)) opens the possibilities for conceptualising 'ill-structured' problems such as translations, of allowing the unexplained, the inconsistent and the random to remain just that. For instance, are our explanations of causal factors in translator agency not far to reductionistic?

My argument is not (yet) that translation phenomena in Africa can be best accounted for by these alternative perspectives. What I do claim is that, for translation scholars in the African context to find their own perspective or to find a perspective of their own, they have to question not only the methodologies with which the field of study was colonised. They also need to question the very logic behind those methodologies. As Gentzler (2008) has argued for the Americas, translation scholars and translators in Africa have to build their own identity, be it by way of hybridity or by way of some sort of resistance (what Tymoczko (2007:210-213) calls engagement). The type of logic espoused by scholars such as Jousse (2000) and Ong (1995) is, amongst others, what I have in mind.

If, as Tymoczko says, translation studies has to be de-Westernised, the very logic operating in the scientific process of doing so has to be questioned. Current research in complexity theory may suggest that the phenomena we are observing in translation studies show more complex relationships than only causality.

The logic of this article is meant to be of an indexical nature. It is itself somewhat hybrid, combining causal logic with juxtaposition. It contains paradoxes and is clearly written with and from a biased perspective. It says nothing about 'African' translation studies, but considers the African context of translation studies on this continent. It is a 'meta-consideration' on others' meta-reflexive efforts. It is an effort to indigenise the Tymoczko's, Susam-Sarajevo's, and Gentzler's of this world by translating their thoughts. It is an experiment in Tymoczko's theory of enlarging and

empowering translation. Accepting and resisting. Allowing to travel and chasing away. Pondering the implications of studying translation in Africa ...

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