Can Tymoczko be translated into Africa?
Refractions of research methodology in translation studies in African contexts

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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 (2006, 2007) arguments in favour of 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 (2002) travel theory and Gentzler’s (2008) identity theory of translation to ponder the implications of postpositivist research methodology for the African context. The article suggest Indigenous Knowledge Systems (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.

Introduction
Research methodology in translation studies has received much attention since Holmes’ (2006) map of translation studies (see, for example, Olohan, 2000; Hermans, 2002). 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, methodologies for doing research in these fields proliferated. These methodologies range from the micro-level, if you wish, that is, the linguistic, to ever widening perspectives (Tymoczko, 2002), such as literary, sociological, and ideology criticism as well as the cultural turn.

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 again, what happens when Tymoczko’s theory travels to Africa (Susam-Sarajevo, 2002)? As was Tymoczko’s (2007) intent, my intent is a meta-exploration of matters of a methodological nature, with particular consideration given to factoring in the African context. It is my contention that her line of thought is asking of translation scholars to consider context in translation studies. Her postpositivist assumptions as well as the implications of her line of argument – is my argument – forces us to ask: If we want to create contextual knowledge, can we use universal methodologies in the process? If not, what would contextual methodologies look like?

Considering the methodological issues in translation studies that may be relevant to the African contexts is something that, to my knowledge, has not been attempted before. It may well be that 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), my assumption is that seeing that knowledge is contextually determined, it follows logically that the methods by which that knowledge is generated should also be contextually determined.
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) 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, that is that knowledge and methodologies are or should be universal. This, however, can only be confirmed once we have considered the alternative and found it lacking. To my mind, it is still too early to come to this 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 consider methodologies in the technical sense of the word, in other words 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 consider alternative forms of conceptualisation, in other words the particular type(s) of logic that may inform research in translation studies in the African contexts.

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 have selected three sets of arguments: the internationalisation theory of Tymoczko (2006, 2007), the travel theory of Susam-Sarajevo (2002), and the identity theory of Gentzler (2008). 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 contexts 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.

**Translation studies in the African context**

In her book Enlarging Translation; Empowering Translators (Tymoczko, 2007) and in her article Reconceptualising Translation Theory: Integrating Non-Western Thought about Translation (Tymoczko, 2006), 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 (2007: 83–100) uses Wittgensteinian notions of concept formation to argue that translation is a cluster concept. 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, that is 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).
To my mind, Tymoczko is suggesting a revolutionary shift in logic here. Not only is the idea of cluster concepts a deviation from the positivist notion of definition, but 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, in other words taking the cosmos into itself by observation. I have argued elsewhere that this position to an extent relativises absolutist notions of constructivism (Marais, 2010). To my mind, 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.

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 so on. For instance, Gentzler (2008) has recently shown how concepts of translation in the America’s differ from Western notions.

Tymoczko has criticised the assumptions of Western theory of translation at least twice (Tymoczko, 2006, 2007). She firstly summarises these assumptions in eight statements. The technological influence of Western culture is clearly seen in these notions on translation. In Western translation studies, Tymoczko (2006) 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):

- 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 relationship (Tymoczko, 2007) to Western theory and theorising. Scholars from Africa have been too docile in accepting theories from the West, transferring them and not translating them.

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 does a prominent scholar such as Baker (2010) not include a single African in her anthology? Why is what Africans have produced in translation studies not worth the attention of scholars such as Baker? 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, or has it?

Could one perhaps say that translation studies is now where the colonising Western political powers were in the 17th to 19th 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 in ‘the rest of the world’ not merely a symptom of a culture – subculture, that is, 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)?

Leaving behind the questions and working on Tymoczko’s theory again, Tymoczko (2007: 148) discusses the implications of her arguments for research methods by quoting Crisafulli (2002; 33, 39) who claimed that ‘the process of selecting data – like the ensuing textual analysis itself – is a complex interpretative act.’ Postpositivists would not disagree with this claim. 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 phenomena 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. They 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 explore the contextual nature of translations and notions and practices of translation in their context. They should have another look at their context and try to define the unique nature of this context. They should not assume that 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. I suggest that translation scholars in Africa come together in some way to discuss the methods required by research in their contexts. Maybe the time has come for a translation studies association in Africa which is similar to EST, the European Society for Translation Studies. Or maybe the time has come for a journal focusing on an agenda such as set out above. This should, amongst others, also stop the tapping of translation knowledge by non-Africans for the use in Western theories of translation (Susam-Sarajevo, 2002).

The nature of the African context
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.

Firstly, the African context is a developmental context. This is a historical, economical, and social fact of all forms of culture in Africa. Translation scholars need to adapt their research methodology and refocus the purview of their interest, that is, their scientific perspective, to include developmental matters in translation studies. As an example, I cite a study by one of my students in which she is researching 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 different to language practice matters. Importantly, this study is shifting the focus of methodology in 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 is 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 or culture that are different from other contexts. Ong (1995) and Jousse (2000) before him have argued convincingly that orality is 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, and so on 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 different history. At least, African communities and ethnic groups have unique histories. What is more, one cannot study African histories with the same conceptual framework as European, nation-state, histories. 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. For instance, in South Africa very little is known about translation on a national level, and I would suspect that very little has been done on a national level to foster communication between different cultural and linguistic groups. Research that I have done on local history has, however, proven to be fruitful (Marais, forthcoming).

Fifthly, the African context represents a unique hybridity of culture. Because Africa has a unique context, a unique history, and because it has with this uniqueness made contact with other cultures, it seems to follow logically that the nature of 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).

**Research methodologies in translation studies in Africa**

I thus suggest that the research methodology of translation scholars in Africa should include, but not be limited to, the research methodologies described here. My aim is not to provide an extensive overview of the particular methodologies. Reading material on this is freely available. Instead, I argue the relevance of the particular methods for the (ideological) aim for research on translation studies in Africa as expounded above. I contend that the nature of these methodologies makes them better suitable for the particular research aims in African contexts.

Firstly, research in translation studies in Africa should include the methodologies of research into indigenous knowledge (see for instance Sillitoe et al., 2006; Nel, 2008). 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, per 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 (Sillitoe et al., 2006). 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 (Sillitoe et al., 2006). In short, it should be sensitive to both locality (that is contextuality) and universality.
Secondly, case study as a research methodology should work against the generalising tendencies in Western research. 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 envisage. It does not easily allow for generalisation (Duff, 2008) and, claims Tymoczko (2007), it generally allows for weaker conclusions. This feature, together with its propensity to allow for rich description of data (see also Appiah, 2006), makes for its suitability as a research methodology. This methodology can also be linked to other forms of localised research, such as action research (Hubscher-Davidson, 2008), community service learning (Marais, 2009), and participatory research. These are all research methods that allow 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. 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). Tymoczko (2007) further argues that the inability to attend to difference leads to the loss of information. Ethnography should be explored for this very reason.

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.

An ‘alternative’ logic for translation studies in Africa
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) suggests that the very logic used in translation studies and translation studies research should be reconsidered. She does it by, among 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 (Tymoczko, 2007) and 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).

I wish to take her argument one step further. In translation studies, 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, in other words a translation being the effect of some cause and causing some effect (Chesterman, 2000). This position seems steeped in what Wittgenstein criticises, that is, thinking, not observing (Tymoczko, 2007). It is a model constructed by Western thought, and it is applied universally to explain translation phenomena in all cases.

What I argue is that translation scholars may consider other forms of logic that may enrich translation studies. I here refer to earlier work I did on representation in ancient Hebrew narratives (Marais, 1998). In this study, I found causality not to be the dominant form of logic in the explanations of reality I studied. 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 opens the possibilities for conceptualising ‘ill-structured’ problems such as translations, of allowing
the unexplained, the inconsistent and the random to remain just that (see also the logical structure of Brueggemann’s (1997) *Theology of the Old Testament: Testimony, Dispute, Advocacy*, which is in line with Tymoczko’s (2007) notions of counterdiscourse and resistant actions).

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), amongst others, is what I have in mind.

If, as Tymoczko says, translation studies has to be de-Westernised, the very logic operating in the scientific process to do 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 causality.

**Conclusion**

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 Tymoczkos, Susam-Sarajevos, and Gentzlers 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 implication of studying translation in Africa.

**Notes**

1 The field has been subjected to a number of turns, such as a pragmatic turn, a cultural turn, an ideological turn, and so on.

2 I am referring here to Kefuwe Motsie, who is doing a very small but, to my mind, conceptually revolutionary study on informal advertisements and their translation.

**References**