INDIGENOUS KNOWLEDGE SYSTEMS AND LANGUAGE PRACTICE: INTERFACE OF A KNOWLEDGE DISCOURSE

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ABSTRACT

The paper seeks to engage constructively with the challenges and opportunities Indigenous Knowledge (IK) may offer disciplines in Language Practice. The approach will be contextualized in terms of the theoretical shift in knowledge production and use, as well as the current debate pertaining to the feasibility of the incorporation of IK into curricula. Specific attention will be rendered to topics of Africanizing scholarship, a performance model of knowledge, the socio-cultural embeddedness of language, and brief thoughts on the translation of the oral. These thematic issues are of particular importance to Language Practice, perceived here to be at the gateway between theory of language/communication and receiver communities.

Key words: Indigenous knowledge, performance knowledge, africanizing knowledge, language-knowledge debate, translation, language practice, oral literature

1.   CONCEPT CLARIFICATION

The title makes mention of a couple of terms that require clarification. The most obvious one is Indigenous Knowledge. The concept indigenous knowledge has stimulated a peculiar debate in South Africa (cf. Nel 2005:2-11), but it will not be presented here in detail. I will rather just propose a working definition of IK or IKS and then dwell on a couple of crucial issues pertaining to the distinction between IK and the global scientific knowledge system. IK may be understood as that knowledge base in terms of which local indigenous communities have survived and adapted to new challenges through the ages to maintain their customs and livelihoods. IK does not exist as a totality in an identifiable repository of knowledge anywhere, but is *informed by the cultural, customary, technical, and spiritual activities and beliefs of a local community*.

It is community-embedded knowledge which stands in direct relation to the well-being and health of the community (viz. its moral connectivity). The definition here also differs slightly from the concept "endogenous" preferred by Crossman (2004:323-326) in the sense that "indigenous" does not refer to a natural evolving capacity of this knowledge implied by the concept endogenous. Indigenous knowledge should also not be equated with a homogenizing concept of African knowledge, for the latter is far more complex and includes knowledge dimensions also peculiar of what has become known as scientific knowledge.

Indigenous knowledge, notwithstanding the idiosyncrasies of a particular local community, reflects universal resemblances in the sense that all indigenous cultures share aspects of knowledge embedded in (not systematized in an abstract manner) their practices, customs, and cosmologies. It should also be noted that when Indigenous Knowledge *Systems* is used, the concept "system" does not refer to a logically systematized order of that knowledge. It refers rather to the nature of that knowledge in the sense that it permeates all domains of the social-cultural and spiritual world without conflict. In other words, it is an interconnected system of knowledge related to a holistic view of reality and does not refer to its intrinsic (logical) schematization.

The resurgence of indigenous knowledge as a valid and important knowledge repository irrespective of the disregard and inferiorisation by the dominant science knowledge system is not exclusively linked to the so-called cultural turn within social sciences of the nineties, but also to the recognition that cultural diversity is intrinsically intertwined with epistemological diversity. Indigenous knowledge premises epistemological diversity and seeks to give recognition to the fact that many communities define and understand their culture and practices in knowledge systems other than North-Atlantic knowledge traditions. Differences in knowledge are as diverse as cosmologies are, and a particular episteme cannot be granted the license as sole or dominant discourse to deal with all cultures and their diversity. Indigenous communities produce their own ways of knowing, give account of their knowledge in their own modes, and produce forms of reflexivity and shaping of practices and technologies in their own way (Santos, et al 2007:xxi).

The critical engagement with the reigning Eurocentric knowledge system is in principle not anti-European or anti-science, but it seeks to open a space for other historically denied bodies of knowledge to which Santos (1998:81-118) refers as a process of epistemicide – a genocide of knowledge. The emphasis on the indigenous serves heuristic purposes, namely to claim space for other knowledge systems and intellectual traditions to counter the ignorance of the dominant knowledge systems. In this regard the emphasis on indigenous knowledge enters the battle of rivalling knowledge systems and in this process exaggerations of its contribution contra the dominant system do occur. Scholars may therefore be of the view that proponents of indigenous knowledge do so to the exclusion of the dominant science knowledge system. The opposition cannot be denied, given the tradition of exclusion, but the intention is not to sacralise indigenous knowledge in ways which boil down to an essentialist view of the indigenous culture (if this generalization may be allowed here).

If a fundamental dualism between indigenous knowledge advocates and traditional (Western) science lobbyists does exist and if the implication is that a value is ascribed to indigenous knowledge in terms of essentialist differences between local communities and the global science tradition, such a dualism becomes problematic. If this should be the case, access to the indigenous knowledge of local communities is non-accessible for the outsider and in fact irretrievable, and of a mode not congruent with human cognition systems.

The apparent dualism – and one cannot deny the existence of such dualism behind arguments of proponents seeking to claim space for indigenous knowledge as a valid body of knowledge irresponsibly disregarded and displaced by the dominant global knowledge tradition – is not a result of primordial or essentialist differences. I can therefore only partially agree with Green (2008:48-57) that the South African Indigenous Knowledge System Policy Document from the Department of Science and Technology ascribes to indigenous knowledge essentialist traits relating to indigenous communities. The effort of this policy is not to sacralise the indigenous, but to restore a place for indigenous knowledge abandoned for too long by the global knowledge emporium. The IKS Policy Document does promote the possibility that IK can contribute to all fields of inquiry and social transformation, squarely motivated by a long knowledge tradition in which alternative (not essentialist) knowledge systems have not been recognized and often (deliberately) denied relevance.

The assumption of Green (2008:48-57) that the IKS Policy Document referred to promotes an idea of an almost sacred nature of indigenous knowledge and that it is privileged in a manner that would logically signal views of a fixed and essentialist nature of local cultures seems to me slightly unjustified in the context of the document. The fears and critical remarks she raised pertaining to essentialist views of cultures and a relativist treatment of cultures as though only the inborn member can understand that culture's symbolism and knowledge exclusively are obviously correct, but I doubt her inference that these views may be traced in the policy document in the absolute terms she lays claim to.

This would bring us to the next concept, namely **Knowledge**. Knowledge is seen here not as truth or proven factuality, but the cognitive activity enabling informed action – the ability to act. The knowledge may be based on factuality but also on metaphysical or spiritual dimensions. Western modernity and its sense of rationality, which rejects any form of metaphysics or belief as part of knowledge, are rejected here. Biased references to so-called *misbelief* or superstition are also overruled. The emphasis here is very much on the de facto reality that different knowledge systems also assume different ways of knowing (epistemologies) which directly relate to cultural diversity and different cosmologies. There is no single definition of what counts as knowledge and how that knowledge is produced.

Knowledge is maintained as intrinsically embedded in the socio-cultural context. Indigenous knowledge, in the first instance, is not concerned with universalistic and abstract knowledge with claims of general application. That does, however, not imply that IK is irrational. IK may be viewed as knowledge that includes aspects that we customarily call "skills" or "beliefs," but also "propositional knowledge", which one may witness for instance when local soil classifications are related to crop production in a local rural community.

This knowledge is more directly related to intuition and feeling – a connectedness to nature and social environment. This knowledge has been sidelined as useless by a tradition of disembodied knowledge within the dialectical and logical rationality tradition of Descartes and Kant (cf. De Quincey 2005:18-37). In this Western philosophical rationality, ways of knowing have been reduced to logical or empirical categories, e.g. propositional truth. The plea here is really to open up the canon of knowledge defined by the hegemony of Western science so that that difference may be seen and other knowledge traditions and ways of knowing may be integrated in ways that maintain difference and social diverse contexts.

Language Practice, the last concept to be explained, is not in the narrow sense of the word a discipline with a specific core theory. It is a cluster of applied sub-disciplines at the gate-way between language and communication/rhetorical theory on the one hand and recipient communities of texts, messages, and discourses in whatever format on the other hand. Its very name indicates the functionality and practicality of this discipline. Both the functional position of Language Practice and a re-appropriation of IK's value regarding the development of local communities establish a productive interface or cohort for those actively concerned with the interests of local communities. The concept interface also accommodates strategies in which the traditional boundaries of science are consciously stretched beyond the typical modernist or neo-liberal ideas about knowledge application, and it signals a space for innovative discourse between academia and society. In this sense, Language Practice cannot isolate itself from the head-on challenge with hegemonic traditions and concepts of knowledge advanced without serious recognition of local and social embedded configurations of knowledge – often marginalized and silenced.

2.   AFRICANIZING KNOWLEDGE

The so-called "cultural turn" of the late eighties has impacted on all social sciences, and it was inevitable that it would also affect the study of language and communication. The reality of language and communication can no longer be viewed or accessed unproblematically. The cultural landscape of language and communication is now conceived as "an emblematic site of representation" in which the complex relationships of language and communication overlap with the cultural landscape, identity, memory, and

existing knowledge and discursive systems (cf. O'Keeffe 2007.3-6). The emphasis on the social-cultural landscape relegates language and communication to the sites of practice and performance from which analytic procedures have sought to untangle them.

The idea of "Africanizing" or decolonizing knowledge is met with quite some resistance from the gatekeepers of Western knowledge as though proponents of "Africanizing" are subverting and contaminating the Western knowledge emporium (cf. Mudimbe 1988 for a critical engagement with the Western knowledge science episteme contra to African philosophy). "Africanizing" is not a destructive claim, but an agenda or project for opening up traditional scientific space to accommodate those knowledge dimensions ignored or rejected flat out. The origin of knowledge does not start with a history in which knowledge is linked to the scientific development to the exclusion of the knowledge bases of local communities (cf. Du Toit 1998:10-32). The claim is not Africanization in a pan-Africanist way, but a serious quest towards knowledge production and application in full recognition of the African reality and consciousness.

It seeks to revisit the dominant knowledge discourses which exclude the indigenous or the local, often discarded as pre-scientific and therefore useless. In the neo-liberal mode of thinking, this local knowledge is viewed as an obstacle rather than beneficial to development, for, the claim is, it would promote and continue a backwardness which the knowledge transfer modes of neo-liberal approaches seek to master (Sillitoe, et al 2005:5-7). For Zeleza (2007), Africanizing is an agenda "in pursuit of epistemic rationality, to deepen our understanding of our complex histories, societies, polities, cultures, and ecologies that can only be understood partially, superficially, or even speciously if we continue to rely on analytical models, however sophisticated, developed in other intellectual climes; there is no law of nature that says our universities and intellectual communities are doomed to be exporters of empirical data and importers of refined theory".

The strive towards "Africanizing" is an effort to redefine knowledge in a comprehensive and holistic way, including local knowledge. It is a search for knowledge integration (Odora Hoppers 2002:2-22) and not a replacement of Western knowledge. It certainly addresses the hegemony of Western science to the exclusion of the local African knowledge bases. It also contests the universalistic strive of Western knowledge production and seeks to relate knowledge to the needs of the community. Knowledge must have utility - to serve the wellness of humanity and society. The 'Africanizing' effort emphasises the ethics and impact of knowledge. Knowledge must be integrated with the livelihoods, the customs, the spirituality, and the social environment of people.

One must also add another dimension whilst advancing an Africanizing agenda, including the recognition of indigenous knowledge, namely that the focus should extend beyond the contribution of indigenous knowledge to descriptions or generalizations of knowledge in scientific fashion. The restoration of indigenous knowledge should also go further than customary science in order to search for what can be imaginatively learned from the elders (ancestors), in other words, "cultural instruction before it was made academic; before it was made part of a faculty" as Spivak (2005:40) would claim. An Africanizing and indigenous knowledge agenda would then also entail processes of learning from the elders, of making the past part of the present, and of (re)discovering the world which the scientific community has failed to dream of.

For Language Practice, the implications are related to its pivotal position between informing agency (whether scientific or general information) and recipient audiences or communities. The challenges pertain to the efforts of moving around between the two or oscillating authentically between them by way of translating, interpreting, documenting, as well as learning. It requires knowledge of the indigenous communities as well as their socio-cultural context and the community embeddedness of their knowledge. It becomes a question of who speaks on whose behalf? This position cannot be claimed or described in terms of acquired knowledge, but can only be earned in partnership with the community (cf. Le Grange, 2005:1208-1219, for reflections on an engaged university). Authority resides in community ascription, and it is not based on claims of knowing but rather on a willingness to learn from the past.

The implication for Language Practice is a community project approach, or it may be translated into a constructive community approach, as has been proposed by Naude (2006:1225-1238) for South African language practitioners. The constructivist approach should however not be seen as a descriptive process in terms of which indigenous communities and their knowledge are qualified in essentialist ways, for a cultural relativism is then advanced. It should be seen as a deliberate stance for an approach that seriously engages with the reality of diverse cultural contexts and diverse cognitive resources producing knowledge. The realization thereof would certainly be a complex process and is best unpacked as a project approach, which might seem fragmented, but is the only way in terms of which knowledge integration is possible.

Africanizing also has the ideals to serve the typical issues of Africa in an African way. Centres of South African learning, including the data-focus of fields related to Language Practice, focus excessively on the conventionalized repertoire and are not bending the light towards the African reality and African consciousness.

In the field of Language Practice and Communication Science, the richness of the African context is so overwhelming that it is unthinkable to ignore it. Language Practice does have the unique opportunity to break through the deliberate and covert gate-keeping forces of Eurocentric traditions to stand in service of the African society and polity. The implications for a theory of translation should be obvious. Translation should not escape the responsibility to serve a mediatory role between different social contexts and different knowledge traditions. Its repertoire and theoretical textualisation have been dominated by the reigning knowledge system without concerted efforts to privilege diverse knowledge systems and cultural experiences. Santos (2007:xxvi) may therefore justifiably claim a redefined role for translation which is "fundamental to the articulation between diverse and specific intellectual and cognitive resources that are expressed through the various modes of producing knowledge about counter-hegemonic initiatives and experiences, aimed at redistribution and recognition and the construction of new configurations of knowledge anchored in local, situated forms of experience and struggle. To achieve these aims, it is crucial to mobilize and prioritize concepts of knowledge – such as the modern sciences, including the social sciences, and the humanities – that were originally elaborated in an Eurocentric context." He (Santos 2007:xxvi) describes this strategy of translation as "*diatopical hermeneutics*" which implies a "reconfiguration of knowledges based on the mutual recognition of their partiality and incompleteness." Procedures of translation should fulfil a role of emancipating diverse cultural communities and should not be trapped by conventionalized concepts without an eye for their Eurocentric biases.

3.   A PERFORMANCE MODEL OF KNOWLEDGE

Language Practice has an important role based on a performance understanding of knowledge. Traditionally, knowledge is packed in Western science in terms of the so-called *representational* modes. These imply the acquisition or generation of knowledge, the systematization of it in rational categories with a clear universalistic appeal or in respect to universal laws. The problem, however, is that knowledge does not necessarily move from site to site in this format. In communities, the functionality or applicability of knowledge renders it *movable*. The modes in which knowledge is moved or transferred in communities demonstrate its utility and social capital value and do not relate to its abstract packaging. The abstract or systematized model of knowledge packaging is not congruent with usability. Language Practitioners will have to look at the *commodification* of knowledge in the community "market." How does the commodity of knowledge move in communities and how does its intrinsic value become recognizable?

Indigenous or local societies are also knowledge societies and knowledge-driven, but in quite distinctive ways and unfamiliar to what globalized knowledge societies prescribe.

These sophisticated (and elitist) knowledge societies have almost saturated the modes of representational knowledge production as well as its transfer modes. But has it benefited the local communities in substantial ways and has it succeeded with delivery modes to which local communities relate? Why then is almost 70% of community targeted information in Africa not reaching the target audience successfully?

We have probably fooled ourselves with the assumption that, if the body of knowledge is representational and well systematized, it will succeed along the channels of trans-cultural communication and rhetoric. The emphasis should not be on the body of information only, but on how the community deals with knowledge - their *knowledge performance.* For Language Practice and the Communication Sciences, it is important to take cognisance of the performances and the techniques of *information use* in communities. It should therefore take cognisance of the indigenous modes of *knowledge* use such as the storing of knowledge, how knowledge is interpreted, how it is sanctioned, how it is communicated in face-to-face modes, storytelling, dance, etc. Knowledge is socio-culturally embedded and it cannot be assumed that representational bodies of knowledge can be transferred successfully without this basic assumption of divergent knowledge use traditions in local communities. Extensive empirical research about local communities' knowledge economy is required to fill this gap in current applied language and communication studies.

4. LANGUAGE AND INDIGENOUS AFRICAN COMMUNITY

All sub-disciplines of Language Practice are textualizing reality in linguistic form, whether orally, written, or in signed format. My aim is not to dwell on the intricacies of text and textuality between Western science and indigenous communities, but I rather opted here to focus on the language aspect of text.

There might be universal rules for human languages, and, therefore, a need for a universal grammar of human language. This should, however, not lead one to misconstrue the idea that language is culturally and epistemological neutral. The African philosopher, Wiredu (2004:24), states unambiguously: "Looking at our languages is a way of looking at ourselves, for language is a picture of the ways in which we interact with our environment and our kind." This statement not only articulates the intrinsic value of the local or indigenous languages for a true understanding of the African worldview (if we may unduly generalize it here) and its conceptual framework, but also contests the possibility to render the African conceptual world and worldview perfectly in another language, mainly English, as is the current practice.

Access to the African world and experience may therefore be problematic, but not entirely impossible, for a foreign language may facilitate communication about that indigenous world.

The unanswered question, however, deals with the effective and conclusive ability to communicate that reality coherently. If a conclusive ability may be construed positively, the assumption of a direct relationship between language and cultural content is unattainable, which at this stage seems quite impossible. This would then also imply perfect intertranslatability and interchangeability between languages.

Language itself is socio-culturally embedded and relates in an innate way to the conceptual world of that culture. The language we use and the conceptualization of the experiential world also correlate and resonate with the cognitive schematization/schemata of cultures. Apart from possible generic schemata, they commonly are culture specific.

Language is not merely the medium or conduit which allows the verbalization of a culture's conceptual world, but members of that culture are born into a conceptual world which has already been structured linguistically. The very concept of "universal laws," referred to earlier in connection with scientific knowledge, is culture-bound and typical of a world construed in terms of Western science terminology. These "laws" are not shared in language and concept by indigenous communities and do not necessarily correlate with their (indigenous communities') sense of order. In terms of its rationality, knowledge, and science in general, does not depend on the "empirical verification that establishes what is in agreement with reality. It is language, inter-subjectively shared, which constitutes reality for a particular speech community. Reality is constituted in language" (Du Toit 1998:20).

This brings us to Whorf's hypothesis of an immediate relation between language and knowledge. According to this view, language is not merely a "reproducing instrument for voicing ideas, but rather is in itself a shaper of ideas" (Whorf 2000:117). This view is also congruent with Lakoff and Johnson's (1999:45-73) "*Philosophy in the Flesh*" that the construction of our conceptual metaphors, apart from universal sensory-based images, are based on culture and concrete experience. Some of these conceptual metaphors acquire dominant status and fulfil guiding roles to make sense of actions and to effect actions and experiences (Lakoff and Johnson 1980). Linguistic codes thus prefigure understanding.

This view of Whorf has also led to the questioning of the De Saussure's arbitrary link between the *signifier* and the *signified* as though only the linguistic sign itself in different languages is arbitrary. Whorf maintains that the concept (the signified) is also arbitrary in different worlds of conceptualization. It is language that structures and conditions ways of thinking. Therefore, observers of the physical world and of cultural phenomena can only arrive at the same picture if they share similar linguistic backgrounds (Brand 2004:32). For Language Practice there are, amongst others, two lessons to be learned from this undeniable relationship between culture and language:

The first is the necessity to encourage the use of local languages and, secondly, to draw on the intricate connection between a local community's language and its conceptual world. In terms of the second, the cultural embeddedness of language should be explored in terms of its consequences and impact on Language Practice sub-disciplines. The local knowledge (IK) of communities is essential to any textual coding and decoding process. On this simple but complex issue rests the success of future text constructions in the media and documents to have any promise of meeting the "Other" in the interface of real and effective communication, especially when worlds start mutually overlapping in real partnership with the local. It does not compensate for the lack of knowing the indigenous language, but creates a collective space where its need becomes a necessity. Indigenous language will not survive the global onslaught if a dire need for it is not seen in an important utilitarian light.

5.   TRANSLATING THE ORAL

It is an ironic coincidence that whilst the West has almost completed the circle from the oral text, document, book, digital text to the oral (audible cum visible) text, orality is still the dominant culture of communication in Africa. The irony relates to the fact that the West has lost the "listening" capacity as well as the systemic features of the oral. Much has been written on oral culture and oral communication (cf. e.g. Ong 1982 and Okpewho 1992). From what we have discussed earlier, it should be evident that oral cultures vary and are congruent with the very nature and conceptual world of a particular culture. Apart from general or similar features, large grey areas of differences exist between cultures. If one would look at the flora and fauna images of African proverbs, one can see that the same conceptual image application cannot be traced throughout the continent. A repertoire of oral structuring modes has been provided through comparisons (cf. e.g. Maranda 1971), and these may already assist translating efforts. However, my concern is somewhat different here.

The point I want to make for the sake of an engaged Language Practice programme is to emphasise the performance side of oral literature and the challenge it poses to interpretation and translation. The recovery (rediscovery) of the systemic and repertoire features of the oral texts through empiric analyses will certainly benefit translation strategies. The translation of the oral – and here I focus on the "literary" genres of the oral in song, story/myth, proverbs/riddle, and ritual performance/drama – implies cognisance of contextual performance. When performance is the focus, obviously the audience is centre-staged.

Oral performance does not succeed without the audience and it subsumes the audience. In the translated text (whether it is still "oral" is a question), however, the audience is silenced; it is no longer the co-performer of the oral text.

And one can rightfully ask to whom the oral text belongs once removed from the audience? Is the translated text still seen as containing co-ownership with an audience, or does the known individual creative spirit accept sole ownership? What challenges are thus posed to the one collecting and recording oral literature?

Even more importantly, what is the purpose of translating the oral? Is it to come up with a text trustworthy or equal to the meaning of the oral? But what is the meaning of the oral without audience performance? In Kenya amongst the Agikuyu, there are challenger duet songs (Gicandi) so metaphorically rich and dialogical in structure that it renders it almost impossible for even the native speaker to understand what is transpiring (cf. Mutahi 1994:26-35). Apart from explanatory notes to assist the grasp of metaphors, the translator will have added additional information regarding the competitive structure of the text as well as the interchanges between speakers. Above all, what about the audience's response, for they are the addressee who decide on the worthiness of the attempt of the song challenger!

Of crucial importance for translation strategies of the oral is also the language-imbedded power - a power arresting the body, soul, and mind. Amuka (1994:4-15) states that the oral impacts on all the senses - it is a power saturating the body that draws the audience like a magnet. The body (the audience) is the object the song or story seeks to drive. It is a sound, flowing and engulfing the body and converting the heard text into a corresponding text the audience responds to. "Oral form literally charges the body of the receiver (audience), provokes responses including dance or some other body movement" (Amuka 1994:12). It amounts to text performance. There are therefore serious questions to be asked when it comes to translating the oral (cf. Okombo 1994:19).

The challenge faced by the translator is already enormous solely considering the authenticity of the oral text. What about the cultural context of the translated text in which the oral may not be marked or in which the corresponding bodily impact does not parallel rhythmic and sound stimulation? Some people (Jousse 1990:102) would say that the oral style operates in the oral-aural or gestural-visual modes only, and by translating it, we deform it through graphical or written representation in space. The space of the oral is the rhythmic-mnemonic enacting of the past in the present performance. It is also impossible to capture the oral-aural features of rhythm, sound patterning, tone, pitch, pace, inflection, or the gestural movement and visual indicators of expression and non-verbal communication in translation (cf. Sienaert and Conolly 2002:72). What translation strategies should be followed to prevent such substantial loss of meaning? Impossible? Almost! The first reaction would be to refrain from the oral.

But within the South African and continental contexts, the emphasis on collecting and recording is very demanding and has created an urgency because of the immanent fear of losing important cultural artefacts. The collecting and recording of the oral already pose challenges relating to the cultural embeddedness, as well as to efforts which would make the oral accessible to the broader community. The lessons are not only to be learned from the recording and the translation of the oral, but also from the intrinsic cultural memory conveyed in the oral as well as the consciousness and ethics of a "past" world. In the oral, the "ghost dance" and "planet think" (cf. Spivak 2005:39, 44) resonates. From the oral, we can learn from the elders and critically engage our accepted technocratic and globalized command over knowledge and of the earth. I think that an engaged and socio-cultural constructivist Language Practice cannot escape these challenges.

6.   CLOSING REMARK

It is certainly a less fruitful academic endeavour to compile lists of challenges without indicating clear solutions to them, or at least suggesting ways of going about. I will be the first one to admit this inadequacy. On the other hand, it is also true that proper science cannot begin with improper questioning. The purpose of the small-scale reflection here was mainly to emphasize the cultural and linguistic embeddedness of local indigenous knowledge, and that this knowledge can no longer be ignored or discarded as of no relevance or inferior. The shift towards community centred knowledge, together with the recognition that this local knowledge may be the only real route through which community development may be communicated effectively, have brought to the threshold of academia the challenge of constructive engagement beneficial to community wellness and empowerment. Language Practice occupies a position in the interface between these two positions from which it is difficult to escape.

Language Practice will have to redefine its position and agenda of activities in modes other than to subscribe overtly or covertly to strategies informed by the reigning knowledge traditions, which may be seen as hegemonic in terms of its history of the exclusion of diverse knowledges and experiences of local indigenous communities. In this effort, Language Practice will have to balance two crucial imperatives: on the one hand, not to fall prey to a philosophy of absolute cultural (and knowledge) relativism, but on the other hand, to perform Language Practice in a manner that is emancipatory towards local communities and with full recognition of diverse knowledge-producing and functioning systems together with their anchored epistemology and social configurations. A performance model of knowledge may prove to be a productive point of departure to move beyond conventionalized views of knowledge commodification and moveability, particularly in a South African context of diverse cultures and communities.

7.   BIBLIOGRAPHY

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