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### ANCIENT EGYPT AS CUNE FOR CONTEMPORARY TRANSLATION AND INTERPRETING INDUSTRY

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#### **ABSTRACT:**

The paper aims to check the hypothesis of the Ancient Egypt comprehensive impact on the contemporary interpreting and translation industry operation.

The article delivers the replies to the research questions on possible correlation between the status of translator and interpreter, fields and scope of their professional practices in society with regard to Ancient Egypt and contemporary national activities across the world.

The methodology incorporated theoretical investigation of academic publications and empirical analysis of cultural artefacts related to interpreting and translation in Ancient Egypt. The findings map the profession and activities of interpreter and translator within the societal landscape of the Ancient Egypt state with regard to the contemporary modern interpreting and translation industry, consider modern data concerning the industry standards, requirements, operation through the lenses of the interpreter and translator profession in Ancient Egypt.

The research data can be used for university-based degree courses modules on history of interpreting and translation studies. The compiled material raises societal and professional community awareness of the interpreter and translator role in the human civilisation development, bridges past and present of the professional requirements in terms of the interpreting and translation quality assurance.

#### **INTRODUCTION**

Interpreting and translation as oral and written forms, respectively, of cross language and culture communication contribute to the human civilisation harmonious development, collaboration and mutual enrichment of different cultures. The mentioned activities in the third millennium are seen as a coordinated fusion of multifaceted thinking, various literary schools and eras.

It was interpreting and translation that gave the world the birth and prosperity of huge empires densely populated by peoples of different languages. Thanks to these activities the development and spread of social and spiritual worldviews took place.

The third millennium sees translation as an essential tool for the development of a multilingual and multicultural civilization. Translation today leaves the meaningful and organizational and administrative activities of international political, socio-economic, scientific, educational organizations, within which cooperation between states takes place and enhances.

The history of interpreting and translation is usually counted from Ancient Egypt, which had solid business contacts with the surrounding cultures (Dobson & Tonks 2020; Munir et al., 2019; Shabbir et al., 2019).

Apparently, there is no information about interpreting and translation activities in the pre-Egyptian period, therefore scholars agree that the history of interpreting translation begins with Egypt and Mesopotamia, since it is there that civilization in its own sense is born and formed: writing is born there, with which the history of civilized society begins (Bagnall, 2019; Muhammad et al., 2019).

*The research hypothesis* states that the interpreting and translation practice of Ancient Egypt gave birth to the profession of interpreter and translator within the societal landscape of the state, laid grounds for major areas of the above specialist professional activities and requirements hereof, with regard the contemporary modern interpreting and translation industry.

The above hypothesis has specified the following research questions:

*RQ 1: Is there any correlation between the status of translator and interpreter in society with regard to Ancient Egypt and contemporary national practices across the world?*

*RQ 2: Are there any correlations between fields and translator and interpreter's professional practices in Ancient Egypt and contemporary national practices across the world?*

## **MATERIALS AND METHODS**

*Research materials* include textual sources of the ancient period (Cooper, 1876; McNeill & Sedlar, 1968; Porten, 1986; Pritchard et al., 2011), archaeological artefacts of the culture of Ancient Egypt, academic publications on the history of translation in Ancient Egypt.

*The research methodology* rests on the anthropological scientific paradigm, which considers man as a driving and creative force in the development of civilization.

The study integrates a theoretical analysis of the literature on the research topic and an empirical analysis of historical artefacts (selection of cultural artefacts, including archaeological and literary sites). They were considered as the empirical background of research that is implemented on the principles of artefacts case analysis (Sweet et al. 2019; Noorollahi et al., 2019; Noreen et al.,

2019), which argues for the significance of the artefacts for societal practice studies (Hurcombe, 2014; Normalini et al., 2019). Within the respective societal activities, the selected artefacts are viewed from the angle of their historical significance for practical translation, for the development of translation techniques, and the process of translator's profession social status formation.

The study runs from the standpoint of an inductive approach (Nguyen et al., 2020; Ramakrishnan et al., 2020) and also relies on a descriptive analysis of interpreting and translation activities (Hermans, 2019; Shabbir et al., 2020).

## RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

An analysis of academic sources allows us to determine the socio-historical context of the development of the social practice of interpreting and translation in Ancient Egypt.

It should be borne in mind that the emergence of the ancient Egyptian statehood is attributed to 3000 BC, and the ancient Egyptian language developed in the IV millennium BC. Throughout history, Egypt entered into contact with foreign-speaking peoples, which presupposed the presence of interpreters and translators. Naturally, the original form of cross language communication referred to oral interpreting, with further move to written translation (David, 2002). With the expansion of international contacts, the need for professional both forms of professionally performed activities increases.

### *Status of interpreter and translator in society with regard to Ancient Egypt and contemporary national practices across the world*

The study of cultural artefacts allows us to assert that the formation of the social status of an interpreter/translator and his/her professional features took place in Ancient Egypt.

The oldest real evidence of the existence of interpreters is the legendary Egyptian bas-relief, which depicts a person engaged in interpreting. The appearance of the bas-relief is attributed to the III millennium BC. Judging by the fact that the figure of the interpreter is much smaller in comparison with the others, scholars mention that it can be assumed that this occupation in Ancient Egypt had a low social status (Maspero, 2002).

In the texts of the Old Kingdom, scholars have found a special language unit, which is interpreted by Egyptologists as "interpreter" (Baines, 2007).

With reference to the first historical evidence of the linguistically verbalised mention of interpreting during the 3rd millennium BC scholars also mention the Aswan scriptures, which are the oldest surviving literal artefacts. They contain a mention that the Egyptians had interpreters/translators in the person of the princes of Elephantine (Vischak, 2014). More specifically researchers revealed that the first account of language mediators in Ancient Egypt dates back to the period of the Sixth Dynasty (twenty-fourth to twenty-second centuries BC). When exploring the titles of the princes in the tombs of the Princes of

Elephantine on Qubbet el-Hawa (a hill near Aswan), one can find the term *jmy-r(A) aw*, which means supervisor of chief of interpreters (Benderitter 2007; Hermann 2002: 16; Kurz 1985:213–218).

Further, Herman (2002:16) with reference to the script of King Neferirka-Re period supposes that interpreters were likely to be part of Ancient Egyptian expedition abroad, as the interpreters were mentioned in the manuscript along with sailors, and other members of the expedition. On grounds of other manuscripts, it is possible to state that interpreters took part in the Egyptian armies and performed their duties at the dynasty courts (ibid).

Moreover, there is evidence that nobility representatives could act as interpreters on some occasion. Thus, Kurz (1986) discovered a story of Horemheb, who was a vizier of an authority at the court of three Pharaohs, further a Pharaoh himself (1333–1306 BC), and had a portrait which showed him acting as an interpreter. Further this fact was reflected in his tomb bas-relief. It presented the interpreter as a dual figure, whose first part refers to the Pharaoh and the other part to the ambassadors who attended the court. Unfortunately, the pieces of this tomb were eventually cut off and sold. Nowadays they are in several museums today, they can be found scattered around several European museums (Kurz 1986: 73–77).

Greek historian of the 5th century BC Herodotus wrote that there were seven different castes in Egypt: priests, warriors, cow shepherds, swine herders, small traders, dragoman (interpreters) and helmsmen (Herodotus, 1920). This testifies both to the existence of numerous international ties and to the recognition of interpreters/ translators as members of Ancient Egypt society.

Interpreters and translators in ancient Egypt were a special professional group formed at the offices of the pharaohs and temples. There is evidence that even in Ancient Egypt there was a distinction between interpreter and translator's professional activities, i.e. interpreting served external contacts, while translation was carried out in the area of diplomatic correspondence and contractual texts (Delisle & Woodsworth, 2012, Wilkinson, 2016). In the XIV–XIII centuries BC sources recorded information about a specific interpreter/translator of Ancient Egypt who was the high priest Tinis Ankhurmes (Mairs, 2020).

The findings reveal that there was a kind of interpreter/translator training in Ancient Egypt. Herodotus mentioned that in the time of Ramses II (1304–1237 BCE) young men for Asiatic communities were taught Egyptian in Fayoun, and during the period of Psammetichus I (663–610 BCE) young Egyptian boys were sent to Hellenic settlers in the Nile Delta to learn a foreign language (Herodotus, 1920; Hermann 2002).

Thus, already in the history of Ancient Egypt, a socio-cultural tradition was formed in terms of the adoption of an interpreter/translator as a profession, which provides for different levels of professional competence and qualifications, and as a result, a different level of social and professional recognition of a representative of this profession in society.

Today, in different countries, this approach is systematically used taking with the account of the national administrative and legal framework.

The contemporary academic community has developed and is improving the system of levels of translation competence in the framework of training translators at universities (Best, 2019; González-Davies, 2020; Nitzke, et al., 2019; Wu et al., 2019). Specialists identify the levels of proficiency in translation competence from A1 to C1, these levels correlate with the European system of levels of proficiency in foreign languages and establish special criteria for the competencies of interpreters and translators, taking into account the genre, complexity of the degree of specialization of the original text and the translation (Hurtado Albir et al., 2018). Taking into account these tiered concepts of integral interpreting and translation competence, national programs for the training of interpreters and translators are developed (Atabekova et al., 2018 b; Sawyer et al., 2019; Robinson, 2019), the issues of translation product quality is discussed (Atabekova, Gorbatenko, 2017, Bowker, 2019).

The research results also make it possible to draw parallels between ancient times and modern standards of professional certification of interpreters and translators.

For instance, in Australia, the National Accreditation Body for Interpreters and Translators recognizes four levels of professional excellence in each specialty:

- Paraprofessional Translator (level two in earlier grading system)
- Paraprofessional Interpreter (level two in earlier grading system)
- Professional Translator (level three in earlier grading system)
- Professional Interpreter (level three in earlier grading system)
- Advanced Translator (level four in earlier grading system)
- Conference Interpreter (level five in earlier grading system)
- Advanced Translator (Senior) (level five in earlier grading system)
- Conference Interpreter (Senior) (level five in earlier grading system)

There is also a “Language Aide” category, which is not a translator and was previously known as Level 1, and a “Recognition” category, which is assigned to the languages for which NAATI is currently does not test. (NAATI, n.d).

In the USA, within the registry for deaf interpreters there are three major levels. The first one, NIC is awarded for those who pass at this level “have shown basic professional level interpreting and transliterating skills”. NIC Advanced level refers to the certificate holders have shown “within the standard range on the interview portion and high on the performance portion of the examination”. NIC Master designation is awarded o those who demonstrate highly scored level on both the interview and performance portions of the test (NIC, n.d.)

The Russian Federation identifies nine levels for professional labour standard, The levels from 6 to nine cover the holders of higher education diplomas, level 7 refer to Master degree holders, and the managerial positions, levels 8 and 9 require PhD degrees and are assigned to the directors of large corporate institutions (Qualification levels in professional standards, n.d).

Within the above scale Russia currently renews the professional standards for translators and interpreters, the following grades are to be adopted:

- Consecutive interpreter (grade 01.6)
- Official documents translator and conference interpreter (grade 02.6)
- Translator for specific purposes and use of specialized equipment (grade 03.6)
- Translation of fiction (grade 04.6)
- Audiovisual translator (grade 05.6)
- Translation quality manager (head of translation project) (grade 0.7) (Draft Order...2019).

Thus, comparing the approaches to translation profession in the ancient past and diverse present, it is possible to conclude that the Ancient Egypt laid professional background for interpreters and translators' recognition in society, paved the way for further identification of required professional competences and envisaged the origin and development of professional standards.

### ***Scope and fields of interpreter and translator's professional practices in Ancient Egypt and contemporary national practices across the world***

Studies of cultural artefacts and academic literature identify linguistic aspects of interpreting and translation practice.

The artefacts presented by historians and archaeologists allow us to say that Ancient Egypt carried out the main interlingual contacts with Mesopotamia (Sumerian and Akkadian languages). Historians and archaeologists have at their disposal a large amount of ancient diplomatic correspondence translated from the Ancient Egyptian language into the Akkadian dialect. The first documentary monuments date back to the 15th century. BC. and are translations of diplomatic correspondence from ancient Egyptian into Akkadian cuneiform (Schneider, 2020).

The activity of ancient Egyptian translators received its first rapid rise in the period from 1279 to 1213 BC, during the reign of Pharaoh Ramses II, aka Ramses the Great (Boules, 2020). During this time, Egypt achieved a very high level of economic recovery and prosperity, which gave a powerful impetus to the prosperity of literature, science and art, and numerous military victories annexed foreign-speaking lands and countries (Trindade Lopes, 2017).

From the reign of Pharaoh Ramses II around 1280 BC e. we have reached the agreement concluded by the Egyptians with the Hittite king Hattusilis. The text was originally written in Babylonian, but in Egypt the treaty was translated into Egyptian, edited by Ramses, re-translated into Babylonian, and sent to the Hittite king (Langdon & Gardiner, 1920).

This document is considered by experts as one of the holistic examples of a translation text in the field of international law (Beckman, 2006).

Translation practice in Ancient Egypt also includes artefacts from the Tel-el-Amarna Archives (Rainey, 2014; Tarawneh, 2010).

There are 382 known tablets, most of which come from the Place of the Tsars' Letters, a building identified as an official "archive" in the centre of the city of

El Amarna. The questions of their chronology are still controversial, but they can be put into a fifteen- to thirty-year period, starting around the 30th year of the reign of Amenhotep III (1390-1352 BC) and lasting no later than the 1st year of the reign of Tutankhamun (1336-1327 BC). Most of the letters are written in the dialect of Akkadian, which was the lingua franca of the time, although languages such as Assyrian, Hittite, and Hurrian (Mitanni) are also represented. The artefacts are components of the diplomatic correspondence of Egypt both with such powerful powers of Western Asia as Babylonia and Assyria, and with the vassal states of Syria and Palestine. The letters shed light on trade and diplomatic relations.

Thus, in Ancient Egypt, the multilingual practice of drafting specialised diplomatic, socio-economic, legally oriented documents developed.

To our mind, the above correlates with the current internationally accepted views on the areas of specialised interpreting and translation, their specifics in terms of contents, scope of contents and professional tasks.

Currently they are embedded in the internationally accepted ISO standards on translation in interpreting activities, specified in the following documents:

- ISO 13611:2014 Interpreting-Guidelines for community interpreting
- ISO 17100:2015. Translation Services - Requirements for Translation Services
- ISO 18841:2018. Interpreting services - General requirements and recommendations
- ISO 20228:2019. Interpreting services - Legal interpreting - Requirements
- ISO 20771 (2020) Legal translation - Requirements

The above documents contain the detailed description of interpreter/translator competences, the scope of the specialist's activities and duties, required level of training and its documentation, etc.

Furthermore, the specialisation of interpreter and translator's activities in Ancient Egypt seem to mirror current focus on the modern international community multilingual practices from the angle of societal needs, demand for multilingual communication management in humanitarian contexts (Atabekova et al 2018a).

In addition, one more area of translation should be highlighted. Thanks to translation as a comparative linguistic activity, the decoding of Egyptian hieroglyphics has become possible (Westerfeld, 2016). Therefore, the term chronological translation, with reference to Ancient Egypt, has appeared. It means the transfer of texts from more ancient forms of language to later ones.

The need for chronological translations in Egypt was caused by a change in the writing system - the replacement of hieroglyphs with alphabetic writing. This was the case, for example, with one of the largest monuments of ancient Egyptian literature, the Book of the Dead (Pritchard & Fleming, 2011). Thus, translation acted as a tool for the preservation of traditions, spiritual treasury, contributed to the continuity of the literary process.

In 1799, a granodiorite slab with a parallel inscription in Ancient Greek and Ancient Egyptian, known since the Rosetta Stone (196 BC), was discovered in Egypt near the small town of Rosetta (now Rashid), near Alexandria.

Three texts of the same meaning are embossed on it, including a variant in the ancient Egyptian language in the form of ancient Egyptian hieroglyphs, a variant in the Egyptian demotic script, which is an abbreviated cursive of the era of late Egypt, and a variant in the ancient Greek language. Ancient Greek was well known to linguists, and a comparison of the three texts served as a starting point for deciphering Egyptian hieroglyphs (Schneider, 2014).

Based on a comparative analysis of the texts, the French Egyptologist F. Champollion was able to decipher the inscription, which provided the key to the restoration of the ancient Egyptian language (Ray, 2007).

In this respect, translation became a means of restoring a lost language, and this was not an isolated phenomenon.

In general, the above findings correlate with earlier research that argues for the deep historical roots of modern industry of interpreting and translation, and contemporary culture, in general (Roland, 2020).

## **CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATION**

The above analysis confirms the research hypothesis and leads to the conclusion that interpreting and translation practice of Ancient Egypt shaped major areas of translator and interpreter professional activities, their contents, and brought to light the phenomenon of interpreter and translator as subject to the societal hierarchy of professions, which require specific training and skills.

The study made it possible to identify and describe obvious correlation between the status of translator and interpreter in society with regard to Ancient Egypt and contemporary national practices across the world. It refers to the different levels of recognised qualifications that, in turn lead to different position in society.

Further, the findings specified correlations between fields and translator and interpreter's professional practices in Ancient Egypt and contemporary interpreting and translation activities across the world.

The findings highlight the historical cultural background for the contemporary professional standards, requirements, values of interpreting and translation industry.

The contemporary digitalization of the industry operation does not withdraw the relevance of professional activities specialisation, their quality assurance and client/end user of interpreting/translation product satisfaction.

The collected data contribute to raising societal awareness of the historical roots and dimensions of the interpreter and translator profession, underlines the need for respect of and demand for quality service provision.

The results can be used in the university-based degree courses for interpreters and translators. The study of cultural artefacts within the module on the history of interpreting and translation (as part of internationally accepted university



course on Translation Studies) helps students to understand the historical context of these activities, their creative mission in the development of civilization, and professional responsibility of respective specialists for the interpreting and translation product quality.

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