

## RESEARCH ARTICLE

## A Sociological reading of the archaeology of translation and its social needs

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### Abstract:

This article takes a sociological approach to identify the process of translation from the beginning of its emergence outlining the most significant and influential stages throughout history in order to understand the effects of translation, explaining the most important anthropological factors that have made it an important stage in the development of peoples civilizations and the development of science and knowledge through various historical stages.

Through a sociological approach, we also seek to highlight the most important social divisions of the need for translation after it became an official specialization, approach and function in various social spaces and was adopted by all official and unofficial social settings, as well as to highlight the impact of translation and its crucial role in both the Arab-Muslim and the European renaissance. **Key words:** translation, archaeology, sociology, social need, distribution

### Introduction:

The concept of translation goes far beyond the process of converting texts from one language to another, and goes beyond basic and superficial definitions, as it is an essential tool of communication between different cultures, contributing to the exchange of ideas and knowledge transmission. On the other hand, some people claim that translation is a powerful asset to the rest of the world and

societies, because it is not a modern science invented by men for a need they want and use in this complex

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contemporary world, but they have deliberately practiced the art of translation for ages before it was first called 'translation'.

It is true that it involves transferring meanings and concepts in a precise way that reflects the essence of the original text, but it is also a process and a social requirement that has been imposed throughout history.

Translation has improved understanding and communication between cultures and has promoted international cooperation and openness to others. The history of translation dates back to ancient times, and it is not limited to a single civilization, but it is rooted in all ancient civilizations. As a fundamental necessity of human communication, translation offers the significant advantage of allowing each nation to preserve its own civilization and language in their entirety, without compromise.

Translation was implicitly present in the earliest forms of human communication, and the strength of its presence stems from

the nature of human beings, who are condemned to live in social ways and structures at one time, and obliged to live within them at another, as an interactive and complementary process between different social groups, bearing in mind that other researchers speak of the *instinct to translate* with a strong emphasis and believe that '*the activity of translation is as characteristic of man as is the production of language*' (Decarlo, 118 : 2006), and so it has built bridges of knowledge, respect and love between peoples, even if they differ in the language of communication, and played a significant role in the establishment of treaties and global economies, facilitating commercial transactions and communication between cultures.

It is believed that the essence of our problematic is based on the principle that translation is a subject that deserves to be discussed and analyzed through a sociological reading of the effects of translation, identifying the most important social distributions of the need for translation and how it has contributed in the course of history to the rebirth of nations and people, and identifying the most important pillars that have made it an indispensable social requirement, regardless of differences in religion, language, race, and the spatial and temporal background of peoples. **1) The archaeology of translation:**

### **1.1) The relationship between translation and history:**

The origins of translation go back to the ancient history of mankind, and the translation movement originated when men, in the course of their various travels, became aware of the need to learn the art and tools of translation to meet their needs, such as communication with neighboring people or with those who maintain various commercial, economic and communication relationships with others. In order to

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understand the history of translation, we need to read the accounts of certain thinkers (Bassnett, 2002) who believe that we must first study the lives of the first translators, who left their mark on the past, and then study the translations they produced, which explains the distant past of translation from the time of the first tribes.

Certain facts show the existence of a close relationship between the beginning of the era of civilizations and the practice of translation. It is said that *'translation is an ancient need, rooted in antiquity'* (Shehada, 17: 1988), and the evidence is still very much alive in the great international museums, such as the letters of *'Tell el-Amarna'* dating from the 15th century BC, written in Akkadian and ancient Egyptian, and the *'Rosetta Stone'* dating from the 5th century BC, written in hieroglyphs, Greek and ancient Egyptian.

What confirms the relationship between translation and history, and the fact that it is neither socially, nor morally and necessarily nor anthropologically correct to separate them, is the existence of humans throughout the world where each population group has a language that it speaks and the second thing is that these people need to communicate with close or neighboring population

groups. It can, therefore, be confirmed that the dialectic between history and translation is above all a human and social necessity, and at the same time that this necessity is derived from the nature of humans who are condemned to live in social ways and structures at one time and obliged to live within them at another time, as an interactive and complementary process between different population groups.

What proves the validity of our statement about the connection of translation and history is the discovery of archaeological excavations dating back to the third millennium BC in northern Syria with tablets written in more than two languages, which shows that these tablets are the first beginnings of translation and proof of the existence of translation dictionaries (Shehada, 10: 2007).

Therefore, we can see that there is an existential and social imperative for human beings to pay attention to the field of translation as a functional need of living through history and geography, and that this need was and still is an essential tool and means despite the thousands of years that have passed and despite the development that continues to exist in this growing and fast-paced world at the same time, which clearly explains that *'the role of translators who were and still are mediators between cultures, facilitating communication between the cultures of different peoples, and transmitting messages and knowledge'* (Salwa), and from this it is clear that there is a relationship between the history of the emergence of translation and the history of man and societies. **1.2 The impact of translation on civilizations:**

Going back to the terminological definition of civilization, we find that it expresses the entire cultural, material, social and intellectual heritage, i.e. all the scientific, literary and artistic manifestations of any society. Both sides maintain that the emergence of civilizations is a sequential

cumulative process over time, and that every existing civilization draws its roots from earlier civilizations and is not devoid of the heritage of the past and is complementary to the civilization that preceded it, which supports the claim that *Greek civilization was at the origin of later civilizations*.

In terms of civilizations, translation is considered to be the bridge of communication between different peoples, and some consider it to be one of the decisive factors in the surge in intellectual, scientific and cultural prosperity, in the transfer of ideas from the mother tongue to foreign languages; the relationship between translation and civilization can in no way be denied, as some believe that *'translation is an integral part of the intellectual life of any civilized people'* (Newmark, P4 : 1982), and the proof of this is that the Europeans opened their doors to the flow of Arab science when Arab civilization was at its highest ; and the Arabs, like other nations, have been aware of the importance of translation and communication with different peoples and civilizations since the time of the

Jahiliyya and the tribes that surrounded them, such as the Persians, the Romans, the Abyssinians and others; the need for translation was not the exact

description we know today, which only became clear at the time of the Arab world.

Regarding the triangular relationship between translation, history, language and nations, some thinkers claim that *'translations have played an important role in the formation of languages, as noted by'* Cordonnier (1995) and Berman (1978); and there is some historical evidence to suggest that in Spain, under the influence of King Alfonso X, who gave himself the title of emendador, which means corrector of the texts translated in his kingdom, the abundant activity of translating Greek, Latin and Arabic texts into Castilian was one of the factors contributing to the affirmation of this vernacular as the language of the court. (Decarlo, 218: 2006).

Following this brief overview, it is clear that there are direct and indirect links between translation and civilization, and that ancient civilization contributed to the development of translation in terms of its impact on people and nations.

### **1.3 Translation has gone from being a necessity to a profession:**

It is said that the emergence of translation had initially began with individual attempts, and then the intellectual, social, cultural, political, economic and other needs of different peoples led to the establishment of a new concept that framed the demand for translation and entrusted it to institutions, states and centres' specifically prepared for the requirements of translation. It is clear that it is not only people who migrate and move, but also ideas, texts and versions of all kinds, either in their original language or through translation.

In addition to the individual demand for translation, it is said that the official and institutional demand for translation began with the domination of the Greek language in the East in particular, as historical documents state that the kings of Persia and Rome were encouraged to call on Syriac

translators to conclude agreements between them, which was the approach taken by the Muslim kings, allowing us to understand that translation has moved from man's individual attempts to satisfy his personal need and curiosity to the collective and institutional framework. Certain elements indicate that the reign of *Al-Ma'mun* witnessed a major revolution in the field of translation, particularly in terms of conditions of translators and their fancy salaries. In-depth research in the history books we looked through while preparing to write this article show that some translators' work was rewarded with prizes every Tuesday, prizes worth as much as the weight of the book in gold, and that the most important translations known at the time had several titles and covered many fields, such as logic, medicine and philosophy, including the Greek books "*The Geometry of Euclid*" and "*The Politics of Plato*".

Regarding the significance of the movement transferring science and culture, the attention of many kings and heads of state throughout the various historical periods, past and present, has focused on the role of translation in the development of scientific, intellectual and evolutionary life, focusing on the

requirements of translators. In the Abbasid era, for instance, it is noticed that the translator cannot practice his profession without certain basic conditions, for which the political system is responsible, including the guarantee of his material rights and the political protection that allows the translator to practice his profession without threat or danger.... Translators need a special law that guarantees them a decent life so that they do not stray from their mission, and so that translation does not stray from its goal (Cherifi, 165: 2006). Similarly, there are dozens or more centres specialising in translation at national or international level, especially if the leaders have a remarkable fondness for culture and science; And if we go back in time, we can see what translation had achieved at the time of *Harun al-Rashid*, who is said to have been more passionate about science and literature than his predecessors, and the attention he had paid to the translation movement and its material encouragement were the major reasons that led him to achieve what it had achieved at that time, and some consider that the era of translation experienced its most brilliant phases before the Caliph *alMa'mun*.

Speaking of this growing interest in the translation movement throughout the different eras, we can say that without the translator, translation would not have been possible, and so translation became a job managed by its owners before what were individual attempts. Hence, translation evolved from an individual request or isolated personal character to a complete social character entrusted to organizations and translators and managed as a permanent industry and a stable job. History books show that in the Abbasid era, translation became a profession that conferred a distinguished social status on the translator, and even became an official job that culminated in the Baghdad School of Translation, in what is



known as the House of Wisdom, under the Abbasid caliph *Al-Ma'mun*. According to *Jean RenéLadmiral*, a French thinker who has worked in the field of translation for many years, *'translation is not only an individual and collective undertaking, but it is also the second oldest profession in the world'*. (Baker, 199: 2005), and this is a major indication of the transition from translation as a requirement to the status of a craft, or a profession defined by a status of its own. **2) A sociological analysis of the social need for translation:**

### **2.1) Social distribution of translation needs:**

Today, more than ever, translation plays a crucial role in international relations. Transactions between countries, whether diplomatic, economic, cultural or humanitarian, require clear and precise communication. Professional translation agencies are at the heart of this process, providing essential services to overcome language barriers and facilitate mutual understanding.

This why translation is so important in international relations and how translation agencies contribute to this vital area.

Diplomacy relies on precise and accurate exchanges between representatives of different countries; and the presence of translators and interpreters is essential at international

negotiations, conferences and meetings, as they ensure accurate communication to avoid misunderstandings and potential conflicts. Translation agencies, with their specialized and experienced translators, ensure that diplomatic messages are conveyed with honesty and cultural sensitivity, in other cases it can be used for espionage purposes. International trade relies heavily on translation for effective communication between companies, partners, customers and regulators in different languages. Professional translators translate contracts, financial documents, marketing materials and much more, enabling companies to enter new markets and build strong business relationships.

Translation enables researchers and engineers from different countries to collaborate effectively, and translation companies specializing in technical and scientific fields ensure that complex information is translated accurately, minimizing the risk of errors, particularly in critical areas such as medical translation.

Translation also plays an essential role in the dissemination of cultures and educational systems throughout the world. Translated literature, films, television programmers and educational material enable people to discover and understand different cultures thanks to high-quality translations that respect cultural nuances, thus facilitating the spread of culture.

In terms of expertise and specialization, we employ translators who specialize in different fields, such as law, finance, medicine and technology, and this expertise guarantees accurate translations tailored to specific contexts.

In addition, our translators are flexible and adaptable, able to handle different workloads and complex multilingual projects. This flexibility enables companies and organizations to adapt quickly to the changing needs of the international market.

Regarding the other objectives of translation when it is present, some stress and insist that translation, in addition to the known and usual objectives, is used for the purposes of hegemony, occupation and political superiority. This is similar to the case of the English language, which dominated the world, particularly after the Second World War, where some point out that '*translation is used by the colonizer as a tool to reinforce his power and consolidate the authority of his hegemony*' (Baker, 195: 2005).

It is understandable that the need for translation, indeed its necessity in today's world, is taking on a predominant role in the lives of individuals, societies and nations.

## **2.2) the role of political guidelines in the translation drive:**

The strong impetus given to the translation movement, whether from foreign languages into Arabic or from Arabic into foreign languages, may have various motives and reasons, however through the lens of many studies, the decisive factor was the concern of rulers, kings and politicians regarding the development of science and culture, as well as the freedom of belief and thought that prevailed in societies, in addition to the patronage of scholars by rulers

and their encouragement of the creation of works and translation. These leaders recognised the value of openness to other languages and that translation is a factor of communication between cultures and that it is not only a means of knowledge between nations, but that the most important objective is the transfer of ideas and sciences from one nation to another and from one language to another. Guided by this vision, translation has been strongly promoted for the benefit of nations in the short and medium term.

The roots of the interest in translation lie mainly in the strong impetus given by political decision, and it is said, according to those who witnessed the great translation movement in Arab-Islamic civilizations, that under the reigns of *Harun al-Rashid* and his son *al-Ma'mun*, translation was an official task undertaken by the state, which spent its treasury, mobilized the greatest translators, scientists and thinkers and established scientific institutions. It is said that the Caliph *al-Ma'mun* learnt that there was a collection of ancient books specializing in the ancient sciences in the country of Rome, and that they were kept in locked catacombs that did not see the light and that it was forbidden to read them, so he organized a scientific delegation and sent it to the Emperor of Rome to persuade him to bring these ancient books (El kafti and others, 23: 1961).

Similarly, the European Renaissance followed the same approach and the rulers' contribution in directing and pushing towards the translation and transfer of the achievements of Arab-Islamic civilization, as this period witnessed the most brilliant era of Islamic civilization in terms of the brilliance of science and knowledge of all kinds, scientific and literary, medicine, astronomy and other types of science. In this context, some consider that the translation movement of the time was a parallel activity to the Crusades. To

confirm this, History books show us that during this historical period, the English Catholic translator, in a letter to the Bishop of Norberts when he came to Toledo, said: *'Let us therefore, in accordance with the Lord's command and with his help, strip the pagan philosophers of their wisdom and eloquence, let us strip these infidels so that we may be enriched by their spoils in faithfulness'*. (Golf, 24:1085).

Certainly, even contemporary history has witnessed more than this, and the envy of Europeans towards the Arab-Islamic Renaissance and the gains they boasted in knowledge and science, and during Napoleon's campaign on Egypt, after the total destruction of Egypt at the time, but his primary approach was also to draw on the knowledge of the Arabs, where many orientalist flocked in the guise of tourists and in the guise of students of science and knowledge, and the most dangerous of them were those who wore the uniform of Islam, sitting in Al-Azhar, and attending the lessons of the great sheikhs.

Some readings confirm that the real beginning of the translation movement among the Arabs began in the Abbasid period, which played an important role in many translations, particularly during the time of *Abu Jaafar al-Mansur*, the Abbasid caliph,

and among the most famous translators of this period were *'Yahya ibn al-Batriq'*, *'Georgis ibn Gabriel the doctor'* and *"Abdullah ibn al-Muqaffa"*, and the most important works known at that time were the translations of certain Persian literary books, the most famous of which are *"Little Literature"*, then *"Great Literature"* and *"Kalila and Dumna"*, as well as certain Greek books such as the book of Aristotle and others.

In the West, translation made great strides in translating many works written in a language other than their own, but little by little, according to some, especially in the Middle Ages, due to the prevailing belief that a person was not considered a thinker and scientist in the true sense of the word if they did not write in Latin, so thinkers and scientists wrote their thoughts in Latin, which they knew well, in addition to their mother tongue.

Some sources indicate that the West began to take an interest in the translation movement with the translation of the Torah known as the *'Septuagint'*, which, according to the same sources, was the first translation of the Old Testament from Hebrew into Greek. It was called the *'Septuagint'* in reference to the number of translators involved in translating the Torah. This translation then served as the basis for other translations and was translated into Armenian, Georgian, Latin, Coptic and other languages.

### **3) The contribution of translation to cultural and scientific activity:**

#### **3.1) The impact of translation on the Arab and European Renaissance:**

With this in mind, we seek to clarify the importance of translation in the development of thought, peoples and



civilizations, particularly the development of science and knowledge, because all past and present data indicate the importance of cooperation and of strengthening communication with cultures, thought and everything that different peoples have achieved in terms of science, culture, economics, technology and so on, thus approaching the issue with all due seriousness; indeed it is said even in colloquial knowledge: *People who do not take one step forward take two steps back*. In this respect, certain facts indicate that translation as a specialty and translators as craftsmen have played an important role in the history of humanity on several levels: invention of the alphabet, dissemination of knowledge, propagation and export of religions, writing of dictionaries, etc. (Delisle, 14: 1995)

Speaking of the circulation of knowledge and science among different societies and its positive effects, we would like to clarify the importance of the circulation of individuals through the translation of books and publications, and it has become clear that thought and science have no colour, religion, time or geography, and to underline this point, some illustrate, that translation is a just sovereign that does not

care about our many differences of race, colour, ethnicity, language and culture, but welcomes our differences and turns them into a close bond that unites us all in a world that, despite its vastness, resembles a small village, so that we are all like children of the same family (El hadidi) ; which means that when an idea is disseminated and circulates among different peoples, it does not become the monopoly of its owner, and confirming that knowledge and science transcend all borders, the Egyptian thinker known as Al-Jahiz said: *'The book hardly appeared in Kufa, for example, before it was attracted to Basra and its strong scientific spirit, so that the paparazzi accepted it by copying and distributing it, and the students and scholars accepted it by studying and reading it'* (El hadjiri, 140: 1979). As for the importance of access to books and written sources in foreign languages, the book is a reservoir of knowledge and a bearer of ideas, and the best companion that brings you energy, light, reason, insight and creativity, and helps you solve problems, understand societies and open up to others, and is the source of influence in the scientific and academic environment, as Al-Jahiz predicts in his book *The Animal* when he refers to Diocrates, saying *Every book written by one of the sages should have eight aspects: interest, benefit, lineage, genre, author, attribution and management*.

As far as the importance of translation in the progress of societies is concerned, we must refer to the Arab Renaissance at the height of Islamic civilisation, because that period saw a great prosperity in the sciences, including medicine, mathematics, astronomy, chemistry and geography, as the thinker Abdul Hamid Saleh Hamdan says: *'Thanks to translation, Arab civilization and Arab science were born'*. In other words, the credit goes to a group of scientists and thinkers who worked on translating and

transferring Greek, Persian and Indian sciences into Arabic, and the same thing happened with the European Renaissance when Europeans began to translate and transfer Greek, Persian and Indian sciences into Arabic, not forgetting the intellectual and scientific impact left by the Arabs in Andalusia and what they transferred from them.

### **3.2) Principles of university scientific research:**

To prepare scientific research of all kinds and for various scientific purposes, whether in the years of study, promotion in the ranks of professors and researchers or for other purposes, most of them have recourse to numerous sources and references, particularly in the theoretical part of their work. Most of them believe that the importance of scientific research depends on the strength of its sources and references, especially when they come from prestigious and modern scientific databases and platforms, which increases the value of written scientific material for its owner, and some may consider that 'the more information a researcher gathers ..., the more he will be able to cover his research in all its branches and fields' (Hamdane).

We can agree or disagree on the nomenclature because the terms sources and references-

are two overlapping concepts, and the difference between them lies mainly in the fact that sources are the oldest materials on a subject, or in other words, the first documents and studies transmitted by narrative, whereas references are those whose scientific material is based mainly on the original sources, exposing them to analysis, criticism and synthesis (El hadjiri , 158: 1961). All the efforts made by the researcher to appropriate sources and references not only serve to increase the value of his or her efforts, but some consider this to be what is known as positive diligence, which enables the researcher to compare incidents of the present with those of the past in order to assist him or her in reaching a conclusion and to see that many incidents are related to one another and that this diligence applies to all historical facts, customs, society and its evolution or change in various aspects and to individual incidents.

It can be concluded at this point that references and sources enable the researcher to ensure the accuracy of the research and the credibility of the results and conclusions, that they can inspire and guide the researcher towards the creation of new ideas or the formulation of new research questions and that, thanks to them, the researcher can also recognize the efforts of others and contribute to the dissemination of knowledge and the development of the scientific field, and that they also play a crucial role in the success of the scientific research process and help to raise the level of quality and reliability of the results obtained.

### **3.3) Direct effect of translation on the quality of scientific research:**

If every right is to be respected, we must be aware that recourse to foreign sources written outside the national language in all its varieties,

then translating them and using them in various academic works, is not a sign of weakness or dissolution of the national language of the country or of dependence. At the same time, we must recognize that if we are to be at the forefront of science and knowledge, we must be open to others, particularly to prestigious international scientific productions, and that researchers must not limit their research to a restricted geographical area under any pretext whatsoever. We believe that science and knowledge are not the monopoly of one country, one nationality, one race or one person, and that science is characterized by a social nature, and that knowledge transcends religion, nationality, place or time, and the proof of this is reading, to make use of the writings of other thinkers of all races and all times ; and that many theories and laws come from different nationalities, and it is said that *'the environment of books was one of the widest, most fascinating and most conducive to different tendencies'* and as the Italian philosopher Gianni Vattimo says: *'there is no definitive finish line for knowledge'* (Leduc, 2009).

On the other hand, it must be recognized that the use of translations of foreign sources necessarily serves the scientific research being studied, increases its value and the results obtained, and enriches the research from a theoretical point of view. And some long or even modest academic

careers recognize the importance of resorting to translation when foreign sources are necessary, and no one considers that this is detrimental to the research itself or to the national language; on the contrary, translation is an effective tool for investing in the national language and opening up to science and scientific knowledge, and as for the relationship between the impact of foreign languages on the national language, many consider this to be pure intellectual naivety and see translation into the national language as a long-term investment to preserve the value of scientific research, not a short-term investment.

A long-term investment to preserve the value of the language, and that each translation adds value to it, translations into a language can be considered as an indicator of its value, and it is said that *'one translates to discover a culture, to appropriate knowledge ... one translates to advance science and technology, and one translates for one and a thousand reasons'* (Newmark, 4: 1982).

As for the relationship between the academic researcher's translation effort and the sources written in a language other than that of his country, it is only the fruit of scientific research and above all reflects its scientific quality. This research paper reminded me of the famous interview with the Malaysian leader 'Mohamed Mahathir', who ruled that country for many years and whose reign witnessed a strong renaissance for his country, with the famous Egyptian journalist 'Ahmed Mansour'. In this interview, when asked about the economic growth in his country and the impetus of its educational and scientific system, Mohamed Mahathir replied: 'I have simply opened the door to all students and researchers who want to study abroad' you would understand when you go to study abroad and of course to use translation as

a key element and research tool to advance knowledge and understanding.

If we have had the courage to cite this example, it is only to remind ourselves that some foreign languages are ahead of us in the fields of science, technology and economics, and that this is not considered a disadvantage for us if we try to progress, move forward and benefit from international experience. We should also mention, among other things, that in order to acquire knowledge in the current era, especially in view of recent advances in technology, information and knowledge, we should consider translating scientific works published here and elsewhere in the four corners of the planet.

### **Conclusion:**

Through an analytical reading of the itineraries of translation through its profound history, and using the historical method on the one hand and the analytical approach on the other, the purpose of this article is not to identify the most significant historical stages, nor to survey the most relevant ancient and modern studies and the most eminent thinkers who have dealt with this theme, but rather to try to understand and explain the process of the history of translation and to identify its various effects across all temporal and spatial coordinates. One of the most

significant conclusions is that the start of translation coincided with the rise of mankind and their presence in the universe, and that the history and progress of translation are linked to man's journey because of the importance of translation in his simple and then complex life, as certain elements and circumstances accumulated to be two basic components of the need of individuals, societies and countries to have a requirement and therefore the need for translation in life in general.

At the same time, the shift and transformation of the demand for translation in general is also the result of social, cultural, economic, political and other changes, as translation has contributed and will continue to contribute to the distribution of its social needs through individual and official initiatives, in particular thanks to the momentum and desire of leaders and States, who are fully aware that the development of nations is linked to exposure to others, and other cultures as well as different sources of science and knowledge, regardless of their origins, and that everyone is convinced of the importance of translation as one of the oldest professions to have made an impartial contribution.

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