An analysis and comparison on the aspects of silence and speaking in the *Maxims of Ptahhotep* and the *Book of Proverbs*

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The wisdom of ancient teachings has always served as a source of nourishment for the development of our world. For instance, the Maxims of Ptahhotep and the Book of Proverbs offer profound insights into the roles of silence and speech, which shape ethical and interpersonal human formation. The Maxims of Ptahhotep, one of many texts in the ancient Egyptian wisdom traditions, provides valuable life lessons that express the cultural and ethical dimensions of communication in religions and societies deeply influenced by Maat.

On the other hand, the Book of Proverbs, one of the ancient wisdom books in the Hebrew Scripture, explores the aspects of silence and speaking in the context of fearing God, pursuing righteousness and wisdom, and building oneself and the community. Thus, delving into the theme of speaking and silence in the Maxims of Ptahhotep and the Book of Proverbs is a worthwhile adventure that allows us to explore the ancient wisdom literature of two traditions, in order to gain a deeper understanding of the use of speech and the practice of silence in ethical, religious and social contexts, uncover universal and timeless principles that guide effective communication and interpersonal relationships, and apply this knowledge to solve the problem of modern-day communication breakdowns and conflicts that often arise from mismanaged speech and the underestimation of silence's power in both personal and public discourse.

The Maxims of Ptahhotep

A. Social background and setting of the Maxims of Ptahhotep

Ptahhotep is believed to have lived during the period known as the Old Kingdom, around the Fifth Dynasty (approximately the 25th century BCE). It is speculated that he may have served as a vizier under King Djedkare Izezi (ca. 2380 – 2342 B.C.). During Djedkare's reign, the expanding bureaucracy diminished administrative efficiency and unsettled the social balance, which led him to bolster the vizier's position and curtail the power of subordinates. This period also saw a flourishing of crafts, trade, and writing. As such, it is reasonable to believe that Ptahhotep, as the vizier, contributed to the state administration's educational needs.[1] Ptahhotep is renowned for his work The Maxims of Ptahhotep. However, the exact dates of the text remain unresolved, as some Egyptologists argue that the language and grammar used in the text suggest a connection to the Middle Kingdom, even though the content itself reflects the spirit of the Old Kingdom.[2] Most

[1] M. VERNER, The Pyramids. The Archaeology and History of Egypt's Iconic Monuments (Dar el Kutub no. 26213; Cairo – N.Y. 2020) 31-32.

[2] S. L. ADAMS, *Wisdom in Transition.* Act and Consequence in Second Temple Instructions (JSJSup v. 125; Leiden – Boston 2008) 27.

contemporary scholars consider claims that The Maxims of Ptahhotep originated in the Old Kingdom as fictional.[3] Others believe that The Maxims of Ptahhotep (together with the Instruction of Hardjedef and the Instructions of Kagemni) should be classified as pseudepigrapha. Hardjedef was composed during the Fifth Dynasty, while Kagemni and Ptahhotep are from the Sixth Dynasty, as they possess many late Old Kingdom characteristics.[4] Another study of the manuscripts reveals that Ptahhotep contains extensive traces of grammar and style from the period between the Twelfth and Eighteenth Dynasty.[5] Although Egyptologists and experts continue to debate the exact composition date of the Maxims of Ptahhotep, evidence from the text's grammar and style suggests it was circulated before the Middle Kingdom. It may have been then either transcribed or revised during the Middle Kingdom. As a result, its textual and grammatical style may reflect the social context of the transition from the Old Kingdom to the Middle Kingdom.[6]

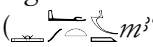
The Maxims of Ptahhotep is one of the collections of moral and philosophical instructions of wisdom passed down from father to son. It is like other typical Egyptian instructions (the sebayit) which aim to shape character and promote proper behavior in both family and public settings. These texts were likely taught in schools to impart character, literacy, and writing skills. They use witty reflections and vivid warnings to encourage honest behavior. Unlike many other Egyptian texts, the instructions focus on everyday human existence rather than the afterlife or deities. They offer practical advice on topics such as how to behave before a superior or how to raise an honest child in a hierarchical society.[7] These wisdom texts were highly regarded in ancient Near Eastern cultures, with authors like Ptahhotep being seen as sages. The Maxims provide insights on the challenges of old age and include the author's opening comments and the first Maxim.[8] It is perhaps the earliest fully developed Western didactic text focused on talk: performing talk, listening to talk, and utilizing talk events in social interactions. It is seen as a "wisdom" text teaching etiquette and manners.[9]

Ptahhotep's instructional style consists of primarily speaking or telling as his main instructional methods. His instructions are mostly organized in a tripartite structure: (i) a conditional clause, (ii) a series of imperatives, and (iii) summary statements that reiterate and emphasize the point being made.[10] He extensively utilizes the imperative mood in approximately 92 percent of his 134 specific instructions, thus emphasizing his authority and the significance of his teaching. This deliberate choice of language could have been aimed at easing the readers' concerns when approaching such a comprehensive text, ensuring their confidence and willingness to engage with its complexity.[11]

Moreover, the text of the Maxims was seen as having a significant formative function for officials. This function is explicitly stated in the prologue, where the king advises Ptahhotep to teach wisdom in accordance with the speech of the past. This indicates that the Egyptians had a great respect for ancestral wisdom, the tradition of the transmission of

[3] F. HAGEN, *An Ancient Egyptian Literary Text in Context.* The Instructions of Ptahhotep (OLA 218; Belgium 2012) 154-155.
[4] M. LICHTHEIM, *Ancient Egyptian Literature* (Oakland, Calif. 2019) 36-37.
[5] A. STAUDER, *Linguistic Dating of Middle Egyptian Literary Texts* (ed. G. MOERS – F. KAMMERZELL – K. WIDMAIER) (LASM; 2013) XII, 94, 108.
[6] Therefore, this paper's textual analysis of the *Maxims of Ptahhotep* is based on Middle Egyptian Literature, although some argue that Ptahhotep belongs to the Old Kingdom.
[7] S. L. ADAMS, "Wisdom Literature in Egypt", *The Wiley Blackwell Companion to Wisdom Literature* (ed. S. L. ADAMS – M. GOFF) ([1]2020) 313.
[8] J. L. FOSTER (ed.), *Ancient Egyptian Literature.* An Anthology (Austin, Tex. [lst ed] 2001) 186.
[9] J. MULHOLLAND, "The earliest Western talk analysis?: Ptahhotep's Instructions", *Text Talk* 37/1 (2017) 72.
[10] M. LICHTHEIM, *Late Egyptian Wisdom Literature in the International Context.* A study of Demotic Instructions (OBO 52; Freiburg, Schweiz: Göttingen 1983) 2-3.
[11] MULHOLLAND, "The earliest Western talk analysis?... ", 76.

cultural identity and education.[12] Thus, the Maxims was intended to serve as a powerful tool for shaping the identity and behavior of elite members of society. It also helped maintain a stable and harmonious social order. Furthermore, its purpose was to instill in the elite the values and behaviors appropriate for their high social status. This ensured that they executed their roles and responsibilities with the highest level of excellence.

Throughout ancient Egyptian history, Maat ( *m3ʿt*)[13] played a central role in its development. Maat served as both a goddess and a concept.[14] The *Maxims of Ptahhotep* were composed with the purpose of upholding Maat, which encompasses concepts of "right/rightness," "truth," and "justice," and served as the fundamental principle that guided the actions and beliefs of the people.[15] It represented the ideal way of life that the gods themselves adhered to and was considered essential for maintaining harmony and order in society. It aimed for a faithful pupil to achieve "life, prosperity, and health" through adherence to the maxims. The advice focuses on attaining success, exhibiting good manners, social mobility, and avoiding boastfulness. The text reflects a conservative and patriarchal context, affirming the status quo and emphasizing the importance of following Maat.[16]

The *Maxims of Ptahhotep* discusses various topics related to life during its time. The composition of this text utilizes different techniques and typical ancient Egyptian literary devices to express its content. This study will specifically focus on two aspects: silence and speech in some selected maxims, in order to explore the beauty and values conveyed in Ptahhotep's teachings.

B. Silence in the teaching of Ptahhotep

The most important moral principle of the ancient Egyptians was Maat, which represented right and proper behavior. Maat was the foundational ideal and the central concept of ancient Egyptian ethics and religions.[17] Individuals were encouraged to live according to Maat for their own personal benefit as well as for the common good. Allen argues that "[t]he individual who lives according to Maat is often described as  *gr* 'the quiet man' or 'the still man' or  *rḫ* 'the knowledgeable man', as opposed to  *wḫ3* 'the fool'".[18] According to this statement, if silence held such significance for the ancient Egyptians, it would have been known in every aspect of life. It is likely that teachings on silence were widespread throughout the kingdom. However, due to a lack of original documents and writings, we cannot thoroughly confirm how silence was understood and taught. Still, we can examine aspects like the circumstances, targets, and methods of teaching and applying silence. Thankfully, the *Maxims of Ptahhotep* provides some insight into these areas.

The hieroglyphic word/root  *gr* literally means *be silent*; *silence*. The word *grw*

[12] However, Jay believes that Ancient Egyptian education was primarily informal and vocational, with parents imparting necessary skills to their children, and children frequently following their parents' professions. (J.E. JAY, "Education", *All things Ancient Egypt.* An Encyclopedia of the Ancient Egyptian World (ed. L. SABBAHY) (Santa Barbara, Calif. – Denver, Colo. 2019) 147.) Despite this, given the ancient texts that remain, I maintain that education played a pivotal role in their society.

[13] The concept of 'maat' cannot be fully conveyed through translation, as it requires intimate life experience to truly grasp. The written form of 'maat' includes a straight line, symbolizing 'straightness' and 'evenness'. Similarly, in Hebrew, the word 'yāšār' (יָשָׁר) initially means 'straight, even' in a geometric sense, and later evolves to mean 'right' and 'correct'. (S. MORENZ, *Egyptian Religion* (SCA 12; London 2004) 113-126.)

[14] C. S. LIPSON, "Ancient Egyptian Rhetoric: It All Comes Down to Maat", Rhetoric Before and Beyond the Greeks (ed. C. S. LIPSON – R. A. BINKLEY) (Albany, N.Y. 2004), 80.

[15] M. LICHTHEIM, *Maat in Egyptian Autobiographies and Related Studies* (OBO 120; Freiburg, Schweiz 1992) 7.

[16] S. L. ADAMS, "Wisdom Literature in Egypt", 317-318.

[17] LICHTHEIM, Maat in Egyptian Autobiographies and Related Studies, 18-19; M. KARENGA, Maat, The Moral Ideal in Ancient Egypt. A Study in Classical African Ethics (African studies; N.Y. 2004) 5.

[18] J. P. ALLEN, *Middle Egyptian.* An Introduction to the Language and Culture of Hieroglyphs (Cambridge 3rd ed. 2014) 306.

means a silent, calm one.[19] It signifies a man who knows what to say, but has not been summoned to do so.[20] There are seven times[21] that the word silent/quiet (*gr*) is used in the *Maxims of Ptahhotep*.[22]

"gr" as a person

The prologue

> Age is here, old age arrived,
> Feebleness came, weakness grows,
> Childlike one sleeps all day.
> Eyes are dim, ears deaf,
> Strength is waning through weariness,
> The mouth, silenced, speaks not,
> The heart, void, recalls not the past,

As previously stated, in the Middle Kingdom, the word *gr* conveys stillness or quietness, rather than silence. A "quiet man" is someone who behaves calmly and thoughtfully, as opposed to acting with passion or impulsiveness.[23] This character is displayed very well in the prologue above which specifically highlights the dignified elderly. This suggests that as physical abilities diminish, the capacity for silent reflection and imparting wisdom becomes more pronounced and valuable. The silence (*gr*) in this case signifies the gentleness and calm of the elderly to interact with the next generation.

> So as to tell him the words of those who
> heard, The ways of the ancestors,
> Who have listened to the gods.
> …
> Instruct him then in the sayings of the past,
> May he become a model for the children of the great,

The lines above indicate that this elder sought to pass on the wisdom of the ancestors and the gods. He demonstrates a commitment to the principles of learning, teaching. His efforts aim to maintain harmony and wisdom across generations, and to promote service to leadership. The phrase "Who have listened to the gods" and his advanced age suggest that he possesses an accumulated wisdom that everyone should search and learn from. As one opinion comments on him: "If we wish to be wise with the most ancient wisdom of the Egyptians, we must thank the wise old prefect who, high in station, with 110 summers on his head, full of years, dignity and wisdom, determined to set down all the proverbs of his

[19] A. H. GARDINER, *Egyptian Grammar.* Being An Introduction to the Study of Hieroglyphs (Oxford 3rd ed., 1994)
598. or the sign of man with hand to mouth {A2} on page 442.
[20] E. BUZOV, "The relation between Wisdom texts and Biographical Inscriptions in Ancient Egypt", *JES* V (2017), 45-46.
[21] There are two more places, line 411 and 602-603 where *gr* is found at the end of the line and is not translated as quiet/silent. Lichtheim admits in her footnote that she doesn't understand the passage in line 602-603 (LICHTHEIM, *Ancient Egyptian Literature*, 115). Allen explains *gr* in line 602-603 as an adverb (ALLEN, *Middle Egyptian literature,* 223). Gardiner explains that the word *gr* can be classified as adverb 'also', 'any more' (A. H. GARDINER, *Egyptian Grammar,*155.)
[22] Please refer to the index for the table of lines containing hieroglyphic terms related to silence and speaking. In this paper, most of the English translation of the *Maxims of Ptahhotep* is sourced from Lichtheim, while the hieroglyphic and transliteration text is taken from the book by J. P. ALLEN, *Middle Egyptian literature.* Eight Literary works of the Middle Kingdom (Cambridge, U.K 2015).
[23] J. P. ALLEN (ed.), *Middle Egyptian Literature.* Eight Literary Works of the Middle Kingdom (Cambridge, U.K 2015) 162.

day, in rhythmic order and metrical arrangement, that so they might be the better remembered, from generation to generation."[24]

The word *gr* appears seven times in *Ptahhotep*, but it's only written as *gr.(w)* in line 13 of the prologue. In the *Instruction of Kagemni's Father*, at the end of line 1,1, the noun  (*grw*) is translated as *a silent man*. Similarly, the term *gr.(w)* signifies a mouth of a man not speaking, which is synonymous with *grw - a silent man*. Therefore, it's worth examining the true meaning of *grw* in ancient Egyptian culture.

After analyzing synonymous terms such as *the timid man (snḏw), the man of exactitude (mty), the calm man (hrw)* from the texts of Kemit, Ptahhotep, Amenemope, etc., Shupak claims that the silent man (*grw),* a central theme in Egyptian wisdom literature, embodies these characteristics: restraint in speech, careful consideration in action, modesty, obedience, and religious devotion.[25] Thus, the quality of the silent man (*grw*) was the ideal value that Egyptians strived for. Similarly, the word *gr.(w)* in line 13 of Ptahhotep may carry the same implication as the word *grw* that Shupak discusses. This perspective on silence as a form of wisdom and a medium for passing down knowledge aligns with the values emphasized in Egyptian wisdom literature.

In another place, Maxim 9, at line 166 of Ptahhotep, Lichtheim translates the word *gr* () as equivalent to *grw,* meaning the silent man. The teaching on *gr* in this maxim guides a farmer, blessed with a good harvest, on how to behave toward his neighbor.

> If you plow and there's growth in the field,
> And god lets it prosper in your hand,
> Do not boast at your neighbors' side,
> One has great respect for the silent man (*gr*):
> Man of character is man of wealth.
> If he robs he is like a crocodile in court.
> Don't impose on one who is childless,
> Neither decry nor boast of it;
> There is many a father who has grief,
> And a mother of children less content than another;
> It is the lonely whom god fosters,
> While the family man prays for a follower.

The social classes of the Old Kingdom[26] were divided into three classes.[27] At the top of the social hierarchy was the king and his family. The upper class, which included the Oversseer of Royal Work, the Overseer of the Granary, and the vizier, played significant roles in administration and governance.[28] Ptahhotep might belong to this class. One of his roles was teaching, in which they provided instructions. Ptahhotep was given permission to train young men as a way to contribute to the administration and governance of the kingdom. Finally, the lower class consisted of commoners, who were governed and made up the majority of the population. The subject of Ptahhotep's teachings in Maxim 9 could belong

[24] H.D. RAWNSLEY, *Notes For The Nile.* Together with a Metrical Rendering of the Hymns of Ancient Egypt and the Precepts of Ptah-Hotep (N.Y. 2012) 282.
[25] N. SHUPAK, "Positive and Negative human types in the Egyptian Wisdom Literature", *Homeland and Exile* (ed. G. GALIL – M. (MARK) GELLER – A. MILLARD) (Leiden – Boston 2010), 246-250.
[26] The social context of Ptahhotep could also have been during the First Intermediate Period and the Middle Kingdom. The First Intermediate Period was characterized by local dynasties (GRIMAL, N. – SHAW, I. – GRIMAL, N., *A History of Ancient Egypt* (Oxford [Repr]2001)), while the social structure of the Middle Kingdom was organized in the form of nested households (*pr*) (according to Prof. SooHoo's class handout.)
[27] R. BUSSMANN, "Egypt's Old Kingdom Perspectives on Culture and Society", *The Oxford History of the Ancient Near East: Volume I* (ed. K. RADNER – N. MOELLER – D. T. POTTS) (Oxford History of the Ancient Near East; New York, N.Y. 2020), 463.
[28] R. J. LEPROHON, "Royal Ideology and State Administration in Pharaonic Egypt.", *Civilizations of the Ancient Near East* (ed. J. M. SASSON) (N.Y. 1995) I, 278-280.

to this lower class. This individual could be an ordinary farmer or a prosperous one who owns more land and property than others.

Egyptian agriculture emerged in the mid-6th millennium due to the abundant natural resources. The extensive use of agriculture in the Nile Valley arose after 4000 BC due to climate changes. This led to the emergence of urban centers and the development of an agriculture-based economy. For most of the past ten thousand years, Egypt's climate has been similar to today's, featuring mild, frost-free winters, pleasant springs and autumns, along with hot summers.[29] The Nile's cycle, providing natural irrigation, was critical to Egypt's agricultural practices. The flood's height influenced the amount of land irrigated. People started guiding water in canals and building dykes around the 3rd millennium. The irrigation practices, however, largely remained the same throughout most of ancient Egyptian history.[30] Agricultural life was dependent on nature. Moreover, due to a long tradition of mythology and cosmology, ancient Egyptians believed in superior powers and spirits. They believed that gods granted their prosperity: "And god (*nṯr*) lets it prosper in your hand" (line 162). The term god (nṯr)[31] could represent invisible beings that people experienced through their deeds and efficacy, deceased humans who had acquired an immaterial state of being, or the living king.[32]

The context of Maxim 9 could have been a farmer who had a successful harvest. He or his household believed that their success was due to the gods' help. Living according to 'Maat' meant he had to offer thanksgiving to the gods. These offerings could be made in public or private. It is possible that both fortunate and less fortunate farmers would come together to offer or pray to gods, living kings, and rulers, especially on sacred days (heb or kha').[33] Therefore, Ptahhotep advises the prosperous farmer not to boast or insult his neighbor who may not have had a successful harvest. By following this advice, the farmer not only maintains his prosperity and wealth but also gains great respect among his peers and companions. The term 'gr' plays a significant role in fostering neighborly relationships.

Rather than encouraging boasting or looking down on less fortunate neighbors, it serves as a reminder of the importance of helping one another in an agricultural village, especially during potential natural disasters that could affect the entire village. It also indicates that respect is a value that even the lower class strives for. The 'gr' assists them in demonstrating compassion and understanding towards one another.

One more important point in Maxim 9 is that it urges one to use silence to suppress boasting: "Do not boast at your neighbors' side, one has great respect for the silent man" (lines 165-166).[34] Boasting was seen as a negative trait that could damage both individuals and communities. It could disrupt social harmony, incite resentment and discord instead of fostering cooperation and unity. Boasting could also be viewed as lacking humility, especially when success and wealth are considered blessings from a higher power rather than merely personal achievements. This concept is exemplified in the Victory Stele of Egyptian Pharaoh Piye, where he encourages his troops not to boast:

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[29] R. J. WENKE, "Introduction to the Ancient Egyptians and Their Country", *The Ancient Egyptian State.* The Origins of Egyptian Culture (c. 8000-2000 BC) (Cambridge 2009), 38.

[30] M. VAN DE MIEROOP, *A History of Ancient Egypt* (Blackwell History of the Ancient World; N.J. 2nd ed., 2021) 21-24.

[31] The term '*nṯr*' might also possibly originate from *nṯr*, 'natron' which means 'purity'. This is because natron was used as soap in ancient Egypt. (MORENZ, *Egyptian religion*, 19.)

[32] S. BICKEL, "Gods, mythology, and cosmology", *The Oxford Handbook of Egyptology* (ed. I. SHAW – E. BLOXAM) (Oxford, 2020), 822.

[33] S. QUIRKE, Exploring Religion in Ancient Egypt (Blackwell Ancient Religions; Chichester 2015) 91, 97.

[34] Allen's translation of lines 165-166: "don't let your mouth get sated beside your neighborhood: quiet makes for great respect."(ALLEN, *Middle Egyptian literature*, 181); Simpson's translation: "Do not talk (about it) incessantly around your neighborhood, For it is important that one should practice the discretion appropriate to the prudent man." (W.K. SIMPSON – R.K. RITNER (ed.), *The Literature of Ancient Egypt.* An Anthology of Stories, Instructions, Stelae, Autobiographies, and Poetry (New Haven, Conn. – London 3. ed2003) 134.

> "Boast not as [though you are] a possessor of might. No man has might in ignorance of him [i.e. Amon-re]. He makes the weak-armed strong-armed, and the many flee before the few, and a single one defeats a thousand men! Sprinkle yourselves with water of his altars; kiss the earth before him. Say to him, 'Give us the way, that we may fight in the shade of your strong arm! As for the troop which you sent, when it charges, may the many tremble before it!'"[35]

This text is an example of how the ancient Egyptians valued humility and divine intervention in human affairs. They were against boasting and kept the focus on Egyptian ideology, where kings and warriors would seek the favor of deities (specifically Amon-Re, who was considered the king of the gods) to ensure victory in battle.

Finally, Maxim 9's reference to the less fortunate is not limited to farmers who had a poor harvest but also extends to childless parents. This concept is expressed at the end of the Maxim.[36] Having an heir to continue the family lineage has always been considered important, as was the case in Ancient Egypt. Maxim 9 encourages humility and silence as a means of showing sympathy with the childless, acknowledging that everyone's circumstances are subject to divine will. The childless might find more fortune when the gods favor them, while a family with many children might struggle to find a successor due to power competition among the siblings, for example.

'*gr*' in action

The term '*gr*' in two cases above are treated as a figure, *a silent man*. In following maxims, it plays a different role, displaying a reaction or behavior that should occur. Ptahhotep gives different types of advice for three circumstances in a dispute: "A powerful man, superior to you" (Maxim 2), "One who is your equal, on your level" (Maxim 3) and "A poor man, not your equal" (Maxim 4). Among these three disputes only in the second one (Maxim 3) does Ptahhotep use the method of silence (*gr*).

> If you meet a disputant in action
> Who is your equal, on your level,
> You will make your worth exceed his by silence (*gr*),
> While he is speaking evilly,
> There will be much talk by the hearers,
> Your name will be good in the mind of the magistrates.

The term  (*ḏ³jsw* a disputant),[37] referenced by Ptahhotep, is not be easily understood since there are not many ancient Egyptian documents which discuss this topic. Derived from the word meaning "to discuss", *ḏ³jsw* typically refers to someone engaged in conversation.[38] In this context, it may suggest a regular argument, not necessarily one that takes place in a tribunal. It could also indicate a family dispute focused on material possessions and labor rights, illustrating how inheritance and property relations can disrupt family unity.[39] In such instances, tribunals are often involved to settle matters. Ptahhotep's reference could be to such contexts where, in addition to the two individuals involved in a disagreement, there's a third party who adjudicates the case. This third party could be an official or a magistrate (*srjw*),[40] as suggested by the final line of the maxim, "Your name will be

[35] A.B. LLOYD, *Ancient Egypt.* State and Society (Oxford 2014) 99.

[36] The last two lines of Maxim 9 from other translations are easier to understand. Allen's translation: "The single man is with one whom the god fosters, while the one with a tribe, it asks for his service." Simpson's translation: "It is the lone man/ of whom God takes care, And the head of a family may pray for someone to succeed him."

[37] R. O. FAULKNER, *A Concise Dictionary of Middle Egyptian* (Oxford [Repr]1981) 319.

[38] ALLEN, *Middle Egyptian literature*, 173.

[39] QUIRKE, *Exploring Religion in Ancient Egypt*, 160.

[40] I am not sure if there is a distinction between a nobleman (*sr, srjw*) and an official, a magistrate of a court (*qnbty*). It is the *qnbt* runs the local administration (EYRE, C. J., "Local administration", *The Oxford Handbook of Egyptology* (ed. I. SHAW – E. BLOXAM), 778-808.). The term for officials of law courts in the Old

good in the mind of the magistrates."

Due to the lack of primary sources on law in the Old Kingdom, it is difficult to understand the circumstances surrounding the disputes in maxims 2, 3, and 4. Why did Ptahhotep advise silence only when facing an opponent of equal standing? Among the five canons of Egyptian rhetoric, *silence* is the first. It is both a moral stance and a rhetorical tactic. Fox suggests that the silence in Ptahhotep's third Maxim is a *response*. Fox also uses examples of silence from Kagemeni and Amenemope's texts, explaining how silence functions as an eristic technique:

> if you are silent, you are demonstrating your trust in divine justice rather than attempting to force the outcome. As you wait for events to proceed toward the equilibrium of justice, your opponent will fill with his heated words the vacuum your silence produces. He will thus expose his inner turmoil and confound himself, while you gain in reputation.[41]

Fox's conclusion on the Egyptian rhetoric of silence is intriguing but not entirely convincing in the context of the disputes in maxims 2 (with a superior) and 4 (with a subordinate). Why did Ptahhotep not advise silence in these two cases? One possible explanation is that in maxim 3, the phrase "who is your equal, on your level," implies that the two parties are on the same social level. They might have the same social rights, such as the right to speak publicly or the right to avoid punishment for certain offenses, etc. So, when these two individuals have a dispute, each is given an equal amount of time and conditions to defend themselves before a judge (a magistrate). After hearing both sides, the judge considers the arguments before making a decision. However, there may be a tendency for one individual to speak beyond their allotted time or to focus on discrediting their opponent rather than defending themselves ("While he is speaking evilly"). In some cases, an individual may overstep their boundaries by judging their opponent as if they were the magistrate. This individual may hope that these tactics will help them win the case or curry favor with the judges. However, such behavior typically leads to disagreement and disorder, which contradicts Maat. In these circumstances, Ptahhotep advises one to remain silent, stay within one's limits, and trust in the social administration (represented by a magistrate - *srjw*) or divine justice (as proposed by Fox).

In the case of maxims 2 and 4, the parties are not on the same social level, leading to imbalances in rights and responsibilities.[42] One party's voice might carry more weight due to their social status, making it more sensible for them to speak or explain rather than remain silent. As circumstances differ, Ptahhotep provides varied advice instead of solely emphasizing silence.

In sum, Ptahhotep's instructions highlight the importance of silence, symbolized by '*gr*', as a key principle for his 'son' to learn and adhere to. In the prologue, '*gr*' represents a silent, wise sage who has lived in accordance with *Maat*. This sage, a life-teacher, bears the responsibility of passing wisdom onto the next generation. Meanwhile, in Maxim 9, '*gr*'

Kingdom is *sr.w* (LIPPERT, S., "Law", *The Oxford Handbook of Egyptology* (ed. I. SHAW – E. BLOXAM), 799)

[41] M. V. FOX, "Ancient Egyptian Rhetoric", *Rhetorica* 1/1 (1983), 13.

[42] This paper focuses on the Maxims that teach about silence and speaking. Maxim 2 and 4 do not explicitly mention silence or speaking, so discussing them at length might be extensive. However, there are some valuable points to consider from these two Maxims. Maxim 2 advises adopting a humble and restrained posture when dealing with a superior engaged in conflict. By folding your arms and bending your back, you demonstrate respect and avoid escalating the dispute. This approach emphasizes self-control over confrontation. Ultimately, Maxim 2 encourages calm behavior and patience, which can maintain dignity and potentially earn respect for one's self-control. In Maxim 4, when dealing with a subordinate, Ptahhotep advises exercising restraint and not exploiting one's power. The teaching suggests that by refraining from responding aggressively, the superior allows the disputant to expose his own mistakes. This approach stresses the importance of patience and ethical conduct over confrontation, underlining the value of compassion and wisdom in leadership. In both cases, the teachings encourage individuals to behave or react based on their social status to maintain hierarchy order, reflecting the value of Maat.

emphasizes the importance of humility and respect in ancient Egyptian society, advising against boasting about one's success. It highlights the value of silence and the belief that wealth and success are blessings from a higher power, not just personal achievements. The teaching also speaks up for childless parents. It reminds that everyone's circumstances are subject to divine will. In Maxim 3, '*gr*' characterizes a person who knows how to conduct themselves according to their social status. In this context, '*gr*' underscores a disputant's knowledge of one's own boundary, his respect, and trust in the magistrate's judgment. The term *gr* also appears in two other places (Maxim 24, line 365; and Maxim 25, line 375). These instances will be discussed in the context of teachings about speaking and communication, as these two maxims primarily focus on this skill.

B. Speech in the teaching of Ptahhotep

As previously stated, living according to Maat was the ideal goal for ancient Egyptians. Consequently, their communication skills were also aligned with Maat. Public expression of Maat has three fundamental characteristics: solidarity, reciprocity, and retribution.[43] Both silence and speaking are forms of public expression. The teachings on silence discussed earlier, such as the silence in Maxim 9, demonstrate one of these characteristics: solidarity. Similarly, Ptahhotep provides advice on speaking in a way that embodies Maat.

The hieroglyphic term for '*to speak, to say*' is '*ḏd*' or '*mdw*' ().[44] Although the term '*gr*' can be translated as the verbal noun 'a silent man,' the term '*mdw*' is never translated as "a speaking man" in the translation of Ptahhotep. The likely reason for this is that the attribute of silence tends to create a harmonious atmosphere in line with Maat. Conversely, speaking could potentially create chaos and disorder, which is against Maat. As such, '*mdw*' is assigned to an action rather than a person (for instance, in Maxim 24 below, Ptahhotep advises more silence than speaking - chatter).

As Fox notes in his article, the second of the five canons of Egyptian rhetoric is timing (kairos).[45] The concept of kairos, or the opportune moment, is crucial in Egyptian rhetoric. It involves understanding the most effective time to speak. Several maxims of Ptahhotep demonstrate very well this aspect of kairos.

Maxim 24 (lines 362-369)

> If you are a man of worth
> Who sits in his master's council,
> Concentrate on excellence,
> Your silence is better than chatter.
> *Speak* (*mdy.k)* when you know you have a solution,
> It is the skilled who should *speak (mdww)* in council;
> *Speaking* is harder than all other work,
> He who understands it makes it serve.

Epilogue (lines 615-617)

> *Speak* (*mdwy.k)* after you have mastered the craft.

[43] ADAMS, "Wisdom Literature in Egypt", 314.

[44] "*mdw*" also means dispute, litigate, "*mdw m*" means speak against (GARDINER, *Egyptian grammar*, see on page 29 or 113 or 571. or J.P. ALLEN, *Grammar of the Ancient Egyptian Pyramid Texts* (Languages of the ancient Near East 7; Winona Lake (Ind.) 2017) 31. or ALLEN, *Middle Egyptian.* An Introduction to the Language and Culture of Hieroglyphs (Cambridge 2014) 192). "*mdw*" also means a staff or stick (J. F. BORGHOUTS, *Egyptian.* An Introduction to The Writing and Language of the Middle Kingdom (Leiden : Leuven 2010) 461.) In this paper I only choose those verses that contain the word "*mdw*", "*ḏd*", "*mdy*" that express the idea of teaching how to speak, or to give speech. Other places of the Maxims also use the word "*mdw*" but they do not have the nuance of teaching on how to speak, for example at lines 13, 30, 240, 251, 265 thus I do not add to the analysis of the this paper.

[45] FOX, "Ancient Egyptian Rhetoric", 14.

If you *speak* (*mdw.k)* to good purpose,
All your affair will be in place.

Those two teachings above emphasize the importance of not just what is said, but when it is said. The speaker must be attentive to the context and situation, choosing the right moment for maximum impact. This might involve waiting patiently during a discussion or a dispute until the most impactful moment to deliver one's message ("when you know you have a solution; after you have mastered the craft"). Such uninformed or premature speech (unwise speech) could have negative impacts. It could disrupt social order and show a lack of respect for authorities or those with more expertise, potentially undermining the society's strict hierarchy.

Additionally, speaking is seen as a challenging skill that should only be utilized when one has substantive, informed contributions to make. Mastery of a subject is a prerequisite for speech, indicating the significance of thorough understanding and preparation. Speaking without sufficient knowledge could harm one's reputation, which was highly valued in this society, leading to a loss of respect among peers and superiors and thus damaging one's social and professional standing. Aside from that, prioritizing silence is still crucial "Your silence is better than chatter". This reflects humility in the willingness to remain silent until one has something significant to contribute. Humility involves acknowledging that one does not always have the answers and that listening is often as important as speaking. It is about understanding one's place within the broader context of the discussion and respecting the contributions of others.

As part of daily activities, it's important to learn how and when to speak. For example, Maxim 7 provides guidance on table manners when one is invited to a feast or meal:

If you are one among guests
At the table of one greater than you,
Take what he gives as it is set before you;
Look at what is before you,
Don't shoot many glances at him,
Molesting him offends the *ka*.
Don't speak (*m mdw)* to him until he summons,
One does not know what may displease;
Speak (*mdw.k*) when he has addressed you,
Then your words will please the heart.
The nobleman, when he is behind food,
Behaves as his *ka* commands him;[46]

Though there is no original text detailing the customs of meals or feasts, surviving paintings, reliefs and royal inscriptions indicate that feasting and celebrating were prevalent in ancient Egypt. The ancient Egyptian diet was complex and rich, and it held cultural significance that extended from daily sustenance to religious and social practices.[47] Maxim 7 might depict a scene from a wealthy household, where different tables could be set for different social classes. Before the meal, everyone had to wash their hands and then take a seat

[46] The context of Maxim 7 differs from Maxim 2. It is not necessary for the host to be a superior. There might be cases where the invited guest may also be wealthier and higher-ranking than the host in Maxim 7. Moreover, Maxim 2 pertains to a dispute, which may be more intense and likely to involve non-verbal behaviors rather than speech. Therefore, Ptahhotep does not emphasize speaking skills in Maxim 2. In contrast, Maxim 7 is set in a meal or festive celebration where socializing is more common. Conversation is generally more relaxed, which could lead to excessive talking, especially amidst cheer, wine, and beer. Hence, in Maxim 7, Ptahhotep advises more on the manner of speech than in Maxim 2. Since the contexts of the two maxims are distinct, it would be inappropriate to apply the teachings from Maxim 7 to the situation in Maxim 2.

[47] B. BRIER – A. H. HOBBS, *Daily Life of the Ancient Egyptians* ("Daily life through history"; Westport, Conn. 2nd ed2008) 109-125.

on the ground next to their respective food tables.[48] The rich and poor might not have been seated at identical tables. Some tables might have been served more food than others, and on certain occasions, some foods might not have been permitted.[49] Therefore, invited guests could have reacted inappropriately at the table if they did not receive what they expected. As a result, Ptahhotep advises his 'son' to display noble manners and respect his *ka*[50] symbolizing the transmission of life power from gods to men.[51] He warns that food, pleasure and honor may interfere with one's behavior to align with the command of his *ka* (line 136).

Refraining from speaking until the host approaches not only demonstrates respect to the host, but also aids in establishing a harmonious social order. This is exemplified in Maxim 7, highlighting the third canon of Egyptian rhetoric. It teaches the control of emotion and careful management of words. It advocates for the concealment of one's feelings, being cautious and discreet in speech, ensuring only thoughtful and suitable responses are given. Similarly, Maxim 25 instructs a person not to stay silent to avoid criticism. However, when choosing to speak up, one must also learn to control one's emotions to prevent provocation: "Don't be haughty, lest you be humbled, Don't be mute, lest you be chided" (lines 374-375). In other words, this teaching warns against provocation and arrogance, as they can lead to humiliation, and advises not to remain silent, as it may draw criticism.

The fifth canon of the Egyptian rhetoric is truthfulness which is the cornerstone of Egyptian rhetoric. It is the alignment of one's words with truth and justice (Maat). The Egyptians believed that truthful speech had inherent power and was intrinsically persuasive. It was expected to be observed in relationships, daily tasks, and particularly when serving the public. For instance, maxim 28 speaks about integrity in public service: "When you speak don't lean to one side." This saying highlights the Egyptian ideal of Maat. It cautions against bias, partiality in speech and encourages individuals to strive for fairness, to weigh their words carefully, and to consider all sides of an argument or situation before speaking. It resonates with the judicial processes in Ancient Egypt, where fairness and balance were paramount. The heart of the deceased was weighed against the feather of Maat to determine their worthiness for the afterlife. In public service, "not leaning to one side" helped to maintain social harmony and order, reflecting the high value the Egyptians placed on justice and balanced judgment within their community. Moreover, the person who did "not lean to one side" could be considered wise. He could recognize the power of words to shape reality, influence others, and maintain the social order. Therefore, speaking with balance and fairness is seen as a manifestation of wisdom, reflecting a deep understanding of one's responsibility towards others and society. Additionally, Ptahhotep emphasizes the importance of truthfulness in higher ranks: "The great[52] will speak accordingly; It is teaching a man to

[48] G. PINCH, "Private Life in Ancient Egypt", *Civilizations of the Ancient Near East* (ed. J. M. SASSON) (N.Y. 1995) I, 368.

[49] Brier and Hobbs posit that "So important was their bread to ancient Egyptians that they gave it up during times of mourning." (BRIER – HOBBS, *Daily Life of the Ancient Egyptians*, 111.) They cite this information from DARBY – GHALIOUNGUI – GRIVETTI, in the book *Food. The Gift of Osiris* (London – N.Y. – San Francisco 1977) II, 503. These authors assert, "Mourners over a dead king avoided wheaten foods." They reference two sources: (1) the Greek hisotorian Diodorus Siculus, and (2) Genesis 43:32, which states, "the Egyptians would not eat bread with them." However, this verse does not suggest the Egyptians abstained from bread altogether. Rather, it indicates the Egyptians did not wish to dine with Joseph's brothers, viewing all other peoples as barbarians. (WALTON – MATTHEWS – CHAVALAS, *The IVP Bible Background Commentary.* Old Testament (Downers Grove, Ill [6. [Aufl.]]2004), 74. Or WESTERMANN, *Genesis 37-50*. A Commentary (Minneapolis 1986), 126.)

[50] The Egyptian concept of the *ka* represents a person's image and vital force, created alongside the human by the potter god, Khnum. Unlike the *ba* or "soul," the *ka* continues after death and needs to be sustained with funerary offerings. Phrases related to the *ka,* for example "be happy with one's *ka*" or "go to one's Ka", often imply a blessed existence after death. (C. R. FONTAINE, "A modern look at ancient wisdom. The Instruction of Ptahhotep Revisited", *The Biblical Archaeologist* 44.3 (1981), 157.)

[51] R.T.R. CLARK, *Myth and Symbol in Ancient Egypt* (London [Reprinted]1993) 231.

[52] Lichtheim interprets term '*sr*' as 'the great', while Allen translates it as 'official', indicating a person who works in public offices.(For the meaning of the term '*sr*', cf. BORGHOUTS, *Egyptian*, 473.)

speak to posterity" (Epilogue, lines 515-516). This shows that truthful speech and honesty were highly expected from those serving the common good. It also demonstrates Ptahhotep's expectation for public figures to represent Maat, embodying truth in the eyes of the people.

In short, the teachings of Ptahhotep highlight several important points about speech. Firstly, it emphasizes the right time (kairos), suggesting that one should speak when they have a full understanding of the situation and the topic. Humility is essential in speaking, encouraging one to remain silent when he does not have an appropriate solution to a problem. Speaking humbly also helps maintain hierarchical order and preserves the reputation of both the speaker and others involved (maxim 24 and Epilogue). Secondly, when one decides to speak, they should do so respectfully, especially when their audience includes individuals from a higher authority or social class (maxim 7). Thirdly, before speaking, one must control their emotions and desires to prevent any provocation, ensuring their words are not guided by their appetites. It also stresses the importance of speaking up when necessary to avoid criticism (maxim 25 and 7). Lastly, it underscores the importance of truthfulness in speech, particularly for those in public service roles. Their speech should embody 'Maat', which means speaking with balance and fairness, demonstrating wisdom and a profound understanding of one's responsibility towards others and society (maxim 28 and Epilogue).

The Book of the Proverbs

A. Social context and the composition of the Book of Proverbs

The *Book of Proverbs* is traditionally attributed to the work of Solomon. However, it is difficult to confirm the date of its composition and the identity of its author. Clifford notes that there have been several attempts to date the book based on factors such as chronological references, language, editing devices, themes, linguistic features, and consonant-numbers.[53] It is believed that the *Book of Proverbs* largely developed during the rise of the monarchy in the early tenth century.[54] Palace scribes were responsible for producing various texts, including wisdom texts. By the late eighth century, a collection attributed to Solomon was circulating, and a second collection was added by the servants of Hezekiah. The subgenre of two-line sayings contrasting the wise and foolish, righteous and wicked, likely became established by this time. "The Words of the Wise" section shows influence from the Egyptian instruction Amenemope and was likely written during a period of trade and cultural exchange with Egypt.

The exact period when chapters 1-9 of the anthology were written and prefaced is uncertain. However, this first unit is considered the most recent part.[55] There is no clear evidence of historical events or conclusive linguistic and thematic arguments. It is likely that *Proverbs* was edited during the early Second Temple period, from the sixth to the fourth centuries B.C.E. The titles with consonant-numbers indicate an editor who believed in the book's unity and wanted to provide a final definition. It is probable that chapters 10-29 were in circulation before the end of the monarchy.[56]

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[53] R. J. CLIFFORD, *Proverbs.* A Commentary (OTL; Louisville, Ky. 1. ed1999) 4.

[54] Fox opposes this argument when discussing the social setting of Proverbs 10 - 29. The argument for monarchical dating should consider that both Qohelet and Ben Sira also reference kings. However, these Hellenistic authors portray kingship differently. Their sayings are not meant as practical advice for courtiers, unlike those in Proverbs. This could point to a period of an Israelite monarchy. (M. V. FOX, *Proverbs 10-31.* A New Translation with Introduction and Commentary (The Anchor Yale Bible v. 18B; New Haven – London 2009) 501.) Fox's argument on this issue is unconvincing because the formation of Proverbs was a complex and lengthy process. The content and style of Proverbs often express many common features of the ANE, which Ben Sira does not exhibit.

[55] S. ROTASPERTI, *Metaphors in Proverbs.* Decoding the Language of Metaphor in the Book of Proverbs (VTSup vol.188; Leiden – Boston 2021) 13.

[56] CLIFFORD, *Proverbs,* 3-6.

There is another opinion that suggests there is a unified authorship for the entire *Book of Proverbs*. This opinion is based on the deliberate compositional structure found throughout the book. By examining the textual unity, patterns, themes, and stylistic features, particularly the comparison between the number of individual lines in the entire book (932 lines) and the numerical value of the proper names (Solomon, David, and Israel) in verse 1:1 (930), one might perceive the intentional unity of the composition.[57] This could indicate that there was one author for the *Book of Proverbs*. This argument is not convincing since it is also possible that there were multiple authors who followed the same compositional style, thereby maintaining a unified composition for the book.

The social location of *Proverbs* is most likely among the men of Hezekiah, who were scribes employed by the palace. Their sophistication in writing and familiarity with foreign literature is evident in the sayings and instructions. The central collections of *Proverbs* reflect their work and idea of wisdom, resulting in a coherent body of work. The book itself is a collection of sayings and instructions, some of which originated from folk traditions. The authors were scribes of the royal court, tasked with producing literature for the temple and court.[58] However, others argue that the teachings of the book do not focus on specific geographical or institutional issues. Instead, they represent the accumulated wisdom of ordinary people based on their experiences in daily life, family, and community.[59] They were assembled, enhanced, and edited by a team of scribes, resulting in a complex compendium of wisdom.[60] Additionally, Greek literary forms may have directly influenced the book.[61] Therefore, it was shaped by a variety of cultures and ordinary people with profound life experiences.

Finally, *Proverbs* has a complicated and unique textual history and development.[62] There are variants among MT and LXX. Thus, it makes more sense to think that the book developed orally from the daily life circumstances of common people and then it was written down by scribes with a polished language from a higher class, which sounded more professional and more persuasive, as was the case in other ANE literature.

B. The values of silence in the Book of the Proverbs

The Hebrew term חרשׁ (*ḥrš*) is the root of two different words. The first (*ḥrš I*) is associated with the meaning "to plough, to engrave, to cut, to till land,"[63] appearing 102 times in the Hebrew Scripture. The second (*ḥrš II*) means "to be deaf, mute"[64] when its verb is in Qal form, and "to keep silent" when in the Hiphil form.[65] This paper only discusses *ḥrš II* which is associated with the meaning "silence, stillness."

In the *Book of Proverbs* the root *ḥrš II* occurs twice in the Hiphil form, in verses 11: 12 and 17:28. It is used 47 times in the Hebrew Scripture (Qal 7x, Hiphil 39x, Hitphael 1x).

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[57] P. W. SKEHAN, "A single editor for the whole Book of Proverbs", *CBQ* 10/2 (1948), 129-130.

[58] CLIFFORD, *Proverbs*, 7-8.

[59] G. A. KIRAZ – J. BALI (ed.), *The Syriac Peshiṭta Bible with English Translation.* Proverbs, Qoheleth, and Song of Songs (Piscataway, N.J. 2021) xiv.

[60] C.B. ANSBERRY, *Be Wise, My Son, and Make My Heart Glad.* An Exploration of the Courtly Nature of the Book of Proverbs (N.Y. 2010) 1.

[61] ROTASPERTI, *Metaphors in Proverbs*, 19.

[62] R. J. CLIFFORD, "Observations on the Texts and Versions of Proverbs", *Wisdom, you are my sister.* Studies in honor of Roland E. Murphy, O. Carm., on the occasion of his eightieth birthday (ed. R. E. MURPHY – M. L. BARRÉ) (29; Washington, DC 1997), 61.

[63] HAMP – RINGGREN – FABRY, "חָרַשׁ ḥāraš; חֶרֶשׁ ḥārāš; חֲרָשִׁים ḥărāšîm", *TDOT* (ed. G.J. BOTTERWECK – H. RINGGREN – D.E. GREEN) (Grand Rapids (Mich.) Cambridge 1986) V, 220-223.

[64] The *ḥrš II* root in its qal form is problematic as it conveys two different meanings: 'mute, dumb' and 'deaf'. It is important to note that a mute person can still hear - it does not imply they are deaf. The Hebrew scripture uses the root אלם to signify 'mute, dumb'. It is used 13 times in niphal and adjective form (Ex 4:11; Is 35:6 & 56:10; Hab 2:18; Ps 31:18, 38:14, 39:3&10; Prov 31:8; Ezek 3:26, 24:27, 33:22; Dan 10:15). Interestingly, Prov 31:8 also uses the root אלם, not חרשׁ, to describe the mute. For more information about the root אלם, refer to *HALOT* (Leiden – N.Y. – London 1994) 57; J. N. OSWALT, "אלם", *NIDOTTE* (ed. W. A. VANGEMEREN) (Grand Rapids, Mich. 1997) I, 412; R. K. HARRISON – E. H. MERRILL, "אִלֵּם", *NIDOTTE*, 412.

[65] L. KÖHLER – W. BAUMGARTNER – J. J. STAMM, *HALOT Vol I* (Leiden – N.Y. – London 1994) 357-358.

There are other Hebrew roots that also describes a state of quietness, absence of sound, or being still such as דמם (19x),סבת (1x), שׁקט (42x), חשׁה (16x), הסה (1x), שׁתק (4x).[66] Among these, Proverbs uses שׁתק(in Prov 26:20), and שׁקט (in Prov15:18).[67] However, in these two cases, it does not mean 'to be silent'; instead, it indicates a state of stillness (יִשְׁתֹּק מָדוֹן 'quarrelling ceases' in v.26:20, and יַשְׁקִיט רִיב 'calm contention' in v.15:18). The root חרשׁ (*ḥrš II*) is used more than others, possibly because it specifically coveys the nuance of active, intentional silence.[68]

As previously stated, the *Book of Proverbs* is the result of a lengthy and complex editorial process. The final editor sought to unify the complex redaction in line with the Hebrew biblical style.[69] The use of *ḥrš II* exemplifies this editorial choice. The author could have used different roots to describe silence, but why didn't they? Wisdom books in the Hebrew Bible, such as Job and Psalms, use *ḥrš II* more frequently compared to other books (9x in Job, 8x in Psalms)[70]. This suggests that by using *ḥrš II* root, the author of *Proverbs* may have chosen to follow this tradition. In other words, in terms of language usage, *ḥrš II* may have provided a minor link with other older Hebrew books.

Before examining the root *ḥrš II* in v.11:12, I will first provide an overview of chapter 11. This chapter focuses on advocating a life of righteousness, humility, and generosity. It discusses the positive impact that it can have on the individual and society as a whole. The structure of this chapter is characterized by antithetic parallelism, particularly between the just and the wicked (vv 4-11, 18-21, 30-31).[71] The roots of the words 'righteous' (*ṣdq*) and 'wicked' (*rš'*) are the key terms in this chapter, each appearing eight times. Without specifying a particular situation, the chapter uses general terms like 'neighbor' (v.9), 'city' (v.10), and 'people' (v.14), making it applicable to a broad context. It encourages a person to embody righteousness (*ṣdq*) and avoid wickedness (*rš'*).

Verses 9-14 teach about appropriate speech within a community, highlighting the importance of speech control, especially refraining from harmful gossip or betraying confidences. Showing disdain towards one's neighbor is deemed unjust and senseless. A trustworthy individual is portrayed as someone who can keep secrets and remain silent (יַחֲרִישׁ) - in contrast to gossipers depicted as chatterers. The key lesson on speech from chapter 11 is the value of not being overly talkative. The highest point of silence here is that 'remaining silent' is ascribed to two important entities: 'heart' and 'understanding'. Thus, silence (*ḥrš*) should emanate from both heart and mind. Verse 11:12 exemplifies this point:

(MT) בָּז־לְרֵעֵהוּ חֲסַר־לֵב וְאִישׁ תְּבוּנוֹת יַחֲרִישׁ׃

The one who despises his friend lacks *heart*,
but a man of *understanding* remains silent.

This verse presents a saying that contrasts two types of people. The first part of v.12 criticizes those who show contempt or disdain towards their friends, suggesting they "lack heart." In other words, they lack compassion, understanding, or sensibility. In the Hebrew

[66] Delcor gives five synonyms for *ḥšh II*: (1) *ḥšh*, (2) *dmh*, (3) *ṣmt*, (4) *skt*, (5) *hsh*. (M. DELCOR, "חרשׁ ḥrš to be silent", *TLOT* (ed. E. JENNI – C. WESTERMANN) (Peabody, Mass 1997) II, 478.)

[67] Fox suggests that the verb שׁקט (*šqt*) was likely influenced by the Egyptian term '*gr*', which means 'silent'. (FOX, *Proverbs 10-31*, 598-599.)

[68] BAUMANN, "דָּמָה dāmāh [dāmâ II]: חֲרַשׁ; חָשָׁה; דּוּמָה; דֳּמָמָה; דְּמָמָה; דּוֹם; דֻּמִּי; דמם II; חֲרַשׁ; חֲרַשׁ be still", *TDOT* (ed. G. J. BOTTERWECK – H. RINGGREN) (1997) III, 262.

[69] In examining the composition of Proverbs 10.1-22.16 and 25-29, Whybray posits that these chapters are not just random assortments of independent proverbs. Instead, they are the outcome of deliberate editorial attempts to organize this material with specific intentions in mind. The editors aimed to establish meaningful links between individual and collective proverbs, using a range of connection strategies (R.N. WHYBRAY, *The Composition of the Book of Proverbs* (JSOTSup 168; Sheffield, England 1994) 66-68.) Thus, it is plausible that the choice of terms and languages might also have been considered.

[70] Examining the specific case to which *ḥrš II* is applied, whether to God or man, etc., is beyond the scope of this paper and would be overly lengthy.

[71] R. E. MURPHY, *Word Biblical Commentary. 22: Proverbs* (Grand Rapids, Mich. 2015) 80.

Scripture, the "heart" (לֵב) is often used metaphorically to represent a person's inner life, including thoughts, emotions, and moral inclinations. Thus, someone who "lacks heart" is seen as lacking the essential qualities of empathy and kindness, which are very necessary to establish meaningful relationships. In contrast, the second part of v.12 highlights the behavior of a "man of understanding" (אִישׁ תְּבוּנוֹת), characterized by wisdom and discernment. This wisdom is not manifested in words, but in silence, suggesting that a truly wise person knows when speaking might be harmful or when silence might be more beneficial. The silence here is not indicative of passivity or indifference but is portrayed as a deliberate and thoughtful choice aimed at preserving relationships and avoiding unnecessary conflict.

The word "heart" is not mentioned in the first part of v.11:12 in other versions, but in the second part, the word '*wise/understanding*' is consistent across all versions.

LXX *μυκτηρίζει πολίτας ἐνδεὴς φρενῶν,*
ἀνὴρ δὲ φρόνιμος ἡσυχίαν ἄγει.

The one who lacks understanding mocks neighbors,
but a *wise* man remains quiet. (LES)

L-Peshitta ܒܨܝܪ ܡܕܥܐ ܡܣܬܟܠܢܘܬܐ ܘ ܓܒܪܐ ܗܘ ܕܒܣܐ ܣܘܛ ܠܚܒܪܗ ܕܐܫܬܩ

People who scorn their neighbor are lacking judgment,
but a person of *understanding* keeps silent. (Kiraz)

TgProv :דשאטי לחבריה חסיר רעיונא הוא וגבר דמתביין שתיק

He who despises his friend lacks sense,
but the man who is *understanding* keeps quiet.

In the Biblical Hebrew vocabulary, the concepts of stillness and silence may overlap.[72] In some instances, the word *ḥrš* may be used to describe stillness. Additionally, in the ANE culture, the heart was not only seen as the sentimental function of a human but also the intellectual one from where understanding and judgment originate. This could explain why the MT uses the word "heart" in the first part of v.12, while other Biblical versions do not. Therefore, the root *ḥrš* in v.12 could also indicate a call for a person to still his judgment in his heart, even though *ḥrš* (remain silent) might be more commonly associated with the physical silence of a mouth, as mentioned in v.9.

Verse 14:33 offers another way to understand the role of *ḥrš* in v.11:12. The first part of v.14:33 states, "In the heart of a wise person, wisdom remains silent" (בְּלֵב נָבוֹן תָּנוּחַ חָכְמָה). Clifford translates the word תָּנוּחַ, derived from the root נוח(meaning to rest, to settle), as 'remains silent'. He suggests that the term *nûaḥ* in this verse parallels *šāqaṭ* 'to be silent' in Isa 14:7 (נָחָה שָׁקְטָה כָּל־הָאָרֶץ פָּצְחוּ רִנָּה׃ "The whole earth is at *rest* and *silent*, they break forth into singing.") and Job 3:26 (לֹא שָׁלַוְתִּי וְלֹא שָׁקַטְתִּי וְלֹא־נָחְתִּי וַיָּבֹא רֹגֶז׃ "I am not at ease, nor am I *silent*, I have not *rest*, but trouble comes.")[73] The terms *nûaḥ* and *šāqaṭ* in these two verses indicate stillness, tranquility, and peace. Thus, v.14:33 implies that the heart of the wise is tranquil and peaceful, where wisdom chooses to dwell. True wisdom lives within a person and does not always need to be expressed outwardly. Likewise, in v.11:12, *ḥrš* can be seen as a critical element that creates space in a wise person's heart for wisdom to reside.

[72] Biblical Hebrew had an extensive vocabulary for silence, particularly in communication, with multiple verbs denoting the absence or abstention from speech. However, it lacked a direct equivalent to the English noun "silence", instead using words connected to the *dmh / dûm / dmm* stems traditionally translated as "silence" but more accurately linked to the concept of stillness, a domain overlapping with silence, allowing biblical writers to depict situations characterized by the absence of speech or sound.(G. EIDEVALL, "Sounds of Silence in Biblical Hebrew: A Lexical Study", *VT*. 62/2 (2012), 172.)

[73] CLIFFORD, *Proverbs*, 148.

So, in the first usage of the root *ḥrš* in chapter 11 above, it is associated with the righteous man. Interestingly, and perhaps surprisingly, its second usage contrasts significantly from the first. It is used in connection with the fool in verse 17:28[74].

Prov. 17:28 (MT) גַּם אֱוִיל מַחֲרִישׁ חָכָם יֵחָשֵׁב אֹטֵם שְׂפָתָיו נָבוֹן׃

Even a fool *who keeps silent* is considered wise,
the one who closes his lips is intelligent.

The grammatical function of the word מַחֲרִישׁ is a participle in Hiphil form, meaning 'the one who keeps silent' or 'the one who knows how to keep silent' which is used in apposition to the noun אֱוִיל. In the Book of Proverbs, אֱוִיל is described as someone who despises discipline, is overly self-confident, disrespects his parents, lacks understanding, has no desire for wisdom, and is a source of strife. His fundamental quality is folly, serving as a cautionary figure illustrating the dangers of rejecting wisdom and discipline.[75] However, in v.17:28 the noun אֱוִיל may primarily refer to unfruitful speech,[76] indicating someone who lacks eloquence and skill in speaking or the unproductive one. Overlooking the specific circumstance addressed in this verse, the key point is the impact and value of silence (*ḥrš*). If you lack knowledge about a subject, the best course of action is to remain silent (*ḥrš*). This can give others the impression that you are intelligent and wise. Gregory the Great's remark aligns with this idea, as he says that opening the mouth may reveal an empty head. Just as a closed door in a house conceals its occupants, if a fool remains silent, it remains unknown whether they are wise or foolish.[77]

There is a noticeable difference in the vocabulary usage of v.17:28 across various biblical versions. Just like the MT version, both the Syriac and TgProv[78] versions use the same root for the word 'to be silent' in v.11:12 and v.17:28. The root for "silence" in Syriac is ܫܬܩ,[79] and in Targum is שְׁתֹק.[80] However, v.17:28 in the Septuagint and Vulgate does not mention 'silence' at all. Instead, they use another word – 'wisdom' or 'skill' ('σοφίαν' in LXX, 'sapiens' in Vulgate) – in place of 'silent':

Prov. 17:28 (LXX) ἀνοήτῳ ἐπερωτήσαντι σοφίαν σοφία λογισθήσεται,
ἐνεὸν δέ τις ἑαυτὸν ποιήσας δόξει φρόνιμος εἶναι.

When an unintelligent person inquires after wisdom, it will be reckoned as wisdom,
and someone who makes himself speechless will appear prudent. (LES)

In this verse, the second halves of both the LXX and MT versions align, emphasizing the value of restraint and careful consideration before speaking. However, their first halves differ (see the table below). The LXX version suggests that seeking wisdom is inherently

[74] The structure of this chapter is inconsistent and incoherent, so the analysis will focus only on the text, not the context and circumstances of v.17:28. However, it's generally understood that the teaching in v.17:28 (or the entirety of chapter 17) is aimed at guiding a young man to become a virtuous person. For more information on the structure of this chapter, refer to WHYBRAY, *The Composition of the Book of Proverbs*, 111-112; MURPHY, *Proverbs*, 127-128.

[75] T. DONALD, "The Semantic Field of 'Folly' in Proverbs, Job, Psalms, and Ecclesiastes", *VT* 13/3 (1963) 287-289.

[76] Cazelles, "אֱוִיל ʾĕvîl; אִוֶּלֶת ʾivveleth", *TDOT* (ed. G.J. Botterweck – H. Ringgren – H.-J. Fabry) (Grand Rapids, Mich. 1997) I, 138.

[77] J.R. WRIGHT – T.C. ODEN (ed.), *Proverbs, Ecclesiastes, Song of Solomon* (ACCS 9; Downers Grove, Ill. 2005) 115-116.

[78] J. F. HEALEY, "Targum Proverbs and the Peshitta: Reflections on the Linguistic Environment", *Studies on the Text and Versions of the Hebrew Bible in Honour of Robert Gordon* (ed. G. KHAN – D. LIPTON) (2012), 325.

[79] R. PAYNE SMITH, *A compendious Syriac dictionary.* Founded upon the Thesaurus Syriacus of R. Payne Smith (ed. J. PAYNE SMITH) (Winona Lake, Ind. 1998) 600.

[80] M. JASTROW, *A Dictionary of the Targumim.* The Talmud Babli and Yerushalmi, and the Midrashic Literature (London – N.Y. 1903) II, 1640.

valuable and commendable. It implies societal respect and the attribution of wisdom to those who acknowledge their lack of understanding and actively seek knowledge. This humility and pursuit of wisdom can raise one's standing in the eyes of others, regardless of their current intelligence or knowledge level.

The two pairs of parallelism in verse 17:28

MT	LXX
silent / wise closes his lips / intelligent	*wisdom* / wisdom makes himself speechless / prudent

In terms of which version adheres more closely to the original text of the Bible, the MT or the LXX regarding verse 17:28, there is no clear evidence. It is obvious that the author of the Septuagint deliberately chose to use the word '*σοφίαν*' in verse 17:28, rather than the word '*ἡσυχίαν*'[81] used in verse 11:12. These two words have very different semantic meanings, so it is unlikely to be an error. However, the discrepancy between the MT and LXX in verse 17:28 indicates that the original vocabulary, whether it is *ḥrš*, *ἡσυχία*, or something else, must have had a positive connotation that could make a foolish person seem wise. Thus, the word *ἡσυχία* in verse 17:28 of the LXX unintentionally emphasizes the meaning of the root *ḥrš* in Proverbs. One is not considered foolish if they possess *ḥrš*, which is tantamount to being wise.

So far, we have seen that the two instances of the word *ḥrš* in Proverbs suggest that a person should learn and practice good virtues. To achieve righteousness, *ḥrš* must reside in one's heart. This allows wisdom to take root within a person, influencing their actions towards friends and neighbors, and helping them become virtuous instead of wicked (as mentioned in v.11:12). Moreover, even a fool (specifically, one who is inconsiderate, unproductive, or incoherent) can become wise by practicing and mastering *ḥrš* (v.17:28). Therefore, *ḥrš* plays a significant role in cultivating good individuals, and by extension, contributing to the betterment of villages, cities, and nations.

C. The teaching on speech of the Book of Proverbs

The *Book of Proverbs* contains many references to the concept of speech. This paper will focus on the following roots: *dbr* (to speak, word, matter)[82], *ʾmr* (to say, to talk), *ʿnh* (to answer), *lāšôn* (tongue), *peh* (mouth). There are also others terms and numerous verses in *Proverbs* that discuss speaking and talking. However, a comprehensive exploration of these is better suited to other studies. The subsequent analysis will explore teachings on speech from three perspectives.

a) Why – purpose

Although the teachings on silence underline the value of *ḥrš* as a vital element in becoming a just and wise individual, teachings on speech also indicate that speech has the power to influence and decide one's life or death. Verses 18:20-21[83] contain beneficial allegorical images, alluding to the power of speech:

[81] '*ἡσυχίαν*' derives from the feminine noun *ἡσυχία*, meaning silence, stillness, absence of excessive noise or movement, and peace of mind. (J. LUST – E. EYNIKEL – K. HAUSPIE, *Greek-English Lexicon of the Septuagint* (Stuttgart Rev. ed2003) 268; T. MURAOKA, *A Greek-English Lexicon of the Septuagint* (Louvain – Walpole, Mass. Rev. ed.2009) 321.) In the Book of Proverbs of the LXX, the term *ἡσυχία* appears not only in verse 11:12 but also in verse 7:9, which refers to the quietness of the night.

[82] The root *dbr* is equivalent to the Egyptian root *mdw* discussed above (W. H. SCHMIDT, "דָּבַר dābhar; דָּבָר dābhār", *TDOT* (ed. G. J. BOTTERWECK – H. RINGGREN – H. GZELLA) (Grand Rapids, Mich. 1974) III, 84-86.)

[83] The structure and theme of ch.18 lack coherence and unity. Verses 18:20-21 are more closely related to ch.17, which discusses silence (WHYBRAY, *The Composition*, 112; MURPHY, *Proverbs*, 134.) The prominent textual problem is the pronoun 3fs suffix of אוֹהֶבֶיהָ. There's debate over what this suffix refers to - the tongue, death and life, or wisdom (FOX, *Proverbs 10-31*, 645; CLIFFORD, *Proverbs*, 173.) I interpret it as referring to the tongue for two reasons: (1) the suffix should refer to its closest antecedent, and the same case number and gender; (2) it maintains the theme of the previous verse mentioning 'mouth' and 'lip'. To keep it concise, I discuss these verses independently without focusing on a specific context or textual issues.

מִפְּרִי פִי־אִישׁ תִּשְׂבַּע בִּטְנּוֹ תְּבוּאַת שְׂפָתָיו יִשְׂבָּע׃
פְּרִי־ה׃ יֹאכַל מָוֶת וָחַיִּים בְּיַד־לָשׁוֹן וְאֹהֲבֶיהָ

From the fruit of a man's mouth his stomach will be satisfied,
with the product of his lips he will be satisfied.
Death and life are in the power of the tongue,
and those who love it [the tongue] will eat its fruit.[84]

These two verses highlight the power and importance of speech in several ways. First, they suggest that speech can satisfy a person, potentially referring to the fulfillment and connection that effective communication can provide. The metaphorical use of the stomach as a soul implies that properly spoken words can nourish one's soul. Secondly, the verses metaphorically illustrate the potential of words to bring about life or death, demonstrating the significant impact our words can have on others. Importantly, the text mentions the tongue, lips, and mouth but doesn't strictly refer to actual speaking. Therefore, one could interpret these verses as advice to stay silent or refrain from slanderous speech. Thirdly, they suggest that those who appreciate and use speech responsibly will reap its benefits, indicating that mindful and constructive communication can yield positive outcomes. Finally, the context of verses 20-21 is unclear, and it is uncertain whether they are addressing the speaker or the listener. However, these verses can apply to either the speaker or the listener, depending on the situation, from the standpoint of their purpose.

Although it may not seem appropriate to relate Proverbs 18:20-21 to Deut. 30:19-20 due to differences in literary genre and purpose, they do share a common theme of advocating for life. Proverbs, as wisdom literature, offers practical advice for everyday behavior. Meanwhile, Deuteronomy serves as a book of Law, outlining the covenant between Yahweh and the Israelites. Deut.30:19-20 encourages the Israelites to choose life by loving the Lord and obeying God's covenant. Similarly, Prov.18:20-21 advises choosing life through considerate speech (לָשׁוֹן lāšôn) and caring for others, linking back to the traditional wisdom of 'fearing the LORD'.

The teaching on speech is not only for the benefit of individual (as in vv. 18:20-21) but also for others, for example, the teachings of king Lemuel's mother (31:1-9). These teachings are divided into two sections.[85] Verses 8-9 belong to the second section, which encourages the prudent use of alcohol to help the impoverished forget their poverty (vv.6-9). If considered independently, verses 8-9 carry significant moral weight:

פְּתַח־פִּיךָ לְאִלֵּם אֶל־דִּין כָּל־בְּנֵי חֲלוֹף׃
פְּתַח־פִּיךָ שְׁפָט־צֶדֶק וְדִין עָנִי וְאֶבְיוֹן׃

Open your mouth for the mute,
for the judgements of all the destitute.
Open your mouth, judge in righteousness,
to judge for the poor and needy.

These verses serve as a call to action, urging individuals to speak up for those unable to defend themselves, including those facing death and the poor or needy. This includes a wide array of actions, from defending the legal rights of the dying to advocating for the

[84] In this verse, the tongue carries more ethical value than religious value (KEDAR-KOPFSTEIN, "לָשׁוֹן lāšôn tongue", *TDOT* (ed. G. J. BOTTERWECK – H. RINGGREN – H.-J. FABRY) (Grand Rapids, Mich. 1974) VIII, 31.)

[85] The well-organized structure in this part exemplifies a later redaction of the *Book of Proverbs*. Clifford notes that verses 1-9 are well-composed. The first part (vv.3-5, 26 words) advises against the reckless use of sex and alcohol ("wine," "strong drink") to prevent the king, who enjoys luxury, from *forgetting* the *poor.* The second part (vv.6-9, 28 words) promotes the sensible use of alcohol so the poor can *forget* their hardship.(CLIFFORD, *Proverbs*, 270.)

poor. Therefore, the purpose of speech (verses 8-9) extends beyond mere communication. It becomes a tool for empathy, compassion, and advocating for the benefit of others.

b) When

Proverbs also highlights the skill of understanding when to speak and when to remain silent. It emphasizes the idea that wisdom is often demonstrated through measured and thoughtful speech. Verse 10:19 underscores this concept, stating:

בְּרֹ֣ב דְּ֭בָרִים לֹ֣א יֶחְדַּל־פָּ֑שַׁע וְחֹשֵׂ֖ךְ שְׂפָתָ֣יו מַשְׂכִּֽיל׃

When words are many, transgression is not lacking,
but the one who restrains his lips is prudent.[86]

This verse implies that a wise individual is one who can control their speech, knowing the right time to contribute to a conversation and when it is better to stay silent. Excessive talking (*roḇ dəbārîm* 'abundance of word', 'multitude of words')[87] is often perceived negatively, seen as a sign of insensitivity and lack of wisdom, which can lead to misunderstandings and offenses. Therefore, the ability to manage one's speech effectively is considered a key characteristic of an individual who can navigate interpersonal relationships and situations with tact and wisdom.

Verse 18:13 is another teaching example, emphasizing the importance of knowing when to speak and the value of active listening וּכְלִמָּֽה׃ הִיא־ל֗וֹ אִוֶּ֥לֶת יִשְׁמָ֑ע בְּטֶ֣רֶם דָּ֭בָר מֵשִׁ֣יב "The one who returns an answer before he hears, it is folly for him and shame."[88] This statement underlines that one must first listen before responding, implying that haste in giving a response (דָּבָר מֵשִׁיב 'returning a word, returning an answer or a matter')[89] without proper understanding could lead to folly and shame. The teaching fundamentally encourages the development of active listening skills. It suggests that effective communication requires not only speaking at the right time but also ensures that our responses are informed by a thorough understanding of what has been said. Therefore, this verse serves as a reminder of the crucial role listening plays in effective communication and the potential implications of neglecting this aspect.

c) How

The *Book of Proverbs* provides essential guidelines on communication and behavior. For example, it advises speaking gently to prevent anger and displaying wisdom in conversation. This involves sharing informed and beneficial knowledge instead of uninformed or foolish remarks, emphasizing thoughtfulness and consideration.

The teachings in verses 15:1-2 exemplify these good communication manners:

מַֽעֲנֶה־רַּ֭ךְ יָשִׁ֣יב חֵמָ֑ה וּדְבַר־עֶ֝֗צֶב יַעֲלֶה־אָֽף׃
דָּ֑עַת וּפִ֥י כְ֝סִילִ֗ים יַבִּ֥יעַ אִוֶּֽלֶת׃ לְשׁ֣וֹן חֲ֭כָמִים תֵּיטִ֣יב
A gentle response turns away wrath,
but a harsh word stirs up anger.

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[86] Chapter 10 is divided into five sections: 1-5, 6-11, 12-18, 19-21, 22-27, 28-32. (MURPHY, *Proverbs*, 71-72).The theme of communication instruction for the righteous is also prominent in this chapter, particularly in section 10:19-21. The chapter uses many keywords related to speech, such as 'lips', 'mouth', and 'word'. I chose v.19 as an example because the use of the particle in the phrase בְּרֹב דְּבָרִים can indicate a temporal or nominal clause. Some translations interpret the particle 'bə' as a spatial preposition ('In much talk', or 'In many words'). (JOÜON – MURAOKA, *A Grammar of Biblical Hebrew*, §154, b).

[87] *dəbārîm* can also means dispute, accusation, claim which could easily lead to transgression (F. R. AMES, "דבר", *NIDOTTE* (ed. W. A. VANGEMEREN) (Grand Rapids, Mich. 1997) I, 913.)

[88] Chapter 18 lacks an organized structure. Verse 13 could represent a general setting that aligns with the foolishness of excessive talk (MURPHY, *Proverbs*, 134-136).

[89] In this case, the root "dbr" is used instead of the root "ענה ʿnh" (as in v.26:4-5, to answer or in v.15:1). This might be due to its grammatical function: "dbr" serves as the object of the verb "shāmaʿ" (SCHMIDT, "דָּבָר dābhar; דָּבָר dābhār", *TDOT*, 107.)

The tongue of the wise pleases knowledge,
but the mouth of the fool utters folly.

These verses advocate for communication to be conducted with kindness and wisdom. Gentle responses (מַעֲנֶה־רַךְ in v.15:1),[90] as opposed to harsh words, can defuse anger and encourage peaceful interactions. Similarly, wise speech (לְשׁוֹן חֲכָמִים "the tongue of the wise, the capacity of speak wisely" in v.15:2), characterized by the correct use of knowledge, is favored over ignorant words. This suggests that one should be considerate and thoughtful in speaking, ensuring their words are well-informed and beneficial to prevent misunderstandings or conflicts.

Verse 16:24 shares similar motifs, and structure with verse 15:1, both providing advice on communication. Verse 15:1 uses the phrase "a gentle response," (מַעֲנֶה־רַךְ)while verse 16:24 uses "pleasant words/speeches" (אִמְרֵי־נֹעַם)[91] to portray similar advice. This connection highlights the message in verse 16:24, encouraging individuals to use pleasant words due to their significant effect on the soul and body: צוּף־דְּבַשׁ אִמְרֵי־נֹעַם מָתוֹק לַנֶּפֶשׁ וּמַרְפֵּא לָעֲצָם: "Pleasant speeches are like a honeycomb, sweet to the soul and health to the bones". This verse uses a beautiful and profound metaphor. Instead of using common words like "mouth", "lips", or "taste" (for example, "for your taste" עַל־חִכֶּךָ(Prov. 24:13)), the author employs two interior body parts - the soul (נֶפֶשׁ) and bones (עֶצֶם) - to represent the recipients of tangible food - honeycomb[92]. The possible reason for this could be that both the soul and bones receive only that which has undergone a refinement process (the soul receives spiritual matters, while bones receive processed and refined nourishment). In the same manner, אִמְרֵי־נֹעַם are words or speeches that need to be refined and processed thoroughly before being spoken. Once they are delivered, they should be as beneficial and impactful as refined food that directly nourishes the souls and bones. Therefore, choosing the right words can yield the powerful, positive impact of kind and thoughtful speech.

Having good manners includes not just knowing how to communicate, but also being able to discern the circumstances and respond appropriately. This notion is exemplified in the seemingly paradoxical verses 26:4-5. At first glance, these verses may appear illogical or difficult to comprehend. However, they convey a lesson about attentiveness to the context of communication:

אַל־תַּעַן כְּסִיל כְּאִוַּלְתּוֹ פֶּן־תִּשְׁוֶה־לּוֹ גַּם־אָתָּה:
פֶּן־יִהְיֶה חָכָם בְּעֵינָיו: עֲנֵה כְסִיל כְּאִוַּלְתּוֹ

Do not answer a fool according to his folly,
lest you also be like him.
Answer a fool according to his folly,
lest he be wise in his own eyes.

This suggests that one must be mindful of the situation and the individuals involved when choosing how to respond, as the same approach may not be suitable for all circumstances. It emphasizes the need to adapt our communication styles to avoid becoming like the fool, yet also to prevent the fool from becoming overly confident in his own wisdom.

The Hebrew term for "a fool" (כְּסִיל *kəsîl*) used in verses 26:4-5 differs from the one used in verse 17:28 (אֱוִיל- the one who is not skilled in speaking). The כְּסִיל describes a more

[90] The term "ענה" (ʿnh) also means to react (C. J. LABUSCHAGNE, "ענה ʿnh to answer", *TLOT* (ed. E. JENNI – C. WESTERMANN) (Peabody, Mass. 1997) II, 928.) or it can also refer to the give and take of conversation (CLIFFORD, *Proverbs*, 150.)

[91] "ʾmr" often functions as a verb. In this case, it functions as a noun, equivalent to "dbr" (H. H. SCHMID, "אמר ʾmr to say", *TLOT* (ed. E. JENNI – C. WESTERMANN) (Peabody, Mass. 1997) I, 161.)

[92] "Honey" can be used metaphorically with either a positive or a negative connotation. For instance, in Prov. 5:3, it is used negatively: "For the lips of a forbidden woman drip honey, and her speech is smoother than oil." N.M.P. TISCHLER, *All things in the Bible.* An Encyclopedia of the Biblical World (Westport, Conn. 2006) I, 63-65.

sinister individual than other types of fools.[93] This figure, representing the depths of folly and its negative impacts, is characterized by extreme self-confidence, disdain for wisdom, a tendency to cause trouble, and a lack of discipline and integrity. The *kəsîl* is portrayed as a dangerous and morally reprehensible individual, combining folly and wickedness. In *Proverbs*, the primary interpretation of *kəsîl* encompasses mostly early material. Theologically, it refers to individuals who display an incorrect attitude towards Yahweh and his world order.[94] However, in the context of 26:4-5, *kəsîl* signifies the arrogant and ignorant who believe they are correct. When faced with the characteristics of a *kəsîl*, one should consider the situation before responding. It is important to avoid stooping to the level of the fool by not adopting their irrational, disrespectful ways of arguing. Alternatively, one could walk away as St. Ambrose says, "Your flight is good if you direct your footsteps away from the countenance of fools."[95]

However, there are instances where responding is necessary to prevent the fool from becoming self-assured in their folly. In such cases, it is essential to correct them in a manner that highlights the flaw in their reasoning. Also, one should not engage thoughtlessly in arguments or respond to foolishness without considering the potential outcome, as this may lead to unproductive discourse. One should not emulate the fool's tactics, because it may lower one's own dignity and possibly reinforce the fool's behavior. When deciding to respond, consider whether the **"עֲנֵה"** will be constructive or if it might unnecessarily escalate the situation. If the **"עֲנֵה"** is necessary, it should address the folly without disparagement, aiming to illuminate the wise path clearly.

The difference between "Do not answer a fool" and "Answer a fool" lies in the context and discernment. In some situations, engaging might draw a person into a pointless exchange. In others, failing to respond might allow harmful ideas to go unchallenged. The key is in judging whether a response will lead to constructive dialogue or merely entangle a person in further folly.

Finally, the teaching on speech in Proverbs culminates with v.16:1

לְאָדָם מַעַרְכֵי־לֵב וּמֵיְהוָה מַעֲנֵה לָשׁוֹן׃

The plans of the heart belong to man,
but the answer of the tongue comes from the LORD.[96]

This verse presents two parallel pairs: "*the plans of the heart* and *man*", versus "*the answer of the tongue* and *the Lord*." It suggests that in communication, all intentions should originate from the heart (*lēḇ*), and then be expressed by the tongue (*lāšôn*) according to the Lord's will. In other words, according to the Hebrew biblical tradition, speech comes from the heart, under the guidance and fear of YHWH.

Moreover, the Hebrew term for "man" (אָדָם) used in v.16:1 is intentionally chosen to express the relationship between humanity and YHWH. The author's purpose becomes clear when reading the next verse, v.16:2, כָּל־דַּרְכֵי־אִישׁ זַךְ בְּעֵינָיו וְתֹכֵן רוּחוֹת יְהוָה׃ "All the ways of a man are pure in his own eyes, but Lord weighs the spirit." Verse 16:2 uses a different term for man (אִישׁ). The term אָדָם is used in the OT to emphasize monotheism, with One God creating the universe[97], recalling the creation story and the first man, Adam. Meanwhile, the term אִישׁ in the second verse (v.16:2) has a general interpretation, which could denote distinction between God and man, a man of war, or man in the context of a marital

[93] DONALD, "The Semantic Field of 'Folly' in Proverbs, Job, Psalms, and Ecclesiastes", 287.
[94] SCHÜPPHAUS, "כסל ksl; כְּסִיל kᵉsîl; כְּסִילוּת kᵉsîlûṯ; כֶּסֶל kesel; כִּסְלָה kislâ", *TDOT* (ed. G.J. BOTTERWECK et al.) (Grand Rapids (Mich.) 1995) VII, 267-268.
[95] WRIGHT – ODEN (ed.), *Proverbs, Ecclesiastes, Song of Solomon*, 160.
[96] A literal translation is "Of man are the arrangements of the heart, but from Yahweh is the response of the tongue." One possible interpretation is "Man proposes but God disposes." (CLIFFORD, *Proverbs*, 157.)
[97] MAASS, "אָדָם ʾādhām", *TDOT* (ed. G.J. BOTTERWECK – H. RINGGREN – J.T. WILLIS) (Grand Rapids (Mich.) Rev. ed1990) I, 84.

relationship.[98] This wordplay in verses 1-2 highlights God's supremacy over all creation. Verse 16:1 describes God's sovereignty over human intentions and spoken words, acknowledging God's authority. It underscores the importance of aligning our words and actions with God's will. Recognizing "The plans of the heart belong to man" fosters humility and reliance on God, acknowledging human limitations. Understanding that "the answer … from the Lord" is not merely a human capability of speaking but a divine gift, encourages its wise usage in line with God's intentions.

In summary, the *Book of Proverbs* offers extensive teachings on effective communication, emphasizing the profound impact of speech on life's outcomes, relationships, and personal growth. It articulates the significance of the purpose behind our words, advocating for speech that is not only constructive and life-giving but also empathetic and supportive of those in need. Additionally, it underscores the importance of timing and listening in communication, suggesting that wisdom is often shown not just through what is said, but also through the discernment of when to speak and the readiness to listen. The manner in which words are delivered is highlighted as critical, with a preference for kindness, wisdom, and contextually appropriate responses that bring healing and understanding. Finally, it teaches one to acknowledge divine sovereignty over speech or the tradition of '*fearing the Lord.*' It invites individuals to align their intentions and words with a higher purpose, fostering humility and a deeper connection to the divine will.

Silence and speech in the two ancient traditions

The teachings on silence in the *Maxims of Ptahhotep* and the *Book of Proverbs* offer intriguing parallels and contrasts, each reflective of their respective cultural outlooks. In both cases, the authors - the Egyptians and the teacher in Proverbs - act not as school teachers, but as fathers guiding their sons.[99] In the ancient Egyptian context, silence, represented by the term *gr*, has various aspects. It represents wisdom, self-control, and calmness. These are seen as good qualities that match with Maat - the ancient Egyptian idea of harmony, balance, and doing what is right. The '*gr*' or silent person is portrayed not as inactive but as someone possessing knowledge and understanding, who speaks only when necessary, demonstrating a controlled and respectful approach to communication and interaction. Ptahhotep's teachings emphasize the value of silence in various life scenarios, from an aging wise man with respected life experience and invaluable accumulated knowledge ('*gr*' in the prologue) to an ordinary person who was managing prosperity with humility (Maxim 3 and 9); from a sage to a novice learner. This teaching underscores the importance of being cautious and thoughtful in speech, suggesting that a reserved approach to communication can foster respect and understanding among peers and within the community.

The *Book of Proverbs*, within the Hebrew biblical tradition and a family/folk/tribal context[100], presents silence through the Hebrew term *ḥrš*, specifically in its teaching on wise and foolish speech. Proverbs 11:12 and 17:28 highlight the significance of silence as a virtue that contributes to wisdom, understanding, and a positive reputation. Silence is associated with discernment, suggesting that knowing when to speak and when to remain silent is a mark of true understanding and intelligence. In contrast to Ptahhotep, where silence is often connected to wisdom acquired with age and experience, the *Book of Proverbs* suggests that even a fool (who does not possess productive or coherent speaking skills) can be perceived as wise if they know when to keep silent, highlighting the practical and perceptive dimensions of silence in maintaining one's dignity and respect in society.

Both *Ptahhotep* and *Proverbs* teachings suggest that silence is not merely the absence of speech but a thoughtful, intentional restraint that reflects wisdom, discernment, and ma-

[98] N.P. BRATSIOTIS, "אִישׁ ʾish; אִשָּׁה ʾishshāh", *TDOT* (ed. G.J. BOTTERWECK – H. RINGGREN – J.T. WILLIS) (Grand Rapids (Mich.) Rev. ed1990) I, 229-230.

[99] CLIFFORD, *Proverbs*, 7.

[100] K. J. DELL, *The Book of Proverbs in Social and Theological Context* (Cambridge, UK – N.Y. 2006) 63-64.

turity. In Ptahhotep's teachings, silence is a virtue connected to the sage who has lived in accordance with Maat, signifying a deep understanding and respect for the natural order and social harmony. In the *Book of Proverbs*, silence is a practical tool for social order, emphasizing the importance of controlling one's speech to preserve one's reputation and relationships. Moreover, the use of silence (*ḥrš*) refocuses the reader's attention on the Yhwh tradition. As mentioned earlier, chapter 11 is underscored by three pairs of antithetical parallelism between the righteous and the wicked. However, the chapter begins with verse 1, the only mention of Yhwh in the entire chapter (מֹאזְנֵי מִרְמָה תּוֹעֲבַת יְהוָה וְאֶבֶן שְׁלֵמָה רְצוֹנוֹ: "Dishonest scales are an abomination to the Lord, but a complete/accurate weight is his delight"). This verse mirrors Israel's legal codes (Lev 19:35-37; Deut 25:13-16) and the prophetic condemnation of commercial greed and deception (Ezek 45:10; Hos 12:7-8; Amos 8:5; Mic 6:11).[101] This illustrates the intention of the Book of Proverbs' editor to start the chapter by echoing the Yhwh tradition, like other Hebrew scriptures, by mentioning the name Yhwh and moral codes. Then, he added other teachings in the following verses, providing supportive information that highlights the Yahwistic character. Similarly, the use of *ḥrš* in v.11:12 emphasizes the Yahwistic tradition of caring for one's neighbors. In other words, *ḥrš* serves to reflect Yhwh's desire for a righteous heart among people.

Teachings on speech from the *Maxims of Ptahhotep* and the *Book of Proverbs*, reveal a profound understanding of the power of words in both the ancient Egyptian and Hebrew wisdom literature. In the teachings of Ptahhotep, the emphasis is placed on the importance of timing, restraint, and the alignment of speech with Maat. Ptahhotep advocates for speaking only when necessary and when one's words can contribute positively to the situation highlighting the value of silence and careful consideration in communication (Maxim 24 and Epilogue). He emphasizes the need for respect, truthfulness, and emotional control in speech, particularly in social interactions and public service, where the integrity of one's words reflects on their character and societal role (Maxim 7 and 28).

On the other hand, the *Book of Proverbs* focuses on the purpose, impact, and wisdom of speech, teaching that words have the capacity to nourish the soul, influence life and death, and advocate for justice and empathy (Prov 18:20-21; 31:6-9). It stresses the significance of mindful communication, encouraging speakers to choose their moments to speak wisely and to ensure their words are both thoughtful and constructive (Prov 10:19; 18:13). Proverbs also highlights the importance of listening and responding appropriately, advising against excessive talk and emphasizing the need for gentleness to foster understanding and peace (Prov. 15:1-2; 16:24; 26:4-5). Together, these teachings present a comprehensive view of speech as a powerful tool for personal growth, social interaction, and ethical living, ultimately striving to uphold the core purpose of "fearing the Lord."

Interestingly, none of the Hebrew texts above fall in the first nine chapters of Proverbs. Most scholars believe that this section is the most recent addition. The editors attempted to refine the book by adding other "Jewish" elements. The chosen Hebrew text above belongs to sections that, ideally, are older and more original. As Fox suggests that Proverbs underwent three stages of development: the "Egyptian" stage emphasized order and truth, the "Yahwistic" stage integrated wisdom with Israelite religion, and the "Theological" stage personified wisdom as a divine intermediary.[102] The analysis of speech and silence in Proverbs shows evidence of the first and second stages, with common themes of order, truth, and reverence of YHWH. However, this commonality does not imply that the teachings of Proverbs on silence and speech were directly influenced by the ANE, namely Ptahhotep. The way these teachings are addressed differs between them. For instance, the use of *ḥrš* adheres to the vocabulary style of the biblical Hebrew tradition and is less frequent com-

[101] R.C. VAN LEEUWEN, "Proverbs", *The New Interpreter's Bible.* Introduction To Wisdom Literature - The Book of Proverbs - The Book of Ecclesiastes - The Song of Songs - The Book of Wisdom - The Book of Sirach (ed. L.E. KECK et al.) (Nashville 2015) V, 117.

[102] M. V. FOX, "Aspects of the Religion of the Book of Proverbs", *HUCA.* 3 (1968), 58-69.

pared to the *gr* in Ptahhotep. The scenarios in most of these teachings of Proverbs are generally set, whereas they are more specific in Ptahhotep. Proverbs discusses speech more often than Ptahhotep. Generally speaking, while the *Maxims of Ptahhotep* and the *Book of Proverbs* share a common purpose in teaching silence and speech, they do so according to their own traditions.

Ethical, religious, and social implications

Both the *Maxims of Ptahhotep* and the *Book of Proverbs* express some ideas that have on ethical, religious, and social implications. There is a common reverence for wisdom and prudent conduct within the ancient Egyptian and Hebrew cultures. In the *Maxims of Ptahhotep*, silence (*gr*) is portrayed not merely as an absence of speech but as a manifestation of wisdom, self-control, and social harmony. The emphasis on silence aligns with the ancient Egyptian ethical and religious principle of Maat. Ptahhotep's maxims suggest that silence, when practiced by the knowledgeable (*rḫ*), enriches communal life, fosters learning, and ensures the transmission of wisdom from one generation to the next. It is presented as a virtue that elevates the individual within the social hierarchy, guiding them to live in society with grace and dignity. The hierarchical nature of ancient Egyptian society is reflected in the teachings on silence, emphasizing its role in maintaining social order and harmony.

Similarly, the *Book of Proverbs* places significant importance on the virtues of silence and the use of speech, presenting them as essential components of a righteous and fulfilling life. Proverbs advocates for a disciplined control over one's words, recognizing the power of speech to influence, heal, or harm ("Death and life are in the power of the tongue" Prov. 18:21). The social implications of these teachings are evident in the encouragement to use speech for advocating justice, defending the voiceless, and fostering peace within the community. The analysis of the texts above indicates that Proverbs places less emphasis on silence but more on speech in a sense of revering YHWH through communication and concern for other people. Both traditions underscore the idea that wisdom, whether expressed through silence or speech, is not an end in itself but a means to achieve a greater good - for the individual, the community, and the broader social order.

Timeless principles and contribution of these two ancient teachings

The ancient teachings of Ptahhotep and the wisdom found in the *Book of Proverbs* both offer timeless principles that continue to resonate with contemporary audiences. Ptahhotep's emphasis on silence and the proper conduct of speech is rooted in the pursuit of Maat, reflecting a holistic approach to living that values balance, harmony, and the common good. This ancient Egyptian wisdom teaches the importance of being a "silent man" - one who knows when to speak and when to remain silent, illustrating the virtue of restraint and the significance of choosing the right moment to share one's thoughts. This guidance not only fosters personal wisdom and dignity but also serves to maintain social harmony and respect within the community. Maxim 9, for example, can aptly be applied to various situations today, such as in schools, workplaces, religious communities, or even at home. The playing field is not level; not everyone has the same conditions or starts from the same point. Some people are already halfway up or near the top of the mountain when others are just beginning to climb. However, it can be challenging for someone to remain humble upon achieving greater success than others. Overall, by highlighting the role of silence in wisdom literature, Ptahhotep contributes to an understanding of communication as a powerful tool for "doing Maat"[103], - building rather than destroying relationships.

Another common scenario is a team meeting where the lessons from Maxim 24, Epilogue (615-617) ("Speak after you have mastered the craft.") and Prov. 10:19 ("When words are many, transgression is not lacking, but the one who restrains his lips is prudent.") can be applied. Consider a meeting where everyone is discussing a problem that has arisen

[103] LICHTHEIM, *Maat in Egyptian Autobiographies and Related Studies*, 32.

in the project. Instead of immediately jumping into the conversation with a solution, a wise team member, following the teaching of Prov.10:19, Maxim 24, Epilogue (615-617) might humbly choose to stay silent and listen to all the viewpoints being presented. They might control their speech, resisting the urge to talk excessively or interrupt others. After carefully considering the input from everyone, they then contribute their thoughts at the right moment. This way, their response is measured, thoughtful, showing humility and avoiding boasfulness (as advised in Maxim 9). This demonstrates wisdom, respect, and effective management of speech as prescribed in the verse.

The *Book of Proverbs* emphasizes the profound impact of words, advocating for a measured, thoughtful approach to speech. It teaches that wisdom is often demonstrated not just by what one says but by when and how one chooses to say it. The *Proverbs* underscore the potential of speech to either nourish and heal or to cause destruction, thereby underscoring the responsibility that comes with the power of communication. This biblical wisdom literature calls for speech that is gentle, well-timed, and considerate, reflecting a deep understanding of the social and moral implications of our words. Proverbs 26:4-5, for example, can be applied to many daily situations. These verses guide us to discern when to respond or refrain from responding ("Do not answer a fool" and "Answer a fool"). A clear example is when we encounter reckless drivers. These drivers may cut us off or drive dangerously, leading us to potentially match their anger. The teachings of Proverbs 26:4-5 challenge us to either respond calmly and charitably or ignore the situation entirely. The choice depends on one's sound judgment and conscience (or depends on our Christian moral standard).

Another common scenario we often encounter in the workplace is a situation where a coworker makes an error that affects your work. Rather than reacting harshly or blaming them, you could apply the teachings of Proverbs 15:1-2 by offering a gentle response. Instead of saying, "You messed up and now I have to fix it," you might say, "I noticed there was a mistake in this section, let's figure out how we can correct it together." This approach defuses potential anger and fosters peaceful interaction. The teachings of Maxim 7 can also be useful here as it advises you to control your emotions when you speak ("Then your words will please the heart … Behaves as his *ka* commands him"). Similarly, when providing feedback in a group meeting, you could apply Proverbs 16:24 by using "pleasant words". Instead of bluntly stating, "This idea won't work," you could say, "This is an interesting idea, could we explore some alternative perspectives to ensure everything ok?" These words, refined and thoughtfully delivered, can have a beneficial impact just like nourishing food for the soul and bones.

By advocating for the righteous use of speech and the importance of choosing the right moment to share thoughts, the Book of Proverbs aligns with Ptahhotep's teachings. This further reinforces the timeless value of thoughtful communication in fostering understanding, peace, and justice, resolving conflicts, and promoting respect in society.

Conlusion

The analysis above encapsulates the roles that the concepts of silence and speech play within the wisdom literature of the *Maxims of Ptahhotep* and the *Book of Proverbs*. This exploration not only underlines the historical and cultural richness of ancient Egyptian and Hebrew societies but also highlights the universal and timeless principles these traditions offer regarding ethical and interpersonal human development.

In the *Maxims of Ptahhotep*, silence emerges as a foundational element in the cultivation of wisdom, integrity, and social harmony, deeply intertwined with the concept of Maat. It signifies a deliberate and respectful restraint, a marker of wisdom and maturity that enables the effective transmission of knowledge and the maintenance of social order. Conversely, speech is not merely a means of communication but a potent tool for ethical instruction, guidance of the young, and the affirmation of societal values, necessitating judicious and purposeful expression.

The *Book of Proverbs*, with its roots in the monotheistic traditions of ancient Israel, fearing the Lord, portrays speech and silence as integral to righteous living and communal well-being. It emphasizes the power of words to create life or bring destruction, advocating for a conscious and discerning use of speech. The wise are characterized by their ability to discern the right moments for silence and speech, reflecting a deep understanding of their moral and social implications.

Bridging cultural and historical gaps, the juxtaposition of the ancient teachings from the *Maxims of Ptahhotep* and the *Book of Proverbs* offers invaluable lessons on ethical speech and the power of silence. These teachings guide us in navigating complex human relationships and communication. Despite their ancient origins, this wisdom remains profoundly relevant in today's world. The ease of technology-led communication, such as free social networks and platforms, can often lead to hasty speech and misunderstandings. Knowing when to speak and when to remain silent can foster better communication, highlighting the significance of our speech and silence in a life marked by wisdom, understanding, and compassion. Additionally, a critical aspect of these teachings is humility, a trait that can foster a more equitable and compassionate society, reminding us of its importance regardless of our achievements. Thus, these ancient teachings contribute to our understanding of ethical and interpersonal relationships in any era.

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The hieroglyphic texts on silence

Line number	Transliteration	Lichtheim's translation	Allen's translation
13	*r gr.(w) nj mdw.n.f*	The mouth, silenced, speaks not,	The mouth has grown quiet, without being able to speak,
70-71	*dd.k ḫpr jqr.k r.f* *m gr jw.f ḥr mdt bjnt*	You will make your worth exceed his by silence, While he is speaking evilly,	You make your accomplishment become more than his by being quiet while he is speaking badly.
166	*wr jrt ḥryt nt gr*	One has great respect for the silent man:	quiet makes for great respect.
256[104]	*jw.f gr.f ḥr jw ḏd.n.j*	He should be silent upon (hearing): "I have told."	he is quiet, saying, "I have spoken."
365	*gr.k ʾḫ st r tftf*	Your silence is better than chatter.	your quiet, it is more effective than valerian.
375	*m gr zʾw ḫ nd.k*	Don't be mute, lest you be chided.	don't be inactive, but beware when you

[104] In the analysis, I omit this line due to the unclear text of its maxim. I relied on both Lichtheim's and Allen's translations for reference. The first part of this maxim (lines 249-253) implies that a messenger should report his assignment without hesitation and provide advice during council meetings. If he is eloquent, his reporting to the master will be smoother, and he is less likely to face questioning or dismissal. The subject of the second part of this maxim (lines 245-256) is challenging to identify. According to Lichtheim's translation, it is the master who should listen and remain silent when the messenger declares, "I have told." However, Allen's translation suggests that those who neglect their duties or underestimate their responsibilities are the ones prone to mistakes. If such individuals face opposition due to their error, they might become silent and evade responsibility by asserting that they have made their point.

			tread.
425[105]	*ḏr gr.f n.k hrw dpj*	Since he was silent to you the first day.	since he will be quiet for you from the first day.

The hieroglyphic texts on speaking

Line number	Transliteration	**Lichtheim's translation**	**Allen's translation**
126	*m mdw n.f r j³šṯ.f*	Don't speak to him until he summons,	Don't talk to him until he calls:
129	*mdw.k ḫft wsḏ.f tw*	Speak when he has addressed you,	If you speak when he addresses to you,
366-367	*mdy.k rḫ.n.k wḥ‘.k* *jn ḥmww mdww m sḫ*	Speak when you know you have a solution, It is the skilled who should speak in council;	You should speak only when you know your solution: it is the craftsman who speaks in counsel.
418	*mdy.k m rdj ḥr gs*	When you speak don't lean to one side,	When you contest with someone who is biased,
516 517 519	*mdw sr(j)w r.s* *sb³ z(j)pwr ḏd n m ḫt* *nfr ḏd n m ḫt ntf sḏm.f st*	The great will speak accordingly; It is teaching a man to speak to posterity, It is good to speak to posterity, It will listen to it.	and officials speak in accord with it. It is teaching a man to speak to the future: It is good to speak to the future: that is what will hear it.
615 616	*mdwy.k ‘q.n.k m zp n ḥmww* *mdw.k r zp n qn*	Speak after you have mastered the craft! If you speak to good purpose,	speak only when you have mastered the craft. When you speak from a state of completeness,

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[105] I omit this line because, even though it uses the word 'silent' (gr), this maxim (lines 422-425) doesn't necessarily teach about silence. Here, 'gr' is used as an adjective to modify a subject. Additionally, as Lichtheim acknowledges, this maxim is unclear. She offers an alternative translation in footnote 49 of her book.

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