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Translation Agents and Networks: A Case Study of the Persian Translations of Bakhtiar Ali's Novels in Iran

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Abstract: The current study examines the agency of translators and publishers in the Persian translations of Ali's Kurdish novels within the Iranian literary field, highlighting how decisions, motivations, and contextual constraints interact. The study adopts a qualitative case study approach, focusing exclusively on Bakhtiar Ali's novels translated directly from Kurdish into Persian between 1997 and 2025. It draws on in-depth semi-structured interviews with seven translators and six publishers, conducted until theoretical saturation was reached, alongside archival research, publication histories, and textual and paratextual analysis to trace patterns of decision-making and collaboration. The analysis is informed by Haddadian-Moghaddam's tri-tier model of agency comprising decision, motivation, and context in tandem with Actor–Network Theory (ANT) and Bourdieu's concept of capital. The findings reveal that agency is unevenly distributed: early translations were driven primarily by translators' intellectual and cultural motivations, whereas later translations reflect publishers' increasing control, shaped by symbolic capital, market considerations, and the growing recognition of Kurdish literature. Translators' agency is further constrained by political and institutional factors, including censorship, time, and language hierarchies, yet facilitated by enabling mechanisms such as literary awards, paratextual visibility, and the emergence of celebrity translators.

Keywords: Actor–Network Theory (ANT); Bourdieu; Capital; Field; Kurdish Translation Studies; Translator Agency.

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1. Introduction

Ever since the mid-twentieth century, the discipline of Translation Studies has undergone a profound transformation, characterized by successive theoretical turns that have expanded its analytical horizons. From the early linguistic and pragmatic perspectives of the 1960s to the cultural turn of the 1990s and the sociological and power turns of the 2000s (Wolf 129), the field has demonstrated a remarkable capacity for theoretical growth and interdisciplinary exchange (Riccardi 2). The cultural turn, in particular, brought translation into dialogue with the sociopolitical dynamics of culture and ideology, emphasizing the contextual embeddedness of translation and calling attention to the role of historical, institutional, and discursive factors (Bassnett and Lefevere 11; Wolf 5-6). Nonetheless, this shift also exposed a significant gap, the neglect of the human agents who shape, negotiate, and influence the translation process. This awareness laid the foundation for the sociological turn, which re-oriented translation as a socially situated activity and emphasized the translator and other actors as agents with distinct roles, motivations, and degrees of power (Kalantari 742-745; Chesterman 13-22).

When it comes to the sociological paradigm, one encounters the concept of agency, a term that has been increasingly deployed to scrutinize the complex interconnection between structure and individual action in translation. As Tyulenev argues, agency is crucial for understanding both translation as a social practice and translators as social actors (17). Adopting sociological frameworks, particularly Bourdieu's notions of habitus, field, and capital, scholars such as Buzelin, Paloposki, and Abdulla have strived to theorize and operationalize translator and publisher agency, especially within institutional, political, and market-driven contexts. Despite this growing body of work, the application of agency theory remains understudied in non-European and peripheralized linguistic settings (Tymoczko; Pym).

The present study remedies this lacuna by examining the agency of translators and publishers in the production of the Persian translation of Bakhtiar Ali's contemporary Kurdish novels. As one of the most eminent Kurdish novelists, Bakhtiar Ali's work has gained widespread recognition within Iranian literary circles, and his novels have increasingly appeared in Persian translations. Translating his novels holds considerable importance, functioning as a site where cultural capital and identity are actively negotiated within the context of Iran's diverse literary sphere.

In the context of Iran, where Persian is the official and dominant literary language, Kurdish literature remains a marginalized yet increasingly visible domain. Kurdish and Persian, though both classified as peripheral languages in the world system of translation (Heilbron 429), exhibit an uneven and asymmetrical relationship within Iran's national

literary field. While Persian functions as a pathway for international literary exchange and as a target language for the translation of minority literature, Kurdish literature despite its rich tradition has only recently begun to find wider audiences through Persian translations, particularly due to increasing state leniency and institutional tolerance toward this minority language (Miraki and Noushmand 18).

The translation of Bakhtiar Ali's novels into Persian, therefore, displays a revealing example of inter-periphery exchange. This translation is inspired and formed by a plethora of sociopolitical, cultural, and economic factors, including the publishers' willingness to invest in Kurdish works, the translators' interpretive and linguistic choices, and the broader ideological and institutional frameworks that boost or constrain the production of Bakhtiar Ali's translated novels. As Gholami aptly states Ali's novels articulate the struggles and resilience of Kurdish identity under linguistic oppression (3-4). Therefore, this embedded sociopolitical discourse enhances the symbolic capital of the works, making them more attractive to publishers seeking both cultural prestige and market viability. Nevertheless, the translators and publishers involved in this process have largely gone unnoticed. As active agents, their decisions from text selection to publication play an indispensable role in shaping how Kurdish literature is represented and received in the Persian literary space.

Despite the growing recognition of Kurdish literature in Iran, academic attention to the mechanisms through which it enters the Persian literary field remains scant. Previous research focused its attention predominantly on Persian as both the language and prism of translation history in Iran, often overlooking the diverse linguistic communities that shape the nation's literary landscape (Menbari and Farahzad 9). With this in mind, taking into consideration the agency of translators and publishers in the case of Bakhtiar Ali's novels provides not only an opportunity to cover this scholarly gap but also a means to shed light on the sociocultural and institutional dynamics that account for the production of minority literatures in Iran.

This study employs Haddadian-Moghaddam's tri-tier model of agency (27) in parallel with Actor-Network Theory (ANT) and Bourdieu's concepts of capital to explore the motivations, constraints, and decisions shaping the translation and publication of Bakhtiar Ali's novels. To do so, it sets out to find adequate answers to three major questions:

- 1) Who decided which of Bakhtiar Ali's novels get translated?
- 2) What motivates translators and publishers to translate Bakhtiar Ali's novels?
- 3) What factors constrain or enhance the agency of translators and publishers?

Ultimately, this study aims to provide a more comprehensive understanding of Kurdish-Persian literary exchanges, offering insight into how translation functions as a vehicle for cultural transmission, minority representation, and literary innovation. It argues that the agents and networks of translators and publishers are central to the visibility, reception, and survival of Kurdish literature in Iran's national literary discourse, and that this agency must be understood within the wider sociopolitical dynamics of translation in multilingual societies.

1.2. Contextual Background

Bakhtiar Ali is a prominent contemporary Kurdish novelist, poet, and essayist from Iraqi Kurdistan who writes primarily in Central Kurdish¹. Widely regarded as one of the most influential voices in modern Kurdish literature, he is the author of several critically acclaimed novels, including *The Last Pomegranate of the World* (2002), *The City of the White Musicians* (2005), and *Ghazalrus and the Gardens of the Imagination*² (2008). His literary style is marked by philosophical depth, elements of magical realism, and postmodern narrative structures, through which he offers critical reflections on authoritarianism, war, memory, and on the contested boundaries of national identity. In recent years, an increasing number of his works have been translated into Persian, German, Arabic, and English, significantly contributing to his international recognition and positioning him as the doyen of Kurdish literature. The expanding body of Persian translations of Ali's novels, produced by different translators and publishers in Iran, makes his oeuvre a particularly suitable case for examining translator and publisher agency in the Kurdish-Persian literary context. Notably, the English translation of his novel *Ghazalrus and the Gardens of the Imagination* (2008) by Karim Abdullrahman is often regarded as one of the earliest Kurdish novels translated into English further accentuating Ali's transnational literary significance.

2. Review of Literature

2.1. Sociological Turn in Translation Studies

Translation Studies has experienced a series of epistemological shifts, particularly since the late twentieth century, which have expanded its theoretical and methodological horizons. One of the most influential of these shifts is the sociological turn, which reoriented the discipline toward examining translation as a socially embedded activity shaped by agents, institutions, and power structures (Wolf; Sapiro). This shift opened up promising potential for understanding translation not merely as linguistic transfer but as a practice mediated by human actors within specific socio-cultural and institutional contexts. Early forerunners of the sociological turn, such as Wolf, Heilbron, Sapiro, and Chesterman, developed conceptual frameworks that emphasized the social structures,

networks, and fields in which translators operate. Zhonggang and Wang assert that “the sociological approach in Translation Studies emphasizes the role of social structures, networks, and institutions in shaping translator agency” (49). Building on Pierre Bourdieu’s notions of habitus, field, and capital, this body of research has emphasized the embeddedness of agents’ dispositions and the institutional environments that shape translation choices and outcomes. As Inghilleri (129) contends, the incorporation of Bourdieu’s theory into Translation Studies has enabled scholars to move beyond the rigid dichotomies such as micro/macro or agency/structure, offering a more integrated view of how translators operate within systems of power and constraint.

2.2. The Definition of Agency: Theoretical Frameworks and Debates

Despite its centrality, agency remains a contested concept within social theory. Based on Buchanan’s definition (23) agency refers broadly to the capacity of individuals to act with purpose in the world, although it is frequently understood in tension with structural determinism. Giddens (4) famously defined agency as the ability to intervene in the flow of events and alter the course of history, a formulation that challenges binary views of action and structure. Sokol et al. further propose a tri-tier model for agency encompassing biophysical, psychocultural, and sociocultural dimensions, emphasizing the layered nature of human intentionality and constraint (6).

2.3. Agency in Translation

With the advent of sociologically-oriented approaches to translation, the concept of agency has gained wide currency. The initial calls of some scholars can be traced back to Lefevre’s work on rewriting, Baker’s work on narrative, and Tymoczko’s work on activism, which imply a strong focus on the agency of translators (Marais 366). At this point, it is helpful to define a term akin to the concept of agency. An agent, according to Sager, is anyone who is “in an intermediary position between a translator and an end user of a translation” (qtd. in Shuttleworth and Cowie 7). According to this definition, “any translation process will involve a number of participants” (Shuttleworth and Cowie 7). Closely related to the agent, agency has been described by Palumbo as “the capacity of individual subjects to act purposefully in a social context” (9). Laver and Mason define agency as “the ability of an individual to take purposeful and effective action in some social contexts” (6). They further note that “in studies of written translation, agency is closely associated with the empowerment of translators” (6). Similarly, Buzelin expounds on the concept of agency as “the ability to exert power in an intentional way” (6-7). Simeoni links the concept of translator agency to other social agents by defining an agent as “the subject, but socialized...inextricably linked to networks of other social agents” (452).

In a commonly accepted definition within translation studies, Kinnunen and Koskinen designate agency “as the ability and willingness to act” (6). Paloposki provides the most comprehensive typology of different types of agencies, dividing them into textual, extratextual, and paratextual agencies (191). She maintains that textual agency is assigned to the translator’s voice, manipulations, and stylistic preferences. In contrast, extratextual agency refers to the choices made by translators regarding the selection, explanation, and strategies of translated texts. The last category, paratextual agency, posits that a translator exerts agency by adding notes and prefaces (Paloposki 191). This definition stems from Paloposki’s detailed analysis of footnotes in her study of translated books in Finland from 1870 to 1929. Chan, in turn, combines the idea of “symmetric/asymmetric information,” adopted from information economics, to account for poor translators in the translation industry. Khalifa examines the construction of agency among Finnish translators and the contributing factors impacting their agency.

2.3.1. Empirical Studies on Translation Agency

A multitude of empirical studies have extended these theoretical underpinnings by examining how agency manifests itself in various translation contexts and media. By way of example, Poupaud analyzed the mediation of Hispanic literature in France, revealing tensions between translators’ advisory roles and their lack of institutional power. Scoville illuminated the translation practices of Khalil Baydas, emphasizing the deliberate manipulation of historical narratives and the role of translators in shaping Arab literary modernity. Similarly, Awung investigated the role of translator identity in the rendering of African literature into English, adopting ethnographic methods to highlight the translator’s embeddedness in socio-cultural networks.

In the context of Iran, Haddadian-Moghaddam’s sociological studies on literary translation highlight the intersection of politics, exile, and publishing structures, illustrating how translation agents overcome censorship, anonymity, and selective visibility. Bolouri offered one of the most comprehensive studies on paratextual agency, analyzing footnotes and endnotes added by contemporary Iranian literary translators. His findings reveal that translators often employ paratextual elements to bridge cultural gaps, justify their choices, and assert their interpretive authority. In this sense, the act of footnoting becomes a visible manifestation of translator agency. Similar uses of paratext as a site of agency have been observed in other semi-peripheral and non-Western literary systems and historical periods, where translators strategically negotiate asymmetrical power relations between source and target cultures. For example, Ahmadzade provided historical insights into translation practices during the Qajar period, illustrating how

translation was mobilized as a tool for cultural transformation and how specific translators played pivotal roles in disseminating new knowledge. Comparable patterns can be identified in other modernization projects, where translation functioned as a vehicle for intellectual reform and cultural reorientation rather than mere linguistic transfer.

Delzendehtrooy's study examines the role of translation agency in the introduction and institutionalization of psychology in Iran between 1920 and 1960, a period marked by Iran's increasing engagement with European scientific knowledge. Focusing on key institutions such as the Safialishah Publishing Institute and *Kaviyan* magazine, as well as influential translators including the Moshfegh Hamedani brothers and Ali-Akbar Kasmaei, the article demonstrates how translation functioned as a mediating force in distinguishing modern psychology from traditional *elm al-nafs*.

Çelik's *Translators' Formative Agency in the Periodical Hawar (1932–1943): The Making of a Kurdish Cultural Identity* offers an agent-centered analysis of how translation functioned as a formative cultural force in the construction of modern Kurdish identity through the periodical *Hawar* (1932–1943). Taking into account the multifaceted role of Celadet Alî Bedirxan as translator, editor, and cultural mediator, Çelik demonstrates how translational practices were strategically employed to shape linguistic norms, literary aesthetics, and a dialogic vision of Kurdish identity in relation to Western cultures.

Meanwhile, Abdulmaleki et al. explored non-professional translation practices in Iran's manga culture based on Haddadian-Moghaddam's tri-tier model to examine motivation, participation, and decision-making in translation activities. Recent studies have expanded the scope of agency analysis to audiovisual, game localization, and digital contexts. Zoraqi and Kafi investigated agency in video game localization in Iran, distinguishing between visible agency, reflected in textual interventions, and invisible agency, manifested in navigating interactivity and game architecture. In the same vein, Noushmand and Miraki examined fansubbed Persian translations of Hollywood films, showing how Iranian fansubbers assert cultural and political agency through paratextual annotations, often to bridge gaps between source and target cultures. In the end, Alkharashi has conducted the most recent work in which the development of agency in literary translation within the framework of digital initiatives is brought to the limelight.

Translation for social justice has been reconceptualized in recent scholarship as a central site of counter-hegemonic practice, where translation is not only a linguistic activity but a politically and ethically charged intervention in struggles for equity and rights across interconnected global contexts. Boéri argues that social justice must be

understood not only in terms of fair distribution and recognition within individual societies but as a transnational and performative project that reshapes how translation, interpreting, subtitling, and other communicative modalities support movements, media networks, and cultural institutions engaged in resistance.

Altogether, these studies emphasize the rising academic interest in examining translation through the vantage point of human agency. These studies demonstrate that translators and other mediators are far from passive conveyors of meaning; rather, they actively shape how texts are produced, circulated, and received. Nevertheless, despite this rising interest, the literature remains disproportionately focused on high-visibility translations. There is a notable lack of research on translator and publisher agency in multilingual settings, particularly in contexts where peripheral languages intersect within a single national space. The Iranian Kurdish–Persian literary dynamic is a notably underexamined, underdeveloped, and underrepresented field. Although works by scholars such as Haddadian-Moghaddam and Bolouri have established a crucial foundation, there remains a dearth of focused empirical inquiry into how agency operates at the crossroad of language politics, minority representation, and literary production.

This overview traced the conceptual evolution of agency from a contested sociological notion to a central analytical category in Translation Studies. By engaging with key sociological contributions, most notably those of Bourdieu and Giddens, and reviewing empirical research on diverse translation practices, it highlighted how translation is increasingly understood as a socially embedded activity shaped by historically situated agents operating within relations of power. Building on this perspective, the present study examines the agency of translators and publishers involved in the production of Bakhtiar Ali's translated novels in Iran, with the aim of deepening our understanding of translation as social practice in a multilingual context. To further specify how such agency is accumulated, exercised, and recognized within the literary field, the following section turns to Bourdieu's concept of capital and Latour's Actor-Network Theory (ANT).

2.4. Bourdieu's Concept of Capital

The heightened interest in the figure of the translator in the 1990s drew scholars to the works of the French sociologist Pierre Bourdieu. As Williams explains, the attraction of Bourdieu's sociology of culture lay in its view of social life as a web of interrelated practices, which he interrogated with the conceptual tools of field, habitus, capital, and *illusio* (103). Each individual, or agent, occupies a position in a particular field of activity, Bourdieu's example being the literary field, and possesses a particular habitus,

that is, a set of dispositions inclining individuals to act and react in certain conscious and unconscious ways as a result of education, social background, and conditioning. From this perspective, translation can be understood as a socially embedded activity shaped by the purposeful actions of agents and influenced by its surrounding social context (Wolf 34). As Pym notes, understanding the individuals involved in translation helps to explain not only how a particular translation comes into being but also the implications this process might have for the final product (24). This conception of translators as agents provided the impetus for various lines of inquiry, central among them Simeoni's seminal article, "The Pivotal Status of the Translator's Habitus." Simeoni's main contention is that translators are shaped by a deeply ingrained translator's habitus. According to him, the translator's habitus is "the elaborate result of a personalized social and cultural history" (32). In other words, it is a socially and historically conditioned set of dispositions that governs how translators work, the choices they make, and how they position themselves within the literary and cultural field.

Several scholars have since drawn on sociological theories to examine translators as active participants in the translation process, with Bourdieu's framework proving especially influential. His concepts have been used to critique deterministic models such as Even-Zohar's polysystem theory and Toury's norms theory for downplaying agency, instead advocating more agent-centered approaches (Buzelin; Hermans). In this regard, Bourdieu's notions of habitus, field, capital, and *illusio* have been instrumental in analyzing how translators operate within particular socio-cultural contexts, as these concepts allow for a more nuanced understanding of the interaction between agency and structure (Simeoni; Gouanvic).

Within this framework, "capital" extends beyond economic resources to encompass cultural capital (such as education and professional background), social capital (networks and institutional affiliations), and symbolic capital (prestige, legitimacy, and recognition) (Wolf 37–38). As Inghilleri (125) argues, this sociological orientation marks a paradigm shift in Translation Studies, redirecting analytical attention from texts alone toward the power-laden conditions under which translation is produced and circulated at both local and global levels. By foregrounding the unequal distribution and convertibility of different forms of capital, Bourdieu's approach enables a more nuanced analysis of how positions within the literary field are structured and contested. At the same time, the emphasis on relatively stable fields and positions raises questions about how translation projects unfold through concrete interactions among multiple actors an issue addressed in the following section through Actor–Network Theory.

2.5. Actor-Network Theory (ANT)

Although Bourdieu's sociological model has been widely adopted in Translation Studies for its insights into translator agency, scholars have noted that it tends to focus predominantly on the translator as the primary agent. This focus has been criticized for overlooking the complex interactions among other key participants in the translation process, such as editors, publishers, and institutions (Buzelin). While Bourdieu's framework is effective in explaining the translator's position within a given field, it offers limited tools for conceptualizing the networked nature of agency when multiple actors are involved. Actor–Network Theory (ANT), developed by Latour, has emerged as a useful complement. As Abdallah notes: “since objects are seen as an integral part of actor-network, this approach is useful to a researcher interested in translators' workplace studies, given that the theoretical framework allows the description of a complex structure, its heterogeneous elements, and their relationships” (23).

Although still relatively new within Translation Studies (Abdallah; Buzelin; Jones), ANT provides a robust framework for examining how diverse human and non-human actors collectively co-produce a translation project. Central to ANT is the notion that any entity capable of exerting influence, human or non-human, can be considered an actor. This includes not only translators, editors, and publishers, but also material and conceptual entities such as money, technical tools, institutions, texts, and even abstract concepts (Callon). What makes Actor–Network Theory (ANT) particularly valuable in translation research is its capacity to re-conceptualize translation not as a linear or unilateral act, but as a series of open-ended, evolving interactions among diverse agents. This perspective enables more empirical, situated, and process-oriented investigations into how various actors each embedded within specific social hierarchies, institutional contexts, and power relations collaborate, negotiate, and sometimes compete in shaping the final translated product. In the Kurdish–Persian translation context in Iran, this networked perspective is especially relevant, as the production of translated Kurdish novels typically involves close interaction among translators, publishers, editors, state regulations, market constraints, and paratextual strategies.

ANT thus allows this study to trace how agency is distributed across these interconnected actors rather than residing solely with individual translators. Rather than focusing solely on the individual translator, ANT broadens the analytical lens to encompass a heterogeneous network of human and non-human participants, including editors, publishers, financial institutions, technologies, and paratextual elements. In doing so, ANT does not merely complement Bourdieu's sociological model but extends

and enhances it by offering a more dynamic and distributed conception of agency, one that captures the fluid, relational, and contingent nature of translation as a socially co-constructed practice. This devised theoretical framework “based on Bourdieu's concepts and Latour's actor network theory allowed this study to recognize, identify, and explain the agency of the actor and the network” (Kung 393).

3. Methodology

3.1. Research Design

This study adopts a qualitative case study design to explore how translators and publishers exercise agency in the Persian translations of Bakhtiar Ali's novels (1997–2025). Drawing on semi-structured interviews, archival and historical sources, and textual and paratextual analysis, it examines how decisions, motivations, and contextual factors shape translation practices. Data were collected iteratively until theoretical saturation and analyzed thematically using Haddadian-Moghaddam's tri-tier model of agency, addressing decision-making authority, symbolic and material motivations, and sociopolitical constraints. By integrating multiple sources with a robust theoretical framework, the study reveals how agents negotiate influence and mediate the visibility of Kurdish literature within the Iranian literary field.

3.2. Data Collection

The study draws on four principal sources of data to explore the agency of translators and publishers in the production of Bakhtiar Ali's novels in Iran.

3.2.1. Case Study Selection

The core dataset consists of case studies comprising Persian translations of Bakhtiar Ali's novels directly from Kurdish into Persian, without mediation by a third language. This approach is particularly well-suited to examine complex networks of agency, as conceptualized through Bourdieu's field theory and Actor-Network Theory (ANT), enabling analysis of both human and non-human actors within the translation process. Following Susam-Saraeva's definition, case studies in Translation Studies are understood as “a unit of translation or interpreting-related activity, product, or person embedded within real-world contexts” (39). This method allows for in-depth analysis of how translators' and publishers' decisions are shaped by sociopolitical and institutional factors. Case studies are particularly appropriate for addressing how and why questions (Yin 4), making them ideal for investigating the sociopolitical, cultural, and institutional

conditions underpinning translation practices. In this study, the selected dataset includes only those novels by Bakhtiar Ali that have been translated directly into Persian. Selection criteria were guided by the following: (a) the novel must have a completed Persian translation; (b) translations must be produced in the contemporary Iranian publishing context; and (c) temporal coverage spans the period from 1997³ (frequently considered a formative moment in the development of Kurdish translated literature) to 2025 to capture the evolution of translation practices over time. The following novels have been chosen to serve the aim of this study.

No.	Original Title (Kurdish)	Persian Title	Translator (s)	Publisher of Translation	Year of Publication	Place of Publication ⁴	Place of Translation
1	مەرگی ناڤانهی دووم	مرگ تک فرزند دوم	Sardar Mohammadi	Afraz	1997	Sweden	Iran-Tehran
2	نیواری پەروانە	غروب پروانه	Marivan Halabchayee	Nimazh	1998	Sweden	Iran-Tehran
3	دواهمین هەناری دوتنیا	آخرین انار دنیا	Marivan Halabchayee	Sales	2002	Iraq	Iran-Tehran
4	دواهمین هەناری دوتنیا	آخرین انار دنیا	Arash Sanjabi	Afraz	2002	Iraq	Iran-Tehran
5	شاری موسیقارە سپییەکان	شهر نوازندگان سپید	Reza Karim Mojaver	Morvarid	2005	Iran-Iraq	Iran-Tehran
6	شاری موسیقارە سپییەکان	شهر نوازندگان سپید	Elaheh Ghasem Zadeh	Dat	2005	Iran-Iraq	Iran-Isfahan
7	خەزەڵۆوس و باخەکانی خەیاڵ	غزل نویس و باغ های خیال	Sardar Mohammadi	Afraz	2008	Iran	Iran-Tehran
8	جەمشید خانی مام	عموم جمشید خان	Reza Karim Mojaver	Afraz	2010	Iran	Iran-Tehran
9	جەمشید خانی مام	جمشید خان عموم	Marivan Halabchayee	Nimazh	2010	Iran	Iran-Tehran
10	کەشتیی فریشتەکان	کشتی فرشتگان	?	Afraz	2012 to 2017 ⁶	Iraq	Iran-Tehran
11	هەمۆرەکانی دانیاڵ	ایرهای دانیال	Mehri Berhoon	Afraz	2014	Iraq	Iran-Tehran
12	کۆشکی بانده غەمگینەکان	قصر پرندهگان غمگین	Reza Karim Mojaver	Afraz	2009	Iraq	Iran-Tehran
13	دەر یاس و لاشەکان	دریاس و جسدھا	Marivan Halabchayee	Sales	2019	Iraq	Iran-Tehran
14	داگیرکردنی تاریکی	تصاحب تاریکی	Marivan Halabchayee	Sales	2018	Iraq	Iran-Tehran
15	بەندەر فەیلی	بندر فیلی	Marivan Halabchayee	Afraz	2022	Iraq	Iran-Tehran
16	نەفرەتی نەمۆبەهاران	نفرت نوبهاران	Arako Mahmoudi	Negah	2024	Iraq	Iran-Tehran

Table 1. Bakhtiar Ali's Translated Novels in Iran along with its Metadata

3.2.2. Archival and Historical Sources

To contextualize the emergence and evolution of Kurdish-Persian translation activity, the study employs archival and historical research. Sources include national and university libraries, personal archives, translator websites, publisher records, and bibliographic databases. The timeframe of 1997 to 2025 is selected to capture a critical period during which Kurdish literary translation experienced increased visibility in Iran's literary sphere.

3.2.3. Qualitative Interviews

Semi-structured interviews were conducted with a purposive sample of seven translators and six publishers engaged in the Kurdish-Persian translation and publication of Bakhtiar Ali's novels in Iran. Participants were selected based on their direct involvement in translating or publishing at least one of Ali's works, as well as their active professional engagement within the Iranian literary field. The interviews were carried out either in person or via digital platforms such as *WhatsApp* and focused on participants' lived-experiences, professional trajectories, motivations, decision-making processes, and perceptions of agency. Interviews were conducted iteratively and continued until theoretical saturation was reached, understood as the point at which additional interviews no longer generated new themes, explanatory patterns, or analytically relevant insights. Saturation was assessed through ongoing comparison of interview data during the coding process, as recurrent categories and interpretations stabilized across participants from both groups. All interviews were transcribed and analyzed using manual thematic coding, guided by the study's theoretical framework combining Bourdieu's sociological concepts and Actor–Network Theory. To enhance analytical rigor, coding was conducted in multiple iterative rounds, supported by reflexive memo-writing and constant comparison across interviews.

3.3. Data Analysis

Data were analyzed employing a combination of thematic analysis and manual content analysis, chosen to allow deep interpretive engagement with participants' narratives and the textual and paratextual materials. Given the relatively small scale of the study and the nuanced nature of the data, manual coding was prioritized over software-assisted methods such as MAXQDA or frameworks like Colaizzi's, enabling close, iterative reading and reflexive interpretation. Interview transcripts were transcribed verbatim and coded thematically to identify recurring categories relating to identity, motivation, decision-making, and structural constraints. To ensure coding reliability, emerging codes were reviewed in multiple rounds, cross-checked against archival and textual materials, and

iteratively refined. Although coding was primarily conducted by the first researcher, these triangulation and cross-validation procedures served as a robust reliability measure. Textual and paratextual elements including translators' prefaces, footnotes, introductions, and acknowledgments were analyzed as discursive sites where agency is constructed, asserted, and negotiated. Special attention was given to lexical choices, stylistic shifts, and added interpretive commentary, which serve as indicators of the translator's presence, stance, and intervention within the translated work. This combined approach allowed the study to integrate interviews with material evidence of translator and publisher agency, situating interpretive findings within the broader sociocultural and institutional context of Kurdish–Persian literary translation.

3.4. Analytical Framework

The study revolves around Haddadian-Moghaddam's (27) tri-tier model of agency, which facilitates an integrated analysis of translational decision-making, agent motivation, and sociocultural context. This model is operationalized as follows:

Decision Level: Examines who selects works for translation and who holds authority over key editorial, publication, and marketing decisions.

Motivation Level: Investigates the symbolic and material drivers of agent involvement, ranging from cultural prestige and social capital to market viability and professional sustainability.

Contextual Level: Analyzes both the textual construction of agency (through stylistic and linguistic markers) and the extratextual forces (such as political, institutional, and economic factors) that enable or constrain agency.

By combining this framework with a thematic analysis of interviews, paratextual materials, this study delves into how Kurdish literature is shaped, mediated, and represented in its Persian translations through the active and often strategic interventions of translators and publishers. It further explores how broader sociopolitical conditions and literary market dynamics influence the visibility, voice, and sustainability of peripheral literatures within the national literary discourse of Iran.

4. Results

4.1. Decision

4.1.1. Title Selection and the Shift of Agency

According to our in-depth interviews with publishers and translators involved in the translation of Bakhtiar Ali's novels into Persian, the process of translation in Iran has undergone significant transformations. In the early stages, when Kurdish novels were largely absent from the Iranian publishing field, it was often the translators who

suggested which titles should be translated. Mission-oriented publishers, such as Afraz and Nimazh, were among the first to accept Kurdish works for publication. Over time, as translated Kurdish literature established itself in the Iranian literary market, the dynamics of title selection shifted. Publishers increasingly took the initiative in proposing titles for translation. To understand this shift, we asked participants: “Who is responsible for determining which titles can be translated from Bakhtiar Ali’s novels into Persian?” The responses indicate that the answer depends on several interconnected factors: the passage of time, the growing recognition of Kurdish authors, and the economic capital of the publishers. Together, these factors shape the discretion and agency of publishers and translators in selecting works for translation. Our analysis demonstrates that the decision-making process now varies depending on the publisher’s scale, the symbolic capital of the author, and the financial risk involved. Larger, more prestigious publishers who often have greater economic capital are more willing to invest in lesser-known titles or authors. Smaller publishers remain cautious, favoring works by established authors or delegating financial responsibility to translators when engaging with less familiar Kurdish writers. One publisher described this evolution:

Initially, the translator suggested the work, because we had no idea about Kurdish literature. But as Kurdish literature became more professional in Iran, we ourselves started suggesting Kurdish works, sometimes even in multi-volume projects. Today, it is a collaborative effort. However, since we do not have direct access to the Kurdish language and it is not our mother tongue, translators are still an essential part of selecting new works. (Publisher 1)

Currently, only translators with significant symbolic capital can independently influence or determine the selection of titles. Nevertheless, in most cases, selection remains collaborative, shaped by the interplay of literary recognition, market potential, and the evolving roles of publishers and translators. This shift illustrates a reconfiguration of capital and agency within the field of Kurdish literary translation in Iran. On the basis of Bourdieu’s framework, translators initially held symbolic authority by being the primary mediators of Kurdish texts, while publishers occupied a relatively peripheral position. Over time, publishers accumulated economic and cultural capital, allowing them to assert greater influence in selection decisions.

4.1.2. Translation Strategies and Editorial Control

Another question addressed in our interviews was: “Who decides on the translation strategies employed by the translators? Are there general strategies, i.e. should they be literal or idiomatic?” The responses suggest that the decision is influenced by a number of factors, including the publisher’s orientation, institutional practices, and market

considerations. Mission-oriented publishers follow a predictable procedure for translation. For instance, one editor said that he checked the entire text before the translation and made sure that the translation aligned with the ideological and literary expectations of the publisher (Publisher 3). By contrast, large commercial publishers give translators more autonomy in choosing their translation strategies. A recurring theme in these interviews was the notion of “Iranian readers’ tastes,” (Persian: ذائقه, *zā’eqe*) which they associated with the issue of fluent or idiomatic translations. This mirrors a goal-oriented approach that prioritizes readability and accessibility for Iranian audiences. However, publishers such as Afraz, Sales, and Niloufar, who follow faithful translations, have now turned to translations that offer more explicit and culturally faithful representations of Kurdish life and narrative. Their strategy tends toward literal or faithful translation, aiming to preserve the cultural and linguistic context of the original Kurdish text.

These different strands of strategy are evident in the translations of two prominent translators: Marivan Halabchai and Karim Mojavar. The commercial publisher, Sales, favored Halabchai’s idiomatic and reader-centered translation style, which is in line with mainstream literary tastes in Iran. Afraz, on the other hand, supported Mojavar’s more source-centered approach, which attempts to preserve the linguistic and cultural characteristics of the original Kurdish work (Translator 2). Thus, two trends emerge in this field: fluent, reader-oriented translations promoted by market-oriented publishers, and faithful, source-oriented translations promoted by mission-oriented publishers.

From an ANT perspective, these interactions reflect the distribution of power within the translation network: publishers act as key nodes shaping the conditions under which translators operate, while translators exercise agency within the constraints and opportunities established by these institutional and market actors. In this way, translation strategies emerge not solely from individual choice but through the dynamic interplay of human and non-human actants, including publishers, readership expectations, and institutional norms.

4.1.3. Institutional and Political Constraints in Decision-making

Who decides on the guiding principles of translation was also addressed, especially in contexts where non-compliance and non-adherence to Iranian rules could lead to significant consequences. For example, in Iran, failure to comply with established cultural and ideological norms can result in legal penalties, including denial of a publication license or blocking of the publisher’s institutions by the Ministry of Culture and Islamic Guidance (MoCIG) (Publisher 6). This fact highlights the institutional and

political considerations that translators and publishers face in their work. It also illustrates how they strive to balance fidelity to the source text with adaptation to sociocultural expectations and the political environment. The majority of interviewed publishers admitted to enforcing specific regulations on translated works, with heightened scrutiny in the case of Kurdish literature. More to the point, as one publisher noted, the implementation of these restrictions is not permanent: “There is no dogmatic view on censorship, and it is not a government view; it is more a matter of taste and individuality,” (Publisher 3), emphasizing the discretionary role of individual censors.

While censorship is institutionally regulated at the state level, this account points to the variability and interpretive flexibility through which official norms are implemented in everyday publishing practices. Translators also admitted to engaging in forms of self-censorship, particularly when there are elements in Kurdish source texts that do not comply with Iranian cultural norms or the prevailing political climate. Erotic language, graphic content, and religiously sensitive material were considered highly sensitive in Persian, and both the translators and publishers attempted to remove them. Therefore, these practices illustrate how translation, especially of minority literature, can become a highly provocative and politically sensitive practice. Most of the time, the publishers cited political contents of the Kurdish novels as unacceptable, because, according to their statements, the publication of politically sensitive content could put the whole publisher at the risk of blocking.

4.2. Motivation for Translation

4.2.1. Mission-oriented vs. Market-oriented Motivations

Analysis of the interview data revealed a typology of translator and publisher motivations that emerged inductively rather than being predefined. These motivations can be broadly categorized as mission-oriented, driven by cultural service and symbolic goals, and market-oriented, driven by economic and commercial considerations. The motivation for translating Bakhtiar Ali’s novels into Persian varies substantially across large-scale, small-scale, and independent publishers in Iran.

A clear pattern emerges in the Kurdish literary field. Small publishers often approach translation as a platform for intellectual and cultural influence with the intention to enhance the visibility of Kurdish literature and contribute to cultural discourse. One translator (7) emphasized that the translation of Kurdish literature into Persian, particularly the works of Bakhtiar Ali, has played a significant role in fostering awareness of Kurdish language and identity among readers. According to the translator, many students and readers who encountered these Persian translations began to take an active interest in their own linguistic and cultural heritage, eventually returning to read literature in Kurdish and engage more deeply with Kurdish culture.

In contrast, large publishers tend to capitalize on Bakhtiar Ali's novels as a source of economic gain, leveraging the author's growing recognition and fame to maximize commercial returns. Independent publishers often occupy an intermediate position, balancing symbolic and economic motivations depending on their resources and institutional constraints. The interviews further revealed that both small scale and large-scale translators and publishers frequently frame their work in terms of Resālat (mission) and Khedmat (service) with an eye on ethical or cultural responsibility. For example, the preface to the Persian translation of *The Last Pomegranate Tree* explicitly situates Bakhtiar Ali as both a political activist and a literary craftsman:

Bakhtiar Ali's activities are a refutation of the claim that the writer is limited to his own work and considers any other branch of the universe to be a waste of energy and a deviation from the main standard. Bakhtiar Ali has always been a great theorist and an outstanding essayist in his years of activity. In his political activities, he has acted as a social reformer. (Sanjabi 7)

This framing reflects the symbolic capital accrued by mission-oriented publishers, such as Afraz, who often allow translators greater freedom to intervene in the text to articulate broader cultural or political agendas. In contrast, market-oriented publishers like Sales tend to limit translator interventions, viewing a brief introduction as sufficient. For instance, in Halabchayee's introduction to *The Last Pomegranate Tree* (2014), little to no contextual information about the sociopolitical significance of the novel is provided, emphasizing efficiency and market considerations over cultural framing.

Furthermore, the institutional and financial security of large publishers enables them to engage in risk-taking and trial-and-error strategies, including translating low profile works of Bakhtiar Ali's novels for possible commercial gain. These dynamic raises broader questions about the commercialization and commodification of Kurdish literature in Iran, highlighting the tension between cultural mission and market logic. Overall, these findings demonstrate that the motivations of translators and publishers are not only diverse but also directly influence how Kurdish literature is mediated for Persian readers. Mission-oriented actors prioritize symbolic and cultural capital, shaping the text and its paratexts to enhance intellectual and social impact, while market-oriented actors prioritize economic capital, focusing on strategies that maximize visibility and profitability with minimal intervention.

4.2.2. Symbolic Capital and Activist Logic

Based on our interviews, non-economic motivations are often prioritized over purely financial interests, reflecting how translators exercise agency within the literary field. Most participants explicitly framed translation as a form of activism, aimed at fostering a greater understanding and appreciation of Kurdish literature and language within Iran's broader cultural landscape. This activist orientation was echoed by publishers. For example, a Kurdish economic publisher remarked: "This is not a matter of money and the main motivation is not material concerns. The publisher's mission is to introduce new ideas and new writers. Kurdish literature also needed time to take root in Iran" (Publisher 4).

Notably, neither translators nor publishers openly acknowledged economic gain as the primary motivation, despite its underlying influence. Instead, they emphasized public visibility and the consolidation of the Kurdish voice within a predominantly monolingual cultural field. Historically, as Haddadian-Moghaddam observes, "Translation has functioned as a tool for fame in Iran, and translators have benefited from social recognition, that is, symbolic capital" (120). This interplay of symbolic capital and cultural influence was vividly illustrated by a publisher recalling: "I once promoted Kurdish literature at the Tehran Book Fair. When young people asked me for Kafka, Borges, and Murakami, I introduced them to Bakhtiar Ali instead" (Publisher 6).

4.2.3. Fame, Competition, and Ethical Tensions

This quest for greater recognition and visibility in the Iranian publishing field is particularly evident in the re-translation of Bakhtiar Ali's novels. In some cases, the pressures of publishing fame, market competition, and the pursuit of economic capital have resulted in an over-reliance on existing translations, producing works that rather than offering fresh interpretation verge on replication or, arguably, bordering on replication, if not to say plagiarism. This anxiety of influence, in the Bloomian sense, wields a powerful effect on retranslators, leading their retranslations to take on the form of first translations, whereby later translators are so influenced by previous renditions that their attempts at originality are constrained, causing retranslations to resemble first translations in structure, style, and interpretation rather than constituting independent creative acts.

The absence of enforceable copyright laws in Iran further exacerbates this dynamic. Large-scale publishers, equipped with substantial institutional and financial resources, can reproduce or appropriate the painstaking work of small-scale or independent translators with relative ease, facing little to no legal repercussions. In practice, this allows them to expedite new translations of popular titles while avoiding the time and effort invested by smaller publishers effectively “benefiting from others’ hard work” without contributing original intellectual labor. Some smaller publishers explicitly characterize such practices as *Pokhte-Khari* (literally, “benefiting from others’ hard work”) (Publisher 4).

This situation highlights the broader tension between economic imperatives and the pursuit of symbolic capital: while some actors approach translation as a form of cultural activism or mission-driven service, others prioritize market visibility, prestige, and profit, even if this entails appropriating previous translations. The phenomenon of re-translation in this context thus illustrates the complex interplay of agency, competition, and capital accumulation, showing how translators and publishers navigate the dual pressures of market demands and cultural responsibility. Within this framework, large-scale publishers’ ability to reproduce small-scale translations without constraint not only intensifies competition but also challenges the very notion of creative and ethical translational practice in the Iranian literary field.

4.3. Context

4.3.1. Textual Constraints in Translating Kurdish Culture

Several textual constraints in the translation of Kurdish novels can significantly shape and sometimes limit the agency of the translator. As one translator explained:

There are some cultural and ethnic elements peculiar to the Kurdish language that are uncommon among Persian speakers. For example, certain Kurdish songs, melodies, and ballads such as *Heiran*, *Beit*, *Lavek*, and *Howra* require further explanation in translation. Kurdish terms and lexical items related to nature, local color, and culture-specific elements also need explication.
(Translator 6)

The deeply culture-specific nature of Kurdish language and culture therefore emerges as a major challenge, often contributing to delays in the submission of translated novels. At the textual level, translators must negotiate both cultural irrealia, elements without direct equivalents in Persian culture, and realia, including sociopolitical and locally grounded terms such as *Pêşmerge* (Kurdish armed fighter), *Anfal* (Anfal campaign and massacre of Kurdish people), *Chaykhana* (teahouse), *çulewanî* (wasteland), *kilekekan* (ploughed land), *jirgê biryan* (grief-stricken), and *tep û towz* (dust).

Translator agency also manifests in the treatment of broader culture-specific items, including proper nouns (personal and place names), historical and religious figures, traditional festivals, cuisine, social institutions, customs, and material artifacts (Aixelà 52-78; Newmark 5-14). Decisions about whether to retain, explicate, domesticate, or adapt these elements reflect the translator's negotiation of fidelity, readability, and cultural mediation, demonstrating that agency in translation extends beyond mere linguistic equivalence to encompass interpretive and cultural responsibility.

The negotiation of such culture-specific elements also highlights the translator's role as a cultural mediator rather than a neutral conduit. Translators are compelled to make interpretive choices that balance the source text's authenticity with the target audience's comprehension which most of the time creates a tension between foreignization and domestication (Venuti 1995). For instance, retaining terms like *Pêşmerge* or *Anfal* preserves the historical and political specificity of Kurdish experiences but may require paratextual interventions, such as footnotes or glossaries, to ensure reader understanding. Conversely, domestication strategies risk erasing or flattening the cultural nuances that distinguish Kurdish identity. Most retranslators of Bakhtiar Ali's novels into Persian expressed their oppositions towards the eradication of culture-specific and culture-bound elements of Kurdish language and society. Retaining the Kurdishness of the original text was mostly cited as their major incentive to retranslate Bakhtiar Ali into Persian.

These decisions put emphasis on the point that agency is exercised not only in selecting linguistic equivalents but also in shaping how the cultural reality of the source text is represented and received, positioning the translator as an active participant in constructing intercultural meaning rather than a passive transmitter of words.

4.3.2. Extratextual Constraints: State Censorship and Political Sensitivity

One of the main extratextual constraints for Kurdish translators, according to their responses, is censorship. In addition to adopting their own intervening strategies, such as omitting or modifying politically or religiously sensitive content, translators must also grapple with institutional censorship, particularly from the Iranian Ministry of Culture and Islamic Guidance (Ershad). According to the guidelines provided to them, translators typically face two choices: either to delete a sentence, term, or paragraph entirely or to paraphrase it using alternative wordings. Names of political figures or references to cultural events are considered highly sensitive and are therefore often removed, reflecting the translators' perceptions of potential risk and audience reception (Translator

2). In an interview with the Iranian scholar and translator Khazayee Farid, Halabchayee asserts:

First, let me say that I have translated eight novels by Bakhtiar Ali. Daniel's Clouds, which had not received a publication license for several years, three years ago was reluctantly adjusted to comply with some censored portions of the work and obtained its license; it will be published soon. The Seizure of Darkness, translated several years ago, and Bandar Fayli, Bakhtiar Ali's latest novel, which, like his other works, he sent me in a pre-publication Kurdish manuscript for translation into Persian, are all scheduled to be published by Nashr-e Saless by the end of this autumn. (73)

While translators contend with structural limitations, publishers also grapple with significant challenges, central among them, the pervasive force of systematic censorship. One publisher remarked, "Ershad uses some gol-vâzhe [coded or flagged terms] to filter translations of translations. These filters are shaped by Iran's sociopolitical climate and sensitivities. For example, the color green gained heightened attention after the 2009 Green Movement, or names like Mahsa were flagged due to recent events (Publisher 4). Publishers noted that censorship is often highly subjective and dependent on the individual censor, as no standardized guidelines exist. In some cases, the revision process undergoes three or four rounds before approval is granted.

Time emerges as another significant extratextual constraint that shapes translator agency in the production of Kurdish-Persian literary translations of Bakhtiar Ali. Translators often face pressures not only from institutional censorship and complex cultural content but also from deadlines imposed by publishers or the urgency of manuscript delivery. As one translator noted, "Bakhtiar Ali's novels put the burden of delivering them quickly, which affects the context" (Translator 4), while another explained, "Sometimes the manuscripts arrive in such a way that I barely have enough time to capture the cultural nuances. The pressure to finish quickly inevitably affects how much I can explain or adapt for Persian readers" (Translator 5). He goes on to say "Translation of Bakhtiar Ali is unending and each edition we present new corrections to the first translation due to the fact that we had no time to provide a satisfactory translation from scratch."

Critically, these statements highlight how temporal pressures can influence interpretive choices: under tight timelines, translators may prioritize completing the text over fully negotiating culturally specific terms, explicating local color, or providing nuanced paratextual guidance. Such constraints risk flattening the source text's

sociocultural richness or reducing opportunities for reflective mediation, illustrating that agency is exercised within a matrix of structural limitations. Furthermore, delays caused by censorship, such as multiple rounds of revision or prolonged licensing, interact with these time pressures, fragmenting the translation process and forcing translators to balance fidelity, readability, and cultural mediation under conditions of temporal and institutional constraint.

4.3.3. Boosting Factors and Enabling Conditions

Despite the constraints imposed by censorship, translators identified certain boosting factors that enhance their agency. Within the tri-tier model, these factors primarily operate at the contextual level, shaping the conditions in which translators make decisions and pursue their motivations, and thereby enabling greater freedom and visibility within a restrictive literary environment. Literary prizes such as Mehregan (in Persian مهرگان) and, more recently, Hazhar Pen Award (In Kurdish هه‌زار قه‌لمه‌می خه‌لاتی) were frequently referred to as sources of encouragement and professional validation. As one translator explained, “Receiving the Hazhar Pen Prize for my translation of Bakhtiar Ali’s *The City of White Musicians* was a great motivation for me to continue my work” (Translator 2). In addition, rivalry among publishing houses has played a significant role in propelling the translation of Bakhtiar Ali’s novels in Iran. Two major waves, one led by Afraz and the other by Sales, have resulted in re-translations and competitive efforts to publish his works first. This competition functions as a means of accruing cultural prestige, symbolic capital, and economic gain within the literary marketplace.

Another frequently mentioned facilitator was the presence of cultural and academic events, where recent translations of Bakhtiar Ali’s novels are launched in the presence of scholars, experts, and critics. These public forums not only enhance the translator’s visibility but also serve as venues for accumulating symbolic capital, which can later be leveraged within the Iranian literary field.

At the same time, publishers benefit from the symbolic capital accumulated by their translators. Figures such as Marivan Halabchayee have turned translation into a form of self-branding, frequently sharing their achievements and public appearances on social media. This transformation into a “celebrity translator” not only enhances the visibility and marketability of the publishers but also constitutes a form of symbolic capital for the translators themselves. As demonstrated in a study on Kurdish celebrity translators in Iran (Miraki, Moinzadeh, and Ketabi 79), translators such as Halabchayee and Karim Mojaver have attained public recognition through paratextual branding, participation in literary festivals, media exposure, and active engagement with digital networks. Their

celebrity status illustrates how peripheral literature can circulate more widely when translators leverage visibility to accrue symbolic and cultural capital, reinforcing both their own agency and the market success of the works they mediate. Publishers deliberately exploit their established reputation and credibility to maximize readership and generate financial gain. This fame accumulated by translators acts as a contextual factor, boosting their agency and enabling their works to be published in larger numbers with fewer constraints.

The complex interplay between celebrity translators, publishing houses (whether large or small), and the quest of cultural recognition and readership has intensified the dynamics of literary translation in Iran. In sum, the translation of Kurdish literature into Persian stands at the crossroad of structural constraint and symbolic opportunity, where mechanisms of censorship, inter-institutional rivalry, symbolic recognition, and strategic self-promotion gather together to constitute the shifting agency of translators and publishers alike.

5. Discussion

The findings of this study illustrate that the translation of Bakhtiar Ali's novels into Persian is not a mere linguistic transfer, but is deeply interwoven into a matrix of sociocultural, political, and market practices. Translators and publishers operate not as neutral intermediaries but as agents embedded in complex networks of power, ideology, and cultural capital. These findings highlight the significance of the sociological turn in Translation Studies, particularly in contexts marked by linguistic hierarchies and minority marginalization, exemplified by Kurdish-to-Persian translation, where agency is shaped by symbolic, commercial, and sociopolitical considerations.

The tri-tiered model of agency (Haddadian-Moghaddam 27) applied in this research demonstrates a transition from translator-led initiatives to publisher-driven practices. This framework informed the design of interviews and the analytical structure, with questions organized around the three dimensions of decision, motivation, and context. Initially, translators undertook Bakhtiar Ali's works as personal or political missions, motivated primarily by symbolic goals. Over time, larger publishers, attracted by the marketability of these texts and the symbolic prestige of the author, assumed a more prominent role in shaping translation projects. This evolution reflects Bourdieu's emphasis on the struggle for capital symbolic or economic within the literary field.

The phenomenon of multiple retranslations, competing publishers, and symbolic contests over rights and visibility demonstrates how translational agency is increasingly shaped by commodification. Rival publishers mobilize contracts, cover design, and marketing narratives as actants to claim authority over the same Kurdish text, while

translators strategically align with particular publishers to secure enhanced visibility, illustrating how agency emerges through networked struggles over symbolic and economic capital. The absence of enforceable copyright laws exacerbates ethical tensions, with smaller publishers characterizing the appropriation of their work by larger actors as *Pokhte-Khari* (benefiting from others' hard work), revealing the conflict between market imperatives and professional or cultural responsibility.

Many translators and independent publishers continue to articulate their motivations in terms of *khedmat* (service) and *resālat* (mission), reflecting non-commercial, idealistic orientations (Translator 3). Ancillary motivations, such as fame and recognition, further reflect Bourdieu's notion of symbolic capital, where cultural prestige, professional legitimacy, and social recognition function as key drivers (Bourdieu). Translators such as Halabchayee and Mojaver function not only as linguistic mediators but also as cultural spokespeople, navigating visibility, authority, and legitimacy within the Persian literary field (Sapiro). Persian translations of Bakhtiar Ali have heightened Kurdish readers' awareness of their literary heritage and stimulated engagement with original Kurdish texts. In this sense, translation acts as cultural activism, fostering self-awareness (*khod-āgāhi*, خودآگاهی) and enabling Kurdish readers to reclaim and engage with their language and identity. Yet there is a potential risk that overreliance on Persian translations may weaken Kurdish-language literacy.

The role of Iranian readers' tastes (*zā'eqe*, ذائقه) emerged as a critical factor shaping translation strategies. Market-oriented publishers favor idiomatic and fluent Persian to align with mainstream literary expectations, whereas mission-oriented publishers prioritize faithful, culturally grounded translations. This tension reflects broader challenges in balancing readability with cultural fidelity, exemplifying Venuti's (1995) concepts of domestication versus foreignization. Translators are thus negotiating both linguistic and cultural mediation, balancing audience expectations with the integrity of the source text.

Temporal constraints further shape translational agency. Tight deadlines, delayed manuscript delivery, and prolonged licensing procedures intersect with institutional censorship, often forcing translators to prioritize completion over nuanced cultural negotiation, paratextual guidance, or the explanation of Kurdish-specific cultural references (e.g., songs, festivals, terms such as *Pêşmerge* or *Anfal*). These pressures demonstrate how agency is exercised within structural limitations, highlighting the interplay between interpretive responsibility and practical constraints.

Censorship imposed by the Ministry of Culture and Islamic Guidance (MoCIG) also structures translational practice. Translators and publishers report modifying content, selecting safer titles, and deploying paratextual strategies, such as forewords or footnotes, to navigate ideological scrutiny. Actor-Network Theory (Latour) provides a useful lens for conceptualizing these dynamics, illustrating how human and non-human actors

including texts, institutions, translators, publishers, censors, literary awards, and book festivals form interdependent networks that shape the conditions under which agency is exercised. Translators' symbolic capital, such as reputation or affiliation with influential publishers, often safeguards against censorship or institutional obstruction, highlighting the uneven and contextually contingent distribution of agency.

The empirical material also highlights the significance of eventification (Cudny 90) in shaping translational agency. Participation in cultural events, such as the Tehran Book Fair, literary award ceremonies (e.g., Mehregan, Hazhar Pen), and public launch events, functions as both a non-human actant and a strategic platform for accumulating symbolic capital. These events allow translators to consolidate authority, expand professional networks, and enhance market visibility, demonstrating how translation is co-produced through human and non-human entanglements that regenerate cultural vibrancy, readership, and identity.

At the textual level, translators exercise agency through the negotiation of culture-specific elements, including proper nouns, local terms, songs, and sociocultural references. Decisions regarding retention, domestication, or explicitation illustrate the translator's role as cultural mediator rather than neutral conveyor. Retaining terms like *Pêşmerge* or *Anfal* preserves Kurdish historical and political specificity, while paratextual interventions ensure comprehension for Persian readers. These interpretive choices highlight the translator's responsibility in shaping intercultural meaning.

This study ultimately situates Kurdish-to-Persian translation within an inter-periphery framework. While Persian functions as the dominant language within Iran, it occupies a peripheral position globally. Translation from Kurdish into Persian reflects center-periphery dynamics within a multilingual national periphery, where symbolic, institutional, and economic stakes converge. This dynamic elevates the visibility of Kurdish literature while creating potential asymmetries, such as reduced engagement with the original Kurdish texts. The analytical framework developed here may be applied comparatively to other minority literatures in Iran (Arabic, Baluchi, Azari etc.) and globally, where similar interactions between censorship, symbolic capital, and market hierarchies shape translational agency.

The translation of Bakhtiar Ali's novels thus exemplifies how translator and publisher agency is co-produced through human and non-human networks, mediated by symbolic and economic capital, market expectations, censorship, temporal pressures, and ethical considerations. Translation emerges as a site of cultural negotiation, identity formation, and contested authority, demonstrating that even in a heavily regulated literary field, agents can exercise creativity, mediation, and influence while navigating the competing demands of cultural fidelity, readability, and commercial viability.

6. Concluding Remarks

This study has examined the complex interplay of agency and network dynamics in the Persian translation of Bakhtiar Ali's Kurdish novels within the Iranian literary system. Drawing on Haddadian-Moghaddam's tri-tier model of agency and informed by Bourdieu's sociological framework and Actor-Network Theory (ANT), it has provided a multidimensional account of how decisions, motivations, and contextual constraints shape the production and reception of these translations. Actor-Network Theory is particularly suited to this study as it conceptualizes literary translation as the outcome of interactions within heterogeneous networks of both human and non-human actors. In the Iranian context, elements such as publishing regulations, censorship mechanisms, paratextual strategies, and market conditions function as actants that actively shape translational decisions alongside translators and publishers. By highlighting relational dynamics rather than fixed hierarchies, ANT complements Bourdieu's field theory and Haddadian-Moghaddam's tri-tier model of agency, allowing for a more nuanced account of how Bakhtiar Ali's Kurdish novels are produced and circulated in Persian.

Far from being passive linguistic mediators, translators and publishers emerge as strategic agents operating within, and actively reshaping, a multifaceted web of institutional, political, and cultural forces. The findings confirm that agency in this context is dynamic, evolving in response to broader sociopolitical and literary developments. At the decision level, the nexus of power has gradually shifted from translators to publishers, reflecting changes in symbolic capital, literary recognition, and market considerations. At the motivational level, translators and smaller publishers are often guided by ideological, cultural, and activist commitments, whereas larger publishers increasingly approach Bakhtiar Ali's works as commodified literary products with high market value. This dual orientation, cultural mission versus economic strategy, highlights the heterogeneity of agents' positions and investments within the field. At the contextual level, both structural constraints (such as censorship, political sensitivities, time and institutional gatekeeping) and enabling factors (including symbolic capital, literary awards, public events, and translator visibility) mediate agentive practices. These dynamics underscore the persistent tension between fidelity to the source culture and conformity to dominant sociopolitical expectations. Moreover, the rise of celebrity translators and the branding strategies employed by publishers point to the commodification of translation itself, in which symbolic and market capital are deeply intertwined.

The case of Bakhtiar Ali's translated novels thus offers a revealing example of inter-peripheral literary exchange shaped by local power structures, multilingual politics, and evolving forms of agency. It also underscores the necessity of foregrounding human agents and networks in the study of translation, particularly in minoritized and multilingual settings that remain underrepresented in global Translation Studies scholarship. By offering an empirically grounded account of translator and publisher agency in Iran's Kurdish–Persian literary context, this study contributes to a more nuanced understanding of how minority literatures are translated, circulated, and contested within contemporary national and transnational literary fields. It demonstrates that sustained attention to agency, capital, and networks is essential for advancing Translation Studies in such contexts and for consolidating Kurdish Translation Studies as a critical and theoretically engaged field of inquiry.

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Notes

¹ We have intentionally employed “Central Kurdish” instead of Sorani Kurdish to emphasize the role of Central Kurdish as the **standardized, literary form** of Kurdish. Also, compared to Sorani, Central Kurdish is assumed to be more fitting by linguistics to accommodate a host of closely related varieties of Kurdish.

² Translated into English as *As I Stare at the Night of the City* (2016)

³ Although translated Kurdish literary works had appeared prior to this date such as Jalal Malakshah's translation of Latif Halmat's poem entitled 'Then' [in Persian آننگه] published in Shamlo's Jom'eh magazine (1979), and Ahmad Ghazi and Mohammad Ghazi's Persian translation of Ebrahim Ahmad's Zhanî Gel (The Agony of the People) in 1979 these efforts remained sporadic and largely isolated. It was only from 1997 onward, coterminous with the emergence of the reformist movement in Iran, that Kurdish literature in general, and Kurdish translated literature in particular, began to flourish in a sustained and institutionalized manner, a trajectory that has continued to the present day.

⁴ Place of Publication = country of publisher of the Persian translation; Place of Translation = city where translation work was conducted, if known.

⁵ The translator is anonymous and it has not been authorized by the publisher.

⁶ 2012-2017 (translation process), it has begun in 2012 and ended in 2017.