Variables Influencing the Occupational Prestige of Translation: Iranian Translation Students' Perspectives[1]

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Abstract

This qualitative study explores occupational prestige in translation through Iranian students' perspectives (N=115), selected via stratified sampling across 10 universities. Thematic analysis identified compensation, specialized knowledge, and meritocratic recognition as key enhancers of prestige, while low pay, lack of institutional support, and societal undervaluation diminished status. The Iranian context—marked by limited professional infrastructure but existing certification frameworks—revealed unique tensions in prestige perception. Participants emphasized translation's identity as both a skilled profession and cultural art, highlighting the irreplaceable role of human expertise in linguistic and cultural mediation. Findings suggest structural interventions (e.g., standardized certification, public awareness campaigns, and strengthened educational pathways) could elevate the profession's standing. The study contributes to debates about professionalization in non-Western contexts, offering practical insights for academic programs and policymakers aiming to bolster translators' status amid evolving occupational landscapes.

Keywords: Iranian context, Occupational prestige, Professional identity, Translation

1. Introduction

In recent years, translation studies have attracted increasing attention from various academic fields, primarily due to the growing body of research that has helped transition the field into a more standardized and structured discipline. These studies have focused on various topics to emphasize the importance of viewing translation as a practical, multidisciplinary field that has drawn from diverse theoretical foundations and empirical principles. Some of the topics covered include the professional domain of translation (Dam & Zethsen, 2010; Godbout & Tran, 2012; Volga, 2018), the dynamic and active nature of the translation profession (Séguinot, 2007), the social and personal status of professional translators (Hoang, 2020; Kafi et al., 2018; Nicolai, 2014; Ruokonen, 2016), and the perspectives of students, teachers, and translators (Dam & Zethsen, 2009, 2011; Ruokonen, 2016; Volga, 2018).

The position of translation as a profession within society's occupational hierarchy and the attitudes held by both translators and non-translators towards the translation profession are crucial topics for sociological research in the field. According to Sela-sheffy (2006), translators are highly concerned about their professional status, just like other professional groups. Since they are often seen as playing a subordinate role in the creation of texts, translators make concerted efforts to improve their prestige and standing within the industry. The translation sector faces several challenges, including the need for certification, education, and the development of professional ethical codes for translators (McDonough, 2011; Kafi et al., 2018). The significance of the translation sector to society and its professional reputation, particularly in countries like Iran, remains unclear. A study conducted in 2009 by Abdollahyan and Nayebi showed that the translation profession is not officially recognized in Iran. Their analysis, however, did not specifically address the prestige of translation as a career.

These issues must be carefully considered to identify their unique advantages and disadvantages. Therefore, to improve translation education programs and better prepare students for the workforce, the current study aims to explore how translation students perceive the occupational reputation of the discipline.

2. Review of the Literature

2.1. Sociology of Translation as an Interdisciplinary Field

Translation studies has established itself as an inherently interdisciplinary field, encompassing diverse translation types (literary, technical, terminology) and interpretation while intersecting with semiotics, sociology, psychology, linguistics, and machine translation studies (Toury, 2021). This multidisciplinary approach examines translators, translation processes, and their cultural impacts, recognizing that public perception of translations is shaped by these interconnected factors. The field's historical development reveals its deeply interwoven nature with other academic disciplines, as emphasized by the Vienna Translation Studies Congress.

A significant sociological turn occurred in translation studies during the early 2000s, building on foundations from the late 1990s (Dam & Zethsen, 2016). This shift reconceptualized translation as fundamentally social practice rather than purely linguistic exercise, examining how social contexts shape translation processes. Wolf's (2007) theoretical framework advanced this perspective by analyzing cultural dimensions, social power structures, and ideological influences in translation, demonstrating how sociological and cultural studies approaches can illuminate socio-political aspects of translation.

2.2. Occupational Prestige: Definitions and Debates

The concept of occupational prestige has gained increasing scholarly attention, particularly regarding how professional status is constructed and perceived in modern society. Hayes (2017) notes that digital environments have transformed public understandings of professional status, while Gentile (2018) emphasizes

prestige's crucial role in shaping professional identities and business perceptions. Occupational prestige significantly impacts career satisfaction and retention, with negative perceptions potentially leading to job dissatisfaction or turnover, whereas positive attitudes enhance organizational commitment.

For translation professionals, this prestige dynamic presents particular challenges. The field has long debated whether translation constitutes a profession, vocation, activity, or innate talent (Fang, 2012; Godbout & Tran, 2012). Research across cultural contexts identifies specialized knowledge, formal education, and training as essential markers of professionalization. Godbout and Tran's (2012) Canadian study proposed strategies for professional engagement, while Dam & Zethsen (2016) found Danish translators' specialized knowledge enhanced their occupational value. Pym et al. (2016) similarly identified professional and intellectual attributes as credibility factors, and Katan (2009a, 2009b) highlighted translators' emphasis on skills and education as professionalization indicators.

Comparative studies reveal how professional structures influence translation's status. Research in Turkey (Volga, 2018) and Vietnam (Hoang, 2020) demonstrates how professional organizations, educational standards, and regulatory frameworks can elevate the field's standing. However, the translation profession globally faces persistent challenges in achieving recognition comparable to more established disciplines.

2.3. Challenges in Translation Professionalization

Recent scholarship has identified significant gaps between translation education and market requirements (Doan, 2010; Hoang, 2017). The field's occupational structure—characterized by mixed employment patterns (full-time, part-time, freelance)—reflects both flexibility and instability, complicating professional standardization efforts. Kafi et al.'s (2018) Iranian case study revealed systemic

barriers including inadequate management structures, educational shortcomings, and funding limitations that hinder professional recognition.

These challenges underscore broader issues in translation's professional development. While the field has made substantial progress in establishing theoretical foundations and interdisciplinary connections, practical implementation of professional standards remains inconsistent across contexts. The tension between translation's intellectual demands and its often precarious working conditions creates ongoing professional identity challenges.

Contemporary translation studies has evolved into a robust interdisciplinary field with strong sociological orientations, examining translation as both cultural practice and professional activity. The field's development has been significantly influenced by debates about occupational prestige and professionalization, with research demonstrating the importance of specialized knowledge, formal training, and professional structures in enhancing translators' status. However, persistent challenges in education-to-workforce transition, occupational stability, and cross-cultural recognition indicate areas requiring further research and policy attention. Ongoing studies continue to investigate how sociological factors and professionalization strategies can strengthen translation's position as both academic discipline and recognized profession in diverse global contexts.

3. Methodology

3.1. Participants

Participants were recruited via stratified random sampling across 10 Iranian universities (5 public, 5 private), with quotas for gender (25% female, 75% male) and education level (62% BA, 22% MA, 4% PhD). Data saturation was confirmed after 100 responses. To ensure that the researcher could include people with different characteristics (such age, sex, and educational level) and appropriately represent the

study's target demographic, the participants were selected through a random selection process. The following table shows the demographic characteristics of the participants:

Table 1. Demographic Information of the Students

		Frequency	Percent	Cumulative Percent
Gender	Female	29	25.2	25.2
	Male	86	74.8	100.0
Educational Degree	Bachelor's student	71	61.7	61.7
	Master's student	25	21.7	21.7
	Doctoral student	4	3.5	3.5
	Bachelor's degree	5	4.3	4.3
	Master's degree	9	7.8	7.8
	Doctoral degree	1	.9	.9
Translation Certificate	Authorized	23	20.0	20.0
	Non-authorized	92	80.0	100.0
Job Status	studying	80	69.6	69.6
	working in a field other than translation	21	18.3	18.3
	unemployed	4	3.5	3.5
	other	10	8.7	8.7
	Total	115	100.0	

3.2. Data Collection and Instruments

Open-ended questions were used in the study to gauge the professional status of translators. The work of Ruokonen and Svahn (2022) served as the primary basis for these issues, with additional changes made in response to gaps found in the body of current material. Interviews and the examination of existing records were used when more thorough and unambiguous information was needed. Two university professors confirmed that the questionnaire, which had previously been altered and used, showed notable levels of consistency. Thirty items made up the questionnaire, which included both open-ended and demographic questions that gathered crucial data in the form of opinion statements.

3.3. Research Design

The study used open-ended questionnaires and qualitative data collection techniques to investigate participants' perceptions of the professional prestige of translating in Iran. To obtain thorough, detailed, and unambiguous information from the subjects, the researchers used open-ended questions.

3.4. Procedure

Following reliability testing, the instrument was used with the target groups. Both in-person interviews and an online survey were used to gather data. The participants filled out the informed permission form after being assured of the research's confidentiality and ethical considerations. The tool was made available to the participants, along with guidance on how to answer the questions to optimize positive outcomes. Each participant took about fifteen minutes to complete the questionnaire. Finally, the gathered information was put together and sent to the data analysis procedure. The researchers analyzed, classified, and arranged the gathered data according to the main study subjects. Furthermore, the findings' intercoder reliability was evaluated.

3.5. Data Analysis

The research team analyzed qualitative responses through systematic thematic coding. To ensure consistency, multiple researchers independently reviewed and categorized a subset of the data, with any discrepancies resolved through discussion. Final themes were derived through iterative refinement until consensus was achieved on all classifications. This process aligned with standard qualitative research practices for maintaining analytical rigor.

4. Results and Discussion

4.1. Factors Influencing Translation Prestige

The data was methodically categorized and analyzed in order to answer the research question, which investigates how translation students perceive the

occupational prestige of translation. The results showed that students of translation classify their perception of professional position into four different sub-themes. These include the prestigious status of translation, factors that enhance its prestige, factors that decrease its prestige, and actions done by stakeholders to raise the prestige of translation. Furthermore, it was observed that every one of the sub-themes discussed contained a number of important and unimportant subcategories.

a. Factors that Enhance Translation's Prestige

The first theme pertaining to translation students' perceptions of occupational prestige is displayed in the following chart. To ensure the validity of the findings, the chart displays the number of references used in each of the subcategories. The most significant factors influencing the prestige of translation as a profession were knowledge and skillfulness (N = 42), supporting and valuing translation and translators (N = 29), adequate compensation (N = 30), effective advertising and having an exclusive market (N = 14), increasing societal awareness of translation (N = 13), and attitudes toward translation (N = 11). However, meritocracy, possessing a legitimate certification, and university translation major expansion were found to be small effective elements that can affect the prestige of the translation profession.

knowledge & skillfulnes (42)

supporting & valuing (29)

payments (30)

advertising & having an
exclusive market (14)

raising awareness (13)

factors that enhance translation's prestige (3)

attitudes towards translation
(11)

being certified (9)

expanding the major (6)

meritocracy (4)

no idea (22)

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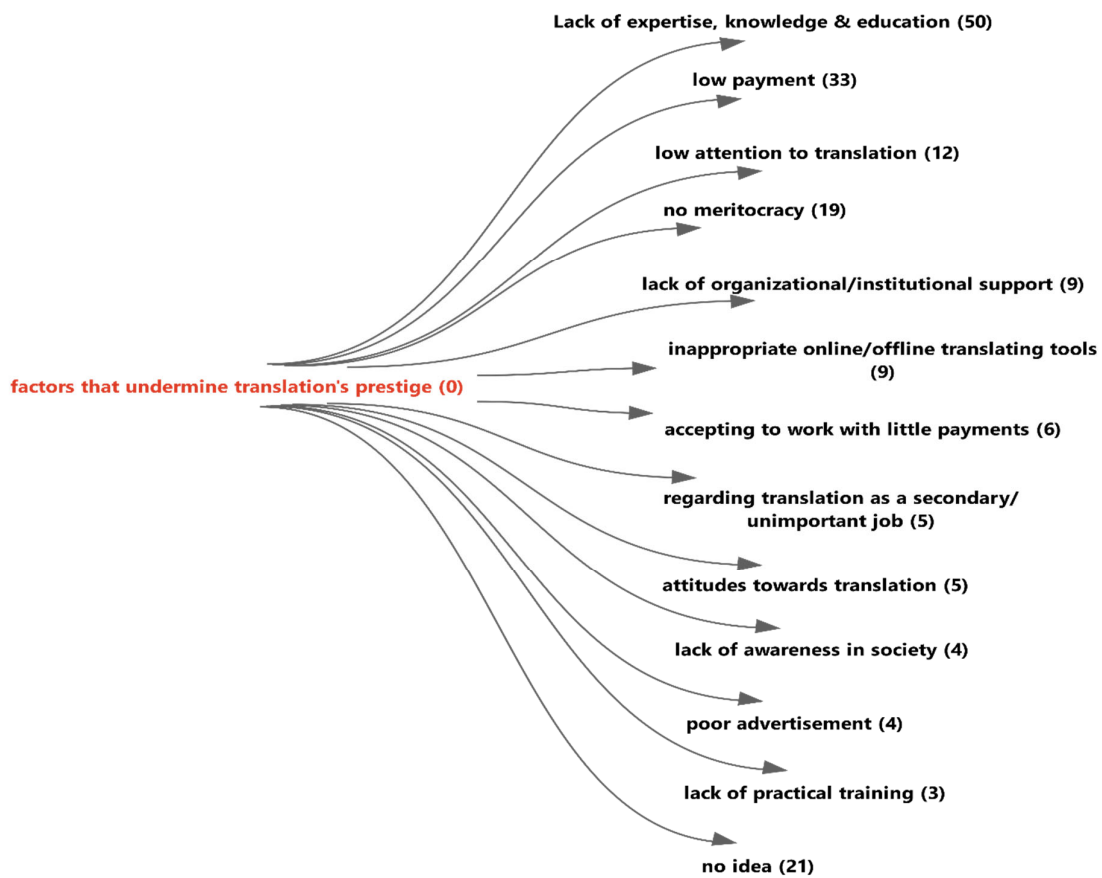
b. *Factors that Undermine Translation's Prestige*

However, it was discovered that there were more characteristics that detract

from translation's occupational reputation than there were that enhance it. Out of all the variables, four main ones were determined to be the most often mentioned and therefore extremely influential undermining elements: lack of formal education, experience, and knowledge (N = 50); poor pay (N = 33); lack of attention to translation as a profession (N = 12); and lack of meritocracy (N = 19).

It also appeared to target higher order institutions in terms of their inattention toward the translation occupation regarding the current inefficient policies and clichéd attitudes. Additionally, eight minor factors were identified in the data, with fewer references made to them. As can be seen from the table, other small elements suggested primarily interpersonal and personal interactions at smaller sizes.

Lack of expertise, knowledge & education (50)

low payment (33)

low attention to translation (12)

no meritocracy (19)

lack of organizational/institutional support (9)

inappropriate online/offline translating tools (9)

factors that undermine translation's prestige (0)

accepting to work with little payments (6)

regarding translation as a secondary/ unimportant job (5)

attitudes towards translation (5)

lack of awareness in society (4)

poor advertisement (4)

lack of practical training (3)

no idea (21)

c. *Stakeholders' measures for enhancing translation's prestige*

Four significant sub-themes that are shown in the above chart emphasized the next identified subject, which is stakeholders' efforts to raise the prestige of translation. The most successful component was determined to be increasing the general public's (N = 22) awareness of translation and those involved in the market. Meritocracy, employing certified and qualified translators with academic expertise in the field (N = 13), providing adequate and sufficient pay (N = 18) based on the work being done, and encouraging and rewarding competent translators (N = 10) were then emphasized as important relevant factors.

raising awareness about the market &
profession (22)

good income (18)

meritocracy (13)

supporting & praising translation/qualified
translators (10)

stakeholders measures to enhance translation's
prestige (0)

degree, expertise & knowledge (8)

law legislation to protect translators' rights (7)

regulating publications (3)

no idea (44)
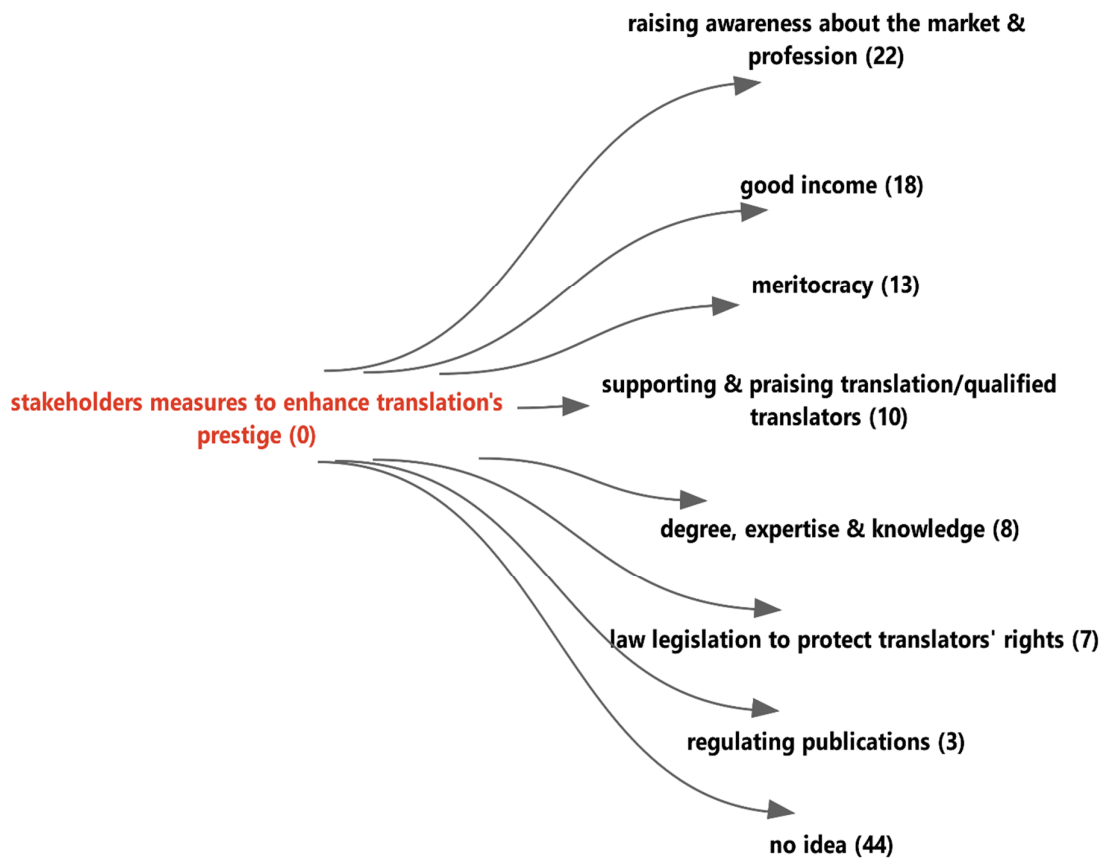
According to the major topic, three subcategories were considered secondary aspects. These include possessing a degree, education, and experience; enacting legislation appropriately to protect the interests of qualified translators in the marketplace; and controlling publications. It was said that publications must be

supervised regarding the content they publish and that publishing the works of unqualified translators must be restricted. These requirements suggested the necessity of a specialized and inclusive market for the translation profession.

a very high degree (27)

a high degree (43)

the prestige degree connected to translation → a certain degree (28)

a low degree (14)

A very low degree or not at all (2)
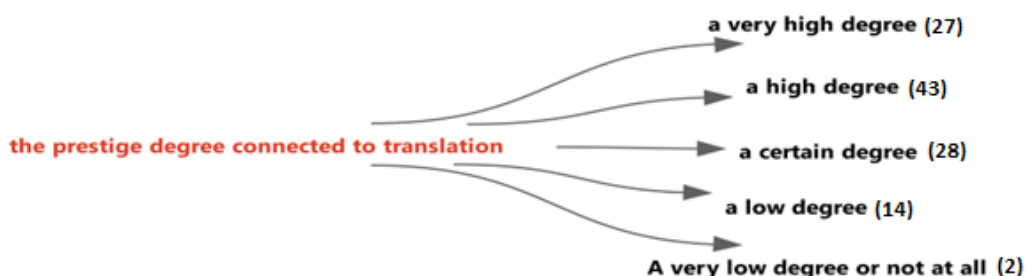
Table 2. Connection between Translation and Occupational Prestige

		Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid	a very high degree	27	23.7	23.7	23.7
	a high degree	43	37.7	37.7	61.4
	a certain degree	28	24.6	24.6	86.0
	a low degree	14	12.3	12.3	98.2
	a very low degree or not at all	2	1.8	1.8	100.0
	Total	114	100.0	100.0	

d. Translation Students' Opinions on the Connection between Translation and Occupational Prestige

Five major subcategories were found in relation to the final selected theme, which was translation students' perceptions of the relationship between translation and professional reputation. The results presented in the above table and chart indicate that 86% of the research participants ranked translation as a highly prestigious occupation based on the sum of the first three options: a very high degree, a high degree, and a certain degree.

The results indicate that a number of factors contribute to the prestige of translation, including compensation, knowledge and talent, meritocracy, and the

support and appreciation of translation. Conversely, a number of issues can significantly damage the reputation that translation carries, including a lack of organizational or institutional support, low compensation, a lack of skill, knowledge, and education, as well as a lack of social awareness. Additionally, it was discovered that meritocracy, increasing market and profession knowledge, earning a solid living, and encouraging and recognizing qualified translators are all important stakeholders' actions to improve the occupational prestige of translating.

The next table, however, shows an ordered ranking of the characteristics that significantly impacted the occupational prestige of translation based on the amount of references to each factor in each of the examined papers, regardless of the category to which each factor or sub-theme pertains.

Cod. seg. (all documents)

Category	Value
factors that undermine translation's prestige\Lack of expertise, knowledge & education	8.3%
stakeholders measures to enhance translation's prestige\no idea	7.3%
the prestige degree connected to translation\a high degree	7.3%
factors that enhance translation's prestige\knowledge & skillfulnes	7.0%
factors that undermine translation's prestige\low payment	5.5%
factors that enhance translation's prestige\payments	5.0%
factors that enhance translation's prestige\supporting & valuing	4.8%
the prestige degree connected to translation\a certain degree	4.6%
the prestige degree connected to translation\a very high degree	4.3%
stakeholders measures to enhance translation's prestige\raising awareness about the market & profession	3.6%
factors that enhance translation's prestige\no idea	3.6%
factors that undermine translation's prestige\no idea	3.5%
factors that undermine translation's prestige\no meritocracy	3.2%
stakeholders measures to enhance translation's prestige\good income	3.0%
the prestige degree connected to translation\a low degree	2.5%
factors that enhance translation's prestige\advertising & having an exclusive market	2.3%
stakeholders measures to enhance translation's prestige\meritocracy	2.2%
factors that enhance translation's prestige\raising awareness	2.2%
factors that undermine translation's prestige\low attention to translation	2.0%
factors that enhance translation's prestige\attitudes towards translation	1.8%
stakeholders measures to enhance translation's prestige\supporting & praising translation\qualified translators	1.7%
factors that enhance translation's prestige\being certified	1.5%
factors that undermine translation's prestige\lack of organizational/institutional support	1.5%
factors that undermine translation's prestige\inappropriate online/offline translating tools	1.5%
stakeholders measures to enhance translation's prestige\degree, expertise & knowledge	1.3%
stakeholders measures to enhance translation's prestige\ law legislation to protect translators' rights	1.2%
factors that undermine translation's prestige\accepting to work with little payments	1.0%
factors that enhance translation's prestige\expanding the major	1.0%
factors that undermine translation's prestige\attitudes towards translation	0.8%
factors that undermine translation's prestige\regarding translation as a secondary/unimportant job	0.8%
factors that undermine translation's prestige\lack of awareness in society	0.7%
factors that enhance translation's prestige\meritocracy	0.7%
factors that undermine translation's prestige\poor advertisement	0.7%
stakeholders measures to enhance translation's prestige\regulating publications	0.5%
factors that undermine translation's prestige\lack of practical training	0.5%
factors that enhance translation's prestige\contacts and links	0.5%
the prestige degree connected to translation\A very low degree or not at all	0.3%
Translation students' perception \the prestige degree connected to translation	0.0%
Translation students' perception	0.0%
Translation students' perception \factors that undermine translation's prestige	0.0%
Translation students' perception \stakeholders measures to enhance translation's prestige	0.0%
Translation students' perception \factors that enhance translation's prestige	0.0%

The study reveals that factors such as expertise, skill, compensation, and the recognition of translation and translators have a more significant impact on the prestige of the profession. Professions are ranked based on their perceived prestige within society, influencing the general impression of the profession, as noted by Gentile and Albl-Mikasa (2017). Hermans and Lambert (2006) argue that socioeconomic factors contribute to the undervaluation of translation, as skilled employees often replace professional translators by offering low-cost or unpaid translations. This results in a lack of emphasis on translation quality, with many believing that basic translations suffice.

The study aligns with the work of Dam & Zethsen (2008, 2009, 2011, 2014, 2016) on the occupational standing and prestige of translators, emphasizing factors such as pay, education, experience, and social influence. Bednárová-Gibová and Madoš (2019) also concluded that job satisfaction for translators is closely linked to their compensation, social standing, and influence. Their study highlighted the inward-oriented employment aspect, where translators seek personal growth and self-actualization through challenging materials and expertise development.

To elevate the profession, Katan (2009, 2011) argues that translators and related organizations must take progressive actions. Improving the social and economic standing of translators requires better perceptions of the profession, especially in countries where translation is undervalued. Dam and Zethsen (2016) acknowledged the difficulties translators face in today's money-driven world but also identified factors such as cultural capital, intellectual standards, and the challenging nature of translation that make the profession fulfilling and prestigious despite its drawbacks.

4.2. Theoretical Implications of AI Development

While this study did not systematically investigate AI's impact, the broader literature suggests machine translation (MT) and large language models (LLMs) may influence occupational prestige through competing mechanisms. On one hand, automation could erode prestige through deskilling (Sela-Sheffy, 2016) and commodification (Pym, 2020), particularly for routine translations. Conversely, AI may elevate prestige by (a) shifting human translators toward higher-value cultural mediation (Cronin, 2023), (b) necessitating new hybrid competencies (Doherty, 2022), and (c) increasing demand for quality control in AI outputs (Moorkens, 2023). In developing economies like Iran, where institutional protections are limited, these effects may be exacerbated without interventions like adapted certification systems or revised curricula emphasizing uniquely human skills. Future research should

empirically test these theoretical propositions through comparative studies of prestige dynamics in human-only versus human-AI collaborative workflows.

5. Conclusion

This study has systematically examined the determinants of occupational prestige in translation through the lens of Iranian translation students, revealing several key insights with important implications for both theory and practice. Our findings demonstrate that translation prestige is fundamentally anchored in three interrelated dimensions: (1) economic valuation (adequate compensation and stable working conditions), (2) specialized expertise (linguistic proficiency and cultural knowledge), and (3) institutional recognition (certification and professional autonomy). These factors collectively shape how translation is perceived as both an art form and a professional discipline within Iranian society.

The emergence of artificial intelligence in translation workflows introduces new complexities to these prestige dynamics. While our study did not empirically investigate AI's impact, the rapid advancement of neural machine translation and large language models suggests several plausible scenarios that warrant careful consideration:

1. Threats to Professional Status:

- Potential devaluation of routine translation work through automation
- Erosion of compensation standards due to unrealistic expectations of instant, cost-free translation
- Challenges to traditional notions of expertise as clients may prioritize speed over quality

2. Opportunities for Prestige Enhancement:

- Shift toward higher-value tasks requiring human judgment (e.g., transcreation, cultural adaptation)
- Development of new hybrid competencies (AI post-editing, quality assessment)

- Increased demand for ethical oversight and cultural sensitivity in automated outputs

In the Iranian context specifically, where our study reveals particular vulnerabilities in professional infrastructure, these technological developments may have amplified effects. The absence of strong professional associations and inconsistent certification standards could leave practitioners more exposed to disruptive impacts. However, the existing framework of "Authorized Translator" certification suggests potential pathways for adaptation.

To navigate this changing landscape, we propose a three-pronged approach:

1. Educational Reforms:

- Curriculum modernization emphasizing AI literacy alongside traditional translation skills
- Greater focus on uniquely human capabilities (creative problem-solving, cultural mediation)
- Development of specialized tracks in machine translation post-editing

2. Professional Adaptation:

- Clear ethical guidelines for human-AI collaboration
- Revised certification standards incorporating technology competencies
- Public awareness campaigns highlighting the value of human translation

3. Policy Interventions:

- Labor protections for translators in increasingly automated workflows
- Incentives for human-centered translation services in sensitive domains
- Support for research on AI's socioeconomic impacts in developing contexts

Our study has several limitations that suggest directions for future research. The student-focused sample provides important but incomplete perspectives, warranting complementary studies with working professionals. Longitudinal research could track how prestige factors evolve with technological adoption. Comparative studies across different national contexts would help distinguish universal trends from local particularities.

Ultimately, this research suggests that translation's future prestige will depend less on resisting technological change than on strategically adapting professional identity. By emphasizing the irreplaceable human elements of cultural insight, ethical judgment, and creative problem-solving - while competently managing technological tools - the profession can maintain and potentially enhance its status. The Iranian case study offers particularly valuable insights for developing economies facing similar challenges of professionalization amid rapid technological change.

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