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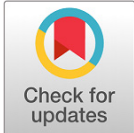# Professional Identity Construction of Novice Translator Trainers in Iran: An Ecological Study

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Abstract

Teacher professional identity, understood as the ways in which teachers perceive themselves as teachers, their professional roles and practices, has received enough scholarly attention in education. However, translator trainer identity is a relatively understudied area in translation studies. Acknowledging this research gap, the paper explores the factors involved in constructing Iranian early career translator trainers' professional identity using Bronfenbrenner's ecological systems theory. Data on the experiences of five Iranian translator trainers in their first five years of teaching were gathered through narratives and semi-structured interviews. Using MAXQDA, a qualitative software program, the data were subjected to thematic analysis to identify patterns and themes. Findings revealed that various factors, such as students' and department expectations, multiple professional identities, socioeconomic issues, educational policies, and the socio-cultural context, negatively or positively (re) shape translator trainers' identity, affecting their professional development and performance. The paper concludes by arguing that training programs should provide prospective trainers with practical experiences and individual and group reflection to prepare them for the complexities of university teaching and help them develop a positive and effective professional identity.

Keywords: identity construction, professional identity, translator trainers, ecological systems theory, translator training

Construcción de la identidad profesional en nuevos docentes de traducción en Irán: un estudio ecológico

Resumen

La identidad profesional del docente, que denota las formas como los docentes se definen como tales, sus roles y prácticas profesionales, ha recibido bastante atención en el campo de la educación, pero la identidad del docente de traducción es un área relativamente poco explorada en el campo de la traductología. Reconociendo este vacío en la investigación, este artículo explora los factores involucrados en la construcción de la identidad profesional de docentes de traducción iraníes al inicio de su carrera, usando la teoría ecológica de sistemas de Bronfenbrenner. Para este fin, se recopilaron las experiencias de cinco docentes de traducción iraníes en sus primeros cinco años de docencia mediante narrativas y entrevistas semiestructuradas. Los datos se sometieron a un análisis temático para identificar patrones y temas usando el programa de análisis cualitativo MAXQDA. Los resultados arrojaron que diversos factores, como las expectativas de los estudiantes y la facultad, las múltiples

identidades profesionales, aspectos socioeconómicos, políticas educativas y el contexto sociocultural pueden modificar, de manera positiva o negativa, la identidad de los docentes de traducción, y con ello tendrán un impacto en el desarrollo y el desempeño profesionales. El artículo concluye afirmando que los programas de formación deben ofrecer a los futuros docentes experiencias prácticas y reflexión individual y grupal que los preparen para las complejidades de la docencia universitaria y les ayuden a desarrollar una identidad profesional positiva y efectiva.

Palabras clave: construcción identitaria, identidad profesional, docentes de traducción, teoría de los sistemas ecológicos, formación de traductores

Construction de l'identité professionnelle des enseignants de traduction débutants en Iran : une étude écologique

Résumé

L'identité professionnelle des enseignants, qui concerne les perceptions des enseignants eux-mêmes comme des enseignants, ainsi que leur rôles et pratiques professionnelles, a reçu assez d'attention dans le domaine de l'éducation. À l'inverse, l'identité des enseignants de traduction est un domaine relativement peu étudié dans la traductologie. Reconnaissant cette lacune dans la recherche, cet article explore les facteurs impliqués dans la construction de l'identité professionnelle des enseignants des traducteurs iraniens en début de carrière en utilisant la théorie des systèmes écologiques de Bronfenbrenner. Nous avons recueilli des données sur les expériences de cinq formateurs de traducteurs iraniens au cours de leurs cinq premières années d'enseignement par le biais de récits et d'entretiens semi-structurés. À l'aide de MAXQDA, un logiciel qualitatif, les données ont été soumises à une analyse thématique afin d'identifier des modèles et des thèmes. Les résultats ont révélé que divers facteurs, tels que les attentes des étudiants et des départements, les identités professionnelles multiples, les questions socio-économiques, les politiques éducatives et le contexte socioculturel, (re)façonnent négativement ou positivement l'identité des enseignants de traducteurs, ce qui affecte leur développement professionnel et leur performance. L'article conclut en affirmant que les programmes de formation devraient offrir aux futurs enseignants des expériences pratiques et une réflexion individuelle et collective pour les préparer aux complexités de l'enseignement universitaire et les aider à développer une identité professionnelle positive et efficace.

Mots clés : construction de l'identité, identité professionnelle, enseignants des traducteurs, théorie des systèmes écologiques, formation des traducteurs

Introduction

In recent years, the translation profession has recognized the importance of continuous professional development in equipping translator trainers with the necessary competencies (Orlando, 2019). Nevertheless, the complex task of teaching translation far exceeds acquiring knowledge and skills in pedagogy and subject expertise. It involves developing a robust professional identity as a trainer; a continuous process of adaptation and growth in this role (Feser & Haak, 2023; Steadman, 2023).

Teaching, for Reeves (2018, p. 2), is not just a job; it is a profession that requires the development of an effective teacher's sense of self. The process of becoming a teacher is multifaceted, involving the construction and development of self-perceptions (Macías Villegas et al., 2020). It should not be neglected that "professional development is a process in which the professional identity of the teacher is formed"; therefore, the professional development of teachers relies on the effective construction of their identity (Avidov-Ungar, 2016, p. 654). Becoming or being a teacher is a lifelong process of self-discovery and development, which is shaped by our understanding of ourselves and how others perceive us (Danielewicz, 2001; Reeves, 2018).

Therefore, the formation of a teacher's identity is a crucial issue in educational systems. The relevance and importance of teacher identity formation stems from the fact that it meaningfully impacts the performance of both prospective and in-service teachers, as well as the overall quality of education (Golzar, 2020; Trent, 2010). It should come as no surprise that the construction of teacher identity is not fixed, but rather changes over time given that "the direct work environment, the wider context of higher education, interaction with students, and staff development activities" can strengthen or constrain identity construction (van Lankveld et al., 2017, p. 330). Additionally, the research on teacher identity can offer insights into how university translator trainers view themselves, their

skills, and their teaching practices and philosophies (Chen & Liu, 2023).

The study of how teachers develop and shape their professional identity dates back to the 1980s (Solari & Martín Ortega, 2022). Since the 2010s onwards, there has been a surge of interest in researching teacher identity in different settings and disciplines, such as education, second language acquisition, and psychology, resulting in a rich body of literature (Feser & Haak, 2023; Reeves, 2018).

The importance of this topic lies in the fact that it provides a deeper understanding of how teachers' professional development evolves over time and can describe teachers' emotions, values, motivations, well-being, and teaching practices (Sang, 2023). Teacher identity has been examined from various perspectives. For instance, scholars have analyzed teacher identity in connection with emotions (Nazari, Karimi, et al., 2023), imagined identity (Goktepe & Kunt, 2021), and agency (Cobb et al., 2018).

Despite the increased interest in teacher identity in other disciplines, few studies have examined the identity of translation teachers (e.g., Chen & Huang, 2022; Chen & Liu, 2023; Wu et al., 2021). This is perhaps because there is a lack of research on the development of translation teachers, and studies have not addressed how to support teachers in becoming reflective practitioners (Massey, 2020, p. 390). The paucity of literature on this topic underscores the necessity for additional research in this fascinating area, which can have important implications for the professional development of trainers and the design of effective teacher-training programs. Therefore, this paper contributes to the present scholarship by shedding light on the identity development of novice translator trainers in Iran through the lens of the ecological systems theory.

1. Theoretical Framework

To assist readers in understanding the constructs of this study, this section defines the notions of

teacher identity and ecological systems theory. It also surveys empirical research on the intersection of identity and translation teachers.

1.1. Teacher Identity

Identity is how people see themselves and how others perceive them. It is structured by society and culture, and people may choose to embrace or reject it. Identities affect how people think and act in different situations (Holland & Lachicotte, 2007). A clear definition for identity can be "how a person understands his or her relationship to the world, how that relationship is structured across time and space, and how the person understands possibilities for the future" (Norton, 2013, p. 45). Studies have explored teacher identity from multiple viewpoints, resulting in diverse definitions and understandings. Teacher professional identity is "the constellations of teachers' perceptions with regard to how they define themselves in their professional activities" (Jiang et al., 2021, p. 2). In fact, professional identity includes a person's self-image and role: how professionals (i.e., translation trainers) perceive themselves as members of their institutionalized group (i.e., university) and what they do in their daily context (Hendrikx, 2020).

Teacher identity is dynamic, complex and context-dependent (Beijaard et al., 2023; Edwards & Burns, 2016); thereby, it constantly evolves and is (re)shaped by a myriad of internal and external factors, such as teachers' personal characteristics, prior experiences, professional and social contexts, and views of relevant individuals (Beauchamp & Thomas, 2009; Pillen et al., 2013). According to Yazan (2022), how teachers view themselves and their role as teachers is not static, but rather dynamic, since teachers' interactions with others as well as the roles they play can shape their self-conception. Drawing on an extensive survey of the literature, Yazan (2022) identifies five characteristics of the way (language) teacher identity is conceptualized. For this scholar, teacher identity encompasses not only teachers' personal views and judgments about themselves as teachers but also other individuals' expectations. It is not flexible and may change over time, since teacher identity is (re)shaped and (re)constructed in social settings and interactions, and its development is inextricably linked to teachers' commitment, involvement, and investment in the teaching profession.

1.2. Teacher Identity Construction

Teacher identity construction is a dynamic process in which teachers constantly refine their identity to align better with the environmental conditions to develop professionally (Ruohotie-Lyhty, 2018). How educators perceive themselves in their role defines their professional identity, which may prompt them to ask such questions as "who am I as a teacher? and what kind of teacher do I want to be?" (Beijaard et al., 2023, p. 764). The process of forming a teacher identity is strongly associated with teachers' learning and development (Reeves, 2018) as it is shaped by individual factors such as experiences or personal attributes, as well as contextual factors such as the roles teachers have, the communities of practice they belong to, and the broader social and educational discourses defining their profession (Teng, 2019). Additionally, teachers' future professional aspirations can shape their self-perception (Uzum et al., 2022, p. 2).

According to Sang (2023), teacher identity includes three levels: individual, relational and collective. Teacher identity, at the individual level, is about how a teacher defines themselves, which may include their views, decision-making processes, self-esteem, or desired and expected future selves. When it comes to the relational level, a teacher's identity is influenced by their interactions with other people in the educational system like learners, teachers, mentors, or parents. At the collective level, it can be understood as a form of social identity, referring to a person's self-image derived from

the social groups with which they identify (Sang, 2023).

Different contexts and participants (colleagues or mentors) may present opportunities and challenges for teachers to develop their professional identity and practice (Seyri & Nazari, 2023). For example, teachers' professional identity is well-developed when they feel appreciated; when they have a sense of connectedness to other teachers; when they feel confident in their teaching role; when they have a strong sense of purpose and passion for teaching and when they can envision their future as teachers (van Lankveld et al., 2017).

The above factors are highly important for beginning trainers, who are still developing their professional identity and navigating the complexities of the teaching profession. Among different teacher groups, research on the identity construction of novice or early-career teachers has been a new line of inquiry (e.g., Nazari, Karimi, et al., 2023; Nazari, Seyri, et al., 2023). Novice teachers may have the same responsibilities as their more experienced colleagues, but they may face more challenges and uncertainties in their work (Caspersen & Raaen, 2014). The early years of teaching are a time of major change as new teachers learn to juggle the demands of lesson planning, instruction, assessment, and classroom management (Chaaban & Du, 2017; Stewart & Jansky, 2022). Wu et al. (2021) also note that novice translation teachers may face some setbacks in their career due to limited professional development opportunities during their translation training programs.

In summary, teacher identity construction is a continuous and dynamic process that is negotiated between individual, social, and contextual factors within the ecology in which teachers work. Sociological frameworks can shed valuable light on this process by illuminating the contextual factors shaping teacher identity.

1.3. Ecological Systems Theory

As hinted at earlier, a teacher's development is shaped by a complex interplay of various internal and external factors. Bronfenbrenner's ecological systems theory (Bronfenbrenner, 1979) is able to capture various contextual factors influencing human development, including the identity construction of teachers (Chong et al., 2023; Nazari, Karimi, et al., 2023). The importance of this can be seen in the argument that teacher identity is a fluid construct, under the influence of the context in which the teacher works, and in the idea that it can evolve over time (Pennington & Richards, 2016). Indeed, how teachers perceive themselves and their work is deeply intertwined with who the teacher is as an individual, the setting in which they perform, their agency to make their own decisions, and the assets and support they can rely on (Teng, 2019).

This theory uses the terms "ecology" and "ecosystem" to delineate the complex and dynamic relationships between the person and their surroundings, where learning or development happens (Chong et al., 2023). Ecological environments are viewed as a hierarchy of various systems, with each system nested within a larger one (Bronfenbrenner, 1979). The interdependencies of different parts of the system help better understand teachers' self-image (Bronfenbrenner, 1979; Neal & Neal, 2013). By dividing the environment into five nested systems, the ecological systems theory underscores the interconnectedness of all aspects of a person's environment, as follows:

- Microsystem: It is the immediate environment wherein the individual actively participates and inhabits, such as family or university.

- Mesosystem: It consists of the interactions between different microsystems in a person's life, which impact the individual in negative or positive ways.

- Exosystem: It involves larger variables, such as social structures and institutions that indirectly impact people. Individuals are not in direct contact with these factors, but the decisions and policies in these settings can still affect their development.

- Macrosystem: It is concerned with how cultural or ideological factors affect individuals' lives, such as the values and norms of society.

- Chronosystem: It includes major events, changes and transitions that happen throughout an individual's life, such as job loss, economic recessions, or wars (Bennett & Grimley, 2001; Bronfenbrenner, 1979; Neal & Neal, 2013).

An ecological approach to teachers' self-image helps unearth how a myriad of contextual factors shape it, highlighting the fusion of relationships between teachers and their surroundings. Viewing translator trainer identity in light of this theory, it can be stated that it is a multifaceted construct that is constructed and negotiated by a complex interplay of contextual factors. Drawing on the scholarship in neighboring disciplines (Bluteau et al., 2017; Chong et al., 2023; Guo & Lee, 2023), the complex interplay of multiple factors contributing to translator trainer identity can be conceptualized as:

- Microsystem: The immediate settings where translator trainers engage in their professional activities, including teaching, administration, and professional development. These can be the university, classroom or even online platforms where they interact with translation trainees, other teachers or teaching materials.

- Mesosystem: This is the network of relationships between the various microsystems. Therefore, it can be the associations between trainers' teaching activities and other roles they can have, such as researching, translating or language teaching.

- Exosystem: This is concerned with external settings that may indirectly affect individuals. Educational policies (e.g., curriculum design and course assessments) or university budgets for research and training, for example, can impact translator trainers' teaching philosophy as well as their pedagogical choices.

- Macrosystem: This addresses cultural values and beliefs. Teacher identity can be influenced by how society perceives translation education, translations or the translator's status.

- Chronosystem: It is concerned with developmental changes and transitions. It can be the emergence of new computer-assisted translation (CAT) tools or cloud-based translation systems in the translation profession or online translator training programs, especially during the COVID-19 pandemic. It can be a challenge for some trainers to keep up with the latest technologies.

Translator education and translation pedagogy is now a well-established sub-discipline within translation studies (Bolaños-García-Escribano et al., 2021; Kelly, 2005; Washbourne, 2020). However, Massey et al. (2019) and Massey (2020) have highlighted the paucity of research on those who teach translation, namely translator trainers. When it comes to translator teacher identity construction, Wu et al.'s (2021) longitudinal case study on a Chinese novice translation trainer during her first year of teaching showed that her identity went through a dynamic process of (re)construction, shaped by positive and negative emotions she had throughout her teaching journey.

In another study, Chen and Huang (2022) investigated how Chinese translator and interpreter trainers develop their role identities and concluded that the three sub-roles of teaching, researching, and translating interact and contribute to overall teacher identity. For example, when teachers are satisfied with their careers, these three roles are well-integrated,

while heavy workload, laborious research projects, and job insecurity can prevent this integration. Finally, Chen and Liu (2023) examined the construction of professional identity in four translator trainers in China. Findings showed that trainers perceive themselves as curriculum makers/instructional designers/material developers, praxis initiators, learning facilitators, advocates for translation technologies, and industry and training brokers.

To address the research gap in the study of translator trainers, this article examines the identity development of novice translator trainers in Iran through the lens of Bronfenbrenner's ecological systems theory.

2. Method

This section offers a detailed account of the steps taken toward conducting the study. After outlining the study's design, context and participants are described for enhancing the understanding of the research. This is followed by an account of data collection and analysis.

2.1. Research Design

Quantitative approaches may not be able "to capture the complexities, multiple facets, and dynamics of teacher emotions and professional identities" (Jiang et al., 2021, p. 5). Therefore, a qualitative approach is followed to analyze the translator trainer identity. Qualitative studies offer deep insights into individuals' experiences, perspectives and views, and they do not focus on quantifying data or manipulating variables (Moser & Korstjens, 2017).

This paper follows narrative research, which is qualitative in nature. Focusing on lived and told stories, narrative stories tell and report individual experiences and offer insights into "the identities of individuals and how they see themselves" (Creswell & Poth, 2016, p. 71). Indeed, narratives "help researchers and readers to understand the experiences of participants and

cultures; and they can contribute to the structuring of identity" (Cohen et al., 2018, p. 664). In the narratives, participants may talk about their past, present, or future. In fact, they are asked to write or orally record a detailed statement about their experience of the phenomenon under study (Creswell & Poth, 2016; Mihas, 2023).

2.2. Context and Participants

The present inquiry was carried out in the Iranian context during 2023. Iranian translation programs, which train prospective translators and interpreters, have witnessed rapid growth over the past decades. Many universities across the country offer English-Persian translation programs at the Bachelor of Arts level, which necessitates the employment of well-educated trainers. These programs and the employment process of trainers are guided and supervised by the Ministry of Science Research and Technology. The undergraduate English-Persian translation courses are taught by both faculty members and adjunct lecturers. The faculty members usually hold a Doctor of Philosophy (Ph.D.) degree, but adjunct lecturers may have a Master of Arts (M.A.) or a Ph.D. degree. The eligibility of M.A. holders or Ph.D. students to teach at the university level depends on the policies of each university.

Translation teaching is offered as an individual but mandatory course in Ph.D. programs in translation studies in Iran. The M.A. program has a course on translation evaluation and assessment. Therefore, M.A. and Ph.D. students are required to take courses on translation teaching, and translation assessment and evaluation. The programs, however, lack any practicums and are basically theoretical and textbook based. Therefore, students only acquire theoretical knowledge and learn various models of teaching translation at the university level. For example, these programs lack specialized courses to prepare prospective teachers to teach legal translation or interpreting.

Table 1. Participants' Demographics

Pseudonym	Gender	Educational Background	Teaching Position	Teaching Years	Interview Length (in minutes)
Ashkan	Male	Ph.D. holder	Faculty Member	4.5	46
Bahar	Female	Ph.D. student	Adjunct Lecturer	2	38
Aref	Male	M.A holder	Adjunct Lecturer	4	40
Hanieh	Female	Ph.D. student	Adjunct Lecturer	1	49
Farideh	Female	Ph.D. holder	Faculty Member	5	35

As a case study, this inquiry's sample included five English-Persian translator trainers, who had been teaching translation for less than five years. Therefore, they are considered newly hired or early career teachers[1] (Räsänen et al., 2020; Van den Borre et al., 2021). The participants were three women and two men, who were chosen based on convenience sampling. They teach both translation-relevant and general English courses at universities across Iran. They were between the ages of 26 to 36 in 2023 and they were in their first five years of teaching (i.e., early career trainers). With regard to the educational background of the teachers, two already had obtained a Ph.D. in translation studies, two were Ph.D. students of translation, and one only had an M.A. in translation studies. Two were faculty members and three were working as adjunct lecturers (Table 1). It is important to note that narrative studies typically focus on a single case or a small group of participants (Creswell & Poth, 2016). Thus, the small sample size of this study is justified by the research design used.

2.3. Data Collection and Analysis

We used social networks, such as Telegram and Instagram, to recruit ten translator trainers for

this study. However, only seven teachers agreed to participate in the study. After initial talks with them, we excluded two of them from the study because they had more than five years of experience. Given the complexity of capturing teachers' identity construction, two sources of data were collected: personal narratives and semi-structured interviews. We initially collected trainers' personal narratives, which helped us design the questions for the interviews.

Narratives have the potential to showcase teachers' experiences of teaching translation at university and they produce "in-depth and highly personal life-story data" (Hiver et al., 2020, p. 2). Narratives and semi-structured interviews are common research tools in the existing literature for examining teacher identity because they effectively capture the multidimensional nature of teacher identity (Fan & de Jong, 2019). The participants were asked to send the narratives, either in written or oral forms. Prompts were used to guide participants in developing their narratives. They were asked to write or orally describe in as much detail as possible how they perceive themselves as translation teachers and identify what factors (challenges or opportunities) may contribute to this perception (i.e., professional identity).

The semi-structured interview questions were informed by the preliminary analysis of the narratives and the ecological systems theory layers. Each interview lasted between 35 and 49 minutes and was conducted in the participants' mother tongue (Persian). The interviews were done

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1 Experience-based descriptors, such as 'novice' or 'early career', should not be interpreted as negative evaluations. Instead, they should be treated as reflections of experiences that translation teachers hold. These teachers are still relatively new to the profession.

online due to the lack of access to participants in person and we informed the participants of the voluntary nature of their contribution. The confidentiality and anonymity of their responses were assured before any stage of the data collection. To analyze the data, we used "thematic analysis" (Braun & Clarke, 2006), which assists researchers in identifying patterns of meanings, known as themes. It consists of six steps: namely, data familiarization, code generation, theme identification, theme review, theme refinement and report generation (Braun & Clarke, 2006).

Thematic analysis of the interviews and narratives was undertaken in MAXQDA[2], a qualitative software program. In doing so, the interviews and oral narratives were transcribed automatically but were checked to ensure content accuracy. We relied on a recursive and iterative process to read the transcripts, ensuring familiarity with the whole data set and excluding information that was irrelevant to the participants' identity development. The data analysis was theory-driven since the transcripts were analyzed in light of ecological systems theory layers. For example, when a translator trainer was referring to their classroom settings, it was coded under the microsystem level. The transcripts and narratives were carefully re-read to identify words or phrases that suggested or at least implied the key aspects of identity construction and development, resulting in a set of tentative codes. Clusters of seemingly relevant codes were initially created and the conceptual glue that connects them together was named according to the ecological systems theory (Mihas, 2023). By reviewing and refining the codes—containing topics—and themes multiple times, all core themes within the data were extracted.

2.4. Research Rigor and Researcher's Position

Although this study does not aim for generalizability of findings considering the qualitative nature of the study, four components of quality criteria for qualitative approaches were considered: credibility, transferability, dependability, and confirmability (Korstjens & Moser, 2018; Lincoln & Guba, 1985). To meet the credibility (internal validity) criterion, we collected data from multiple sources: narratives and interviews. It is also called data triangulation, which is a methodological approach to increasing the validity and reliability of results by using different sources of data (Saldanha & O'Brien, 2013).

As to transferability, a detailed description of the participants and their context was offered for an accurate interpretation of the data by outsiders. In addition to detailing the research steps from the beginning to the end of the investigation, the researcher's role and position were documented to meet dependability and confirmability criteria. To ensure that interpretations are grounded in and driven by the data, verbatim quotations from interviews and narratives were used to highlight the interpretations of the findings.

Qualitative researchers need to clarify their position in relation to the data and the conclusions they draw because their role can impact the research process and findings (Holmes, 2020). As an Iranian translator trainer, language teacher, and practitioner of translation, interpreting and subtitling, I have a multifaceted perspective on the process of teacher identity formation, which facilitated a deeper understanding of the teachers' viewpoints.

However, my teaching experience and professional translation experience can shape my critical perspectives in analyzing the identity construction of novice trainers. Nevertheless, I maintained a balance between insider and outsider perspectives to ensure that participants' views were accurately and authentically reflected. Additionally, I had no close professional relationships with the participants, minimizing potential biases.

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2   The researcher chose this software over others because he was familiar with it.

3. Results

Thematic analysis of the trainers' interviews and narratives revealed what factors contribute to strengthening and undermining the identity construction of novice translator trainers (Figure 1).

3.1. The Microsystem Level

The immediate environment in which translator trainers operate can include the department and faculty, the peer community, as well as students, all of which can shape their professional identity. At the microsystem level, four themes were identified which promote or impede trainer identity construction. Students' lofty or misaligned expectations were the root of some problems for novice trainers, which can question their professional teaching identity. One of the challenges that these trainers face is establishing clear boundaries with their students. Some trainers may attempt to foster a friendly rapport with their students to ensure positive feedback at the end of the semester. However, this may result in blurred boundaries of authority, and may encourage students to make unreasonable demands or expectations. Thus, the microsystem factors (the students'

expectations and the trainers' desire to be liked by their students) can affect the formation of the translator trainer professional identity. For instance, Bahar opines:

> I can't believe that some of my students want me to bring easy materials to my interpreting class. They say they don't need to work hard to master interpreting skills because they don't plan to become professional. How ridiculous is that?

Another microsystem factor that has undermined translator trainer identity is department expectations. The lack of support at this level could prevent novice trainers from reaching their ideal goal or identity. When trainers are assigned to teach irrelevant courses, for instance, they can feel undervalued and insignificant. The emotional impact of this experience (anger) can be seen in the following quote in which Hanieh implicitly calls herself an outlier. Hanieh had no option but to accept those irrelevant courses as she needed to improve her resume for future opportunities:

> I thought I would get to choose the courses I would teach when I joined the department. But they assigned me courses that had nothing to do with my area of expertise and past

Figure 1. Hierarchical Structure of Themes
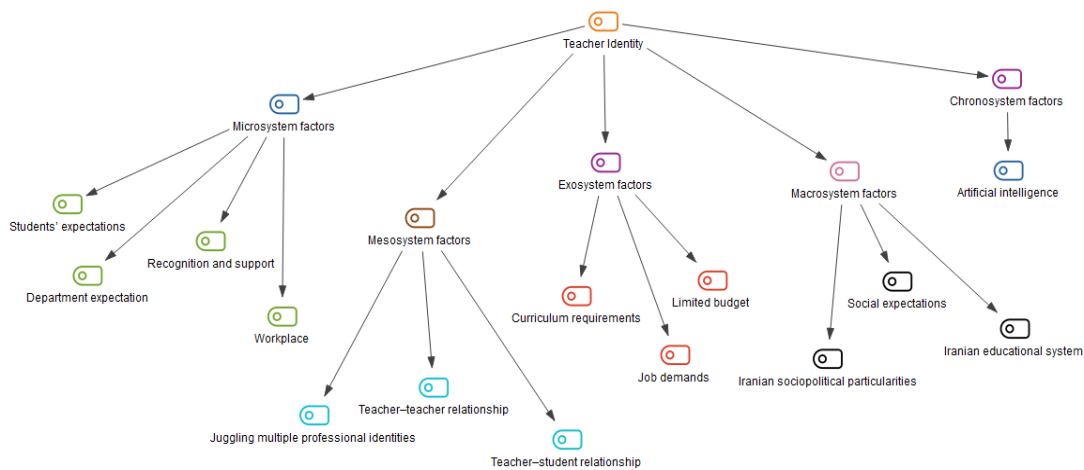
experience. I don't even know how to read such texts [Islamic materials], let alone teach them to students.

This is where a misalignment arises between her personal beliefs and identity as a teacher, who prioritizes self-expression, and the expectations placed upon her. In contrast, support from the education system also helps teachers construct their professional identity more effectively and easily. This is a positive experience and an essential factor for early career trainers or new teachers at a new university. Ashkan mentions that:

I feel lucky to have a job at the University of […] where the faculty members were very supportive when I moved to this new city and university. They gave me courses that matched my interests and expertise. I appreciate that they respect my skills and abilities.

Support can also come from peers. Professional development can be supported by creating connections and learning opportunities with experienced trainers in the teaching community. Novice teachers can gain valuable insights and advice from others to sharpen their skills, acquire new knowledge, and adapt more effectively to the new teaching environment. For example, Farideh says:

I had the experience of teaching translation-relevant courses at other universities and my evaluation was quite high. Here, my peers advised me to keep an eye on my evaluations and do my best to maintain them as high as possible. They said this would help me get awards like *Best Teacher of the Year*.

Farideh's example is a great case of how learning from colleagues' experiences can be of benefit to novice translator trainers. By reflecting on these pieces of advice and shared experiences, novice trainers can enhance their understanding of the principles and practices of successful translator training.

The (warm) workplace environment is another good example of a microsystem. Ashkan's

positive workplace environment, as described in the following quote, probably supports his professional development. For example, supportive colleagues can provide guidance and feedback and help him to develop new skills for learning and growth:

I feel lucky to have a job at the University of […] where the faculty members were very supportive when I moved to this new city and university. […] I appreciate that they respect my skills and abilities.

Therefore, a positive workplace setting is of paramount importance for novice teachers who are still enhancing their understanding of the teaching profession and its complexities. Consequently, they feel more confident in the classroom and think of themselves as successful and effective teachers of translation.

3.2. The Mesosystem Level

At the mesosystemic level, multiple microsystems come to interact with each other. Such interconnections can shape the individual's development and identity. Juggling multiple professional identities (teaching, researching, translating, administrating) has become a concern for participants, especially faculty members. It becomes a concern when the trainer fails to find a balance between these. Farideh elaborates on this:

I had many problems with my work-life balance when I started my university career. I had to teach several (new) courses; pursue tenure by publishing many papers; and serve as the deputy of the department head. In this role, I had to answer students' queries, in addition to fulfilling my parental responsibilities.

Another mesosystemic factor is the interaction of two microsystems of teacher–student relationship and teacher–teacher relationship, which separately or collectively influence teacher professional development and identity. Aref's narrative is an excellent example of how the mesosystem can shape a translator trainer's identity positively or negatively. One

microsystem (in this case, his strong relationships with students) has negatively contributed to his relationship with other teachers. In fact, Aref's successful relationship with his students is the result of a friendly relationship with them and of his ability to integrate his professional translating experience with his teaching philosophy. In contrast, Aref's colleagues interpreted his teaching style as an indicator that he is giving students good grades to obtain good evaluations, which can lead to a feeling that his colleagues do not understand or appreciate his teaching style:

> You know, I'm the only practicing translator in the department and this helps me a lot in my teaching. My students love it when I share my professional experience with them in working with international translation agencies and clients. That's why I always get high evaluations from them. But some of my colleagues think that I just give them good grades to get high ratings. Very unfair!

Despite this, Aref's sense of belonging to his classroom can create a more supportive and nurturing microsystem for his development in the educational system. As a result, he will be more motivated and engaged in his academic work. Aref's above quote can also be another form of mesosystemic level as he incorporates ideas from his professional work into his teaching practices, portraying the interconnectedness of two microsystems, i.e., his past experience and his classroom.

3.3. The Exosystem Level

Curriculum requirements or educational policies occur outside the translator trainer's microsystem, and they can influence the translator trainer's identity construction and their ability to fulfill their role requirements. Aref mentions the problem with assessing students in translation-relevant courses in a new university where he started to teach. He argues that the incorporation of CAT tools and internet access during translation exams should be encouraged, which

portrays how professional translators translate in reality. However, this is incompatible with the evaluation policies of the given university that ban any electronic devices and internet access for educational purposes. He states:

> At first, I had problems with the translation workshops' final exams. The university had a strict policy of no electronic devices during the exam for all majors, while other universities I work with don't have such a rule. However, I was able to arrange the exam at a time when other majors did not have any exams and I explained to the university managers that translation exams were different.

In this example, the translator trainer is facing a conflict between the curriculum requirements or educational policies and their own beliefs about how students should be assessed in translation-relevant courses. He believes that students should have access to cat tools and the internet during their final exams as this reflects the realistic and actual conditions under which professional translators work. Nevertheless, educational policies do not permit that. This conflict may make it difficult for translator trainers to prepare students for their final exams as they have practiced using these cat tools throughout the course. Now, they should translate with no access to proper devices and tools even though the teacher was quite successful in convincing the university officials. The notable aspect here is Aref's agency in resolving this tension.

Sometimes job demands with incompatible payments hinder the professional identity construction of translator trainers. Ashkan—who is a faculty member—shares his job demands and requirements for working 40 hours per week. But he says it is only a number on the paper as his job far exceeds this:

> I'm paid for working 40 hours per week at my faculty. Sounds reasonable, yeah? But I also have to publish papers, which is part of my job. So, I end up working twice as much as I get paid for because research takes more

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time, I even work till the next morning to submit research work. My salary doesn't match my effort.

The limited budget of the university can also affect this situation, as countries with strong economies can pay their university professors more. When teachers are not paid on time or with a decent salary, they may lose their sense of professionalism in the system. It seems that the Iranian university's limited budget has negatively impacted the teachers' self-perception. For example, both Hanieh and Bahar expressed dissatisfaction with their university career due to the low and delayed payment for their teaching services:

> How can I take care of my family life with this amount of payment? I cannot even buy a new phone! I wish I had migrated years ago. […] I' am still waiting for the payment of the previous semester.

3.4. The Macrosystem Level

As noted, the macrosystem explains how the broader cultural, ideological and social context can (re)shape the beliefs of an individual. The Iranian sociopolitical particularities can shape a translator trainer's behavior and self-perception. In societies where translation holds significant importance, it can help trainers assert their professional identity. The following quote from Farideh is particularly interesting as it demonstrates how she feels about the importance of translation and the pivotal role she plays in training the next generation of translators:

> When I step into the literary translation classroom, I see the eager faces of my students and I tell them, you have the potential to be the next Najaf Daryabandari [a renowned Iranian literary translator]. It makes me feel proud and happy, as if I'm not a teacher, but a leader who brightens the path for the future generation of well-known translators.

A macrosystem factor that can negatively influence the identity of translator trainers is social expectations. The following quote highlights the influence of social expectations on translator trainers, who must go beyond their expertise. Thus, they face challenges in maintaining their professional boundaries. This is probably due to the lack of public awareness about translation or misconceptions about the translation profession. Aref shares his views:

> Some professors from other majors think I can translate all text types. Once, I was asked to proofread the English version of a Persian novel about defense literature, which was not my area of expertise. I only translate non-literary texts; besides I don't typically accept projects from Iranian clients [Aref translates texts for international clients and agencies].

The Iranian educational system, where learning is often understood as a classroom-only and teacher-oriented activity, is indicative of a broader socio-cultural context contributing to the trainer's professional identity. The following quote from Ashkan illustrates a fundamental tension between their personal teaching philosophy, which emphasizes self-directed learning and lifelong education, and the prevailing cultural norms that perceive learning as a teacher-led or classroom-bound process. This can create a conflict and clash in their identity, as they try to balance their role as a learning facilitator with the conventional expectations of the teacher's role:

> You know, learning is a journey with no destination; you can't turn into a professional translator by passing a couple of courses. Of course, they help you get started, but you need to practice a lot outside the classroom. You must read a lot. That's the only way to become a pro in this profession. But our students expect the teacher to teach them everything and they think that's enough for their learning!

3.5. The Chronosystem Level

The chronosystem shifts can offer both opportunities and challenges. The rise of artificial intelligence (AI) is a major chronosystem shift which can impact translator training programs,

causing concerns among some translator trainers regarding its potential impact on their careers. Bahar says:

> What if AI becomes so good that translators are no longer needed? Who should we train? How can I secure my career? It is very frightening in our field.

A different teacher expressed the same concern from a different angle. Hanieh contends that translation teachers should equip their students with the necessary skills to become lifelong learners who can adapt to the ever-changing landscape of translation. She further states that her future role would be that of a proofreader and editor trainer rather than a translator trainer.

> You know, sometimes you see in research papers that they call translators post-editors or stuff like that. I think it makes a lot of sense now with the introduction of ChatGPT. Translators may not be needed, but proofreaders or content checkers will definitely be needed. My guess is that our courses will mainly focus on post-editing and proofreading different materials in the future.

Thus, a change of identity is envisioned here, as mentioned before, professional identity is a complex construct that continually changes.

4. Discussion

This study examined how Iranian novice translator trainers perceive who they are as translation educators and construct their professional identities using the ecological systems theory. The thematic analysis of the data indicated that an array of contextual and social factors contributes to professional identity construction and development of trainers in positive or negative ways. This overall finding aligns with the present scholarship on the topic (Beijaard et al., 2023; Edwards & Burns, 2016). In fact, trainers' identity construction was affected by the five interrelated levels of the ecological systems theory. This makes total sense because when

teachers (re)form their professional identities, they constantly encounter not just their personal expectations, beliefs, and requirements but also new expectations, values and demands within the environment, which negotiate their identity (Ruohotie-Lyhty & Moate, 2016). It goes without saying that teachers of translation should be aware of these challenges and adapt their teaching philosophy and professional development accordingly (Wu et al., 2021).

At the microsystem level, the results revealed that trainers' professional development and identity are influenced by factors such as students' lofty or misaligned expectations, department expectations, recognition and support, and workplace environment. When novice trainers receive constructive support from their peers, they feel more confident, motivated and effective in their career, ultimately contributing to a more positive and fulfilling experience for novice trainers in the field (van Lankveld et al., 2017). Furthermore, the complex interplay of multiple microsystems surrounding translation teaching shaped the professional identity of the trainers at the mesosystem level. More specifically, it was revealed that juggling multiple professional identities has become a concern for trainers. A similar issue was observed in the study of Chen and Huang (2022), who highlighted overlapping role identities among translator trainers in China.

The only difference is that our participants negatively perceived multiple identities, while Chen and Huang (2022) found this combination can be at times positive, yielding new research ideas and initiatives for trainers. It is noteworthy that mesosystems that foster positive development are created from strong and supportive interactions among different microsystems in an individual's life (Bouchard & Smith, 2017).

The results also highlighted the influence of the exosystem, as evidenced by the negative impact of the university's limited budget or curriculum requirements on the self-perception of translator

trainers. It was found that the teachers faced economic challenges due to the university's limited budget, which contradicted their high workloads, suggesting how it can shape the attitudes and perspectives of teachers. This may result in stress and anxiety, indicating that the emotional well-being of teachers is closely related to their professional identities. This issue has been evidenced by numerous studies, where identity was associated with teachers' emotional experiences (Nazari & Karimpour, 2022; Wu et al., 2021).

Regarding the macrosystem level, the findings revealed that the Iranian sociocultural particularities influenced translator trainers' self-perception. For example, the high value and prestige placed on literary translation in Iran (Haddadian-Moghaddam, 2014) can help trainers of literary translation assert their professional identity in their classrooms. In other words, trainers can feel a sense of pride in training the next generation of translators, who might become renowned figures in translation in the years to come; such trainers consider themselves important people in the educational system, which supports the development of a strong professional identity among them. However, some trainers faced challenges in maintaining professional boundaries in their university teaching contexts.

In some cultures, there is a misconception that translators should be able to translate any type of text perfectly (Bowker, 2023), which may lead to unrealistic expectations from translation trainers at the university. As a result, trainers may feel pressure to follow these expectations, even at the cost of their own professional integrity. To preserve the integrity of their role as translator trainers, they should assert their professional identity more clearly in their workplace. The Iranian educational system and learning culture, which is mainly classroom-oriented and teacher-centered (Vaezi et al., 2019), was another factor that teachers mentioned. Trainers who encourage self-directed learning and lifelong education may find this against their teaching philosophy. This is also

consistent with the Iranian translator training culture, where Parvaresh et al. (2019) identified the resistance of translation students as a barrier to the implementation of learner-centered approaches in translation education. Teachers' conflicts, however, can be at times constructive since tensions could motivate teachers to exercise their agency and seek effective solutions to deal with the tensions or alleviate these dilemmas (Robertson & Yazan, 2022).

In the context of translation education, the rise of AI is an important chronosystemic shift. In fact, AI technology, particularly neural machine translation, has significantly impacted the translation field by creating more accurate and fluent translations (Calvo-Ferrer, 2023, pp. 1-2). This has led to increased automation of the translation process, which has implications for the role of human translators. Therefore, translator trainers are dealing with situations that can challenge their professional future and identity.

Although AIs raise concerns about job displacement in the translation profession, it definitely necessitates the re-assessment of instructional philosophies and strategies in translator training programs (Kenny, 2019). As indicated by a teacher, translator trainers should adapt to these changes, showcasing an evolution of professional identity in response to technological advancements. In fact, machine translation and AI literacy are now considered vital, and educating trainees about AI technologies, including machine translation, can empower them "to bring their expertise to the table when language-related technologies are developed and implemented" (Ehrensberger-Dow et al., 2023, p. 407). Therefore, flexibility and continuous acquisition of new competencies are essential to come to terms with these changes. However, as Sánchez-Castany (2023) points out, translation modules have limited integration of translation technology, with sporadic references to CAT tools, terminology, project management and, to a lesser degree, machine translation.

5. Conclusion

This empirical study offered valuable insights into the professional dimension of novice teacher identity construction in the field of translator training. The findings highlight that the construction identity of trainers is a dynamic process, which is continually (re)shaped by the interplay of sociocultural and educational complexities. Indeed, effective professional teacher development and growth relies on an ongoing engagement with the socio-cultural dynamics that both shape and influence the identity of trainers (Pennington & Richards, 2016).

As noted before, "professional development is a process in which the professional identity of the teacher is formed"; therefore, the professional development of teachers relies on the effective construction of their identity (Avidov-Ungar, 2016, p. 654). Also, early career translator trainers may encounter socio-cultural and educational setbacks that negatively impact their professional identity formation and development.

Training programs for translation teachers should offer self-reflection workshops and real-world contexts to empower prospective translator trainers to be aware of their professional duties and to explore their self-perceptions as trainers in authentic settings. Additionally, deliberate self-training presents a viable avenue for overcoming these challenges and fostering a dynamic professional identity. Indeed, teachers must embrace lifelong learning by engaging in various activities, such as doing translation, evaluating their teaching philosophies, doing research or sharing knowledge with colleagues (Wu et al., 2019).

The study has some limitations that should be acknowledged. First, this study examined novice trainers, who were adjunct lecturers or faculty members; future research may focus on a specific group of teachers, for example, only faculty members. Second, self-report data may be susceptible to bias; therefore, future researchers are advised to gather observational data from trainers' classrooms to achieve a more nuanced understanding. Longitudinal studies can trace the (re)construction of teacher identity over time, and the relationship between teacher identity, agency and emotions can be a new avenue of research in translation studies. Finally, future research may incorporate a larger sample size to enhance the generalizability of the findings.

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