

## Developing a Quality Classification System for Theatre Translation: A Survey of Theatre Practitioners' Quality Criteria

Mostafa Ahmadi<sup>1</sup>, Zahra Amirian<sup>2</sup>, Akbar Hesabi<sup>3</sup>

<sup>1</sup>Ph.D. Candidate, Department of English Language and Literature, Faculty of Foreign Languages, University of Isfahan, Isfahan, Iran, Email: [mostafaahmadi@fgn.ui.ac.ir](mailto:mostafaahmadi@fgn.ui.ac.ir)

<sup>2</sup> *Corresponding author*, Associate Professor, Department of English Language and Literature, Faculty of Foreign Languages, University of Isfahan, Isfahan, Iran, Email: [z.amirian@fgn.ui.ac.ir](mailto:z.amirian@fgn.ui.ac.ir)

<sup>3</sup>Associate Professor, Department of English Language and Literature, Faculty of Foreign Languages, University of Isfahan, Isfahan, Iran, Email: [a.hesabi@fgn.ui.ac.ir](mailto:a.hesabi@fgn.ui.ac.ir)

### Abstract

This study aims to develop a quality classification system for the collaborative process of theatre translation. To address this gap, the study draws on Actor-Network Theory to explore the quality criteria of Iranian theatre practitioners, whose professional experience situates them as human actors within theatre translation networks. To ensure triangulation, interview data and the analysis of materials suggested by the interviewees informed the development of a questionnaire, which served as the primary data-collection instrument for the survey. The questionnaire underwent qualitative and quantitative validation before distribution. A total of 107 practitioners with experience in multiple roles across the page-stage-post-stage process participated in the study. The analysis revealed 46 quality criteria grouped into 11 underlying factors. Of these, 33 were of primary importance and 13 were of secondary importance. This classification system provides a provisional framework of criteria that contribute, directly or indirectly, to theatre translation quality. It may inform future research and professional practice in the field.

**Keywords:** actor-network theory, human-actors, theatre translation

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## 1. Introduction

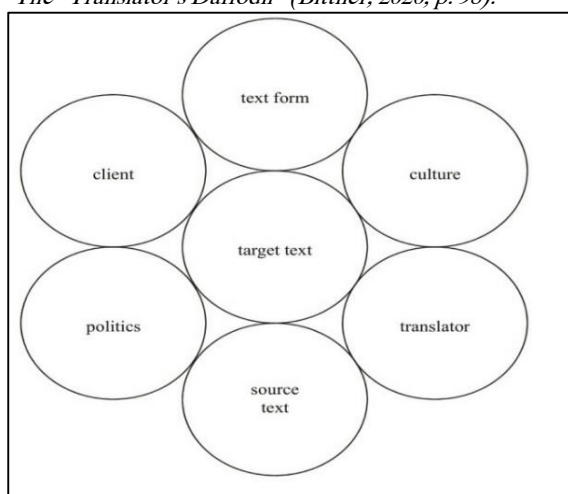
The quality of theatre translation is distinctive in that it extends beyond textual considerations to encompass extratextual and contextual factors. Given the collaborative nature of theatre translation, its quality is shaped and evaluated by the diverse actors involved in its formation and meaning-making.

When a play is translated as a literary work (drama translation), it differs from when it is translated to be performed on stage (theatre translation) (Brodie, 2020, p. 584; see also Anderman, 2009, p. 92; Bittner, 2020, p. 120). A literary work is translated for readers engaging with the text on the page. Theatre translation, however, is intended first for diverse theatre practitioners who perform it on stage. It subsequently reaches spectators and, in some cases, readers. “On stage, the interaction is between the actors (characters): with each other (dramatic context) and also with the audience (theatrical context)” (Aaltonen, 2020, p. 23; see also Espasa, 2013, p. 322). A play is translated in order to have an impact on society and to be accepted by diverse audiences. “The collaborative nature of theatre, and the variety of agents involved in commissioning, developing and presenting a performed translation, places the translator within a group of theatre practitioners with a wide spectrum of professional competences” (Brodie, 2020, p. 584). This signals the first stage of the reception of a translated play. However, when a play is performed, it should be received by spectators (for examples of studies on spectatorship in theatre, see Sedgman, 2016, 2017). Translation for the theatre should cater to the needs of multiple audience members.

In enumerating the “quality factors of translation,” Bittner (2020) uses the metaphor of the “translator’s daffodil” (Figure 1). “Here, the target text is at the centre of the translation process, with six groups of factors influencing it” (Bittner, 2020, p. 98).

**Figure 1**

*The “Translator’s Daffodil” (Bittner, 2020, p. 98).*



For a qualitative foundation to be sufficiently solid, an increasing number of these factors should be considered (Bittner, 2020, p. 99).

The concepts of the target text, source text, client, and translator acquire distinct meanings and functions in theatre translation. Within this context, these roles may be reconceptualized and expanded. For instance, the “client” may include directors, actors, dramaturges, and spectators. Likewise, the role of the “translator” may intersect with that of the director, and in many cases, the two converge. As Aaltonen (2013) argues, “translations in the theatre are not objects of art but products of art worlds, bearing the fingerprints of many subjectivities” (p. 385). The success or failure of theatre translation depends largely on the interaction of diverse actors across a network that extends from translation to performance and beyond. It is further shaped by the criteria through which these actors, including spectators, who are themselves regarded as actors within the network (S. Aaltonen, personal communication), assess the work based on their differing conceptions of quality.

Abdallah (2012) believes that “product-centred quality definition is inadequate in the new economic environment” and that “in audiovisual translation, and in translating and in Translation Studies in general, we should embrace a wider quality definition that accommodates ethical aspects, as well” (p. 36). She argues that “the definition of quality by the various actors together, in collaboration with each other, is the focal requirement in production networks that consist of multiple actors” (Abdallah, 2012, p. 36). In her opinion, even “viewers” or “users” “should have the opportunity to assess the quality of the subtitling **beforehand**, based on specific publicly available criteria” (Abdallah, 2012, p. 37). She proposes a “three-dimensional quality model” that “illustrates how the outermost, invisible third dimension called social quality affects process quality, which in turn affects product quality” (Abdallah, 2012, p. 45). Abdallah further explains that “the social-quality dimension” is related to “collective quality”:

Collective quality – including the level of quality to be aimed at and produced in a particular production network – should be agreed upon by the various actors together. The model [...] is based on the concept of total quality, and therefore it also includes ethical aspects. It emphasises the point that in production networks, quality is not only a feature of the product; it relates to the action concerned – in our case translating – in its entirety: decision-making, production, marketing, customer relations and relations between the various stakeholders, including micro-entrepreneur translators [...]. (Abdallah, 2012, p. 45)

Abdallah (2012, pp. 37, 47–48) argues that “a quality classification system should be developed by the actors.” In line with collaborative and network-based perspectives in the field, including those of Abdallah (2012) and Aaltonen (2013), this study seeks to address a gap in the literature on theatre translation quality. Actor–Network Theory (Latour, 1996, 2005), which accounts for the interactions between human and non-human actors that contribute to the production process within a network, provides the theoretical foundation for the study. In this study, the term actor principally refers to “human actors” who contribute to theatre translation networks.

## 2. Literature Review

Research on theatre translation is varied and diverse. It encompasses, among other areas, historical accounts and evidence of theatre translations that examine their social, cultural, and political potential and outcomes (see, among others, Fonseca & Silva-Reis, 2023; Kampert, 2024; Li, 2020; Marinetti, 2022; O'Leary, 2019; Soleimanirad, 2025). It also addresses topics such as “ideological dimensions” (Halas, 2019), “intersemiotic translation” (Wilson, 2019), “performability” (Glynn & Hadley, 2020; Yang, 2020), and “collaboration” in theatre-making processes (Brodie & Cole, 2017; Čebulj, 2023; Li, 2022; Ploix, 2019). Further areas of inquiry include the “status” and “role” of theatre translators (Aaltonen, 2023; Brodie, 2018a, 2018b; Yang, 2017), “rewriting” (Aaltonen & Ibrahim, 2016), “retranslation” (Lanselle, 2020), and “audience” and “reception” (Aaltonen, 2020).

However, research on the quality of theatre translation remains limited. Focusing on the notion of “performability” and drawing on three reviews, Mišterová (2016) conducts an “audience-response quality assessment” of a Czech translation of *The Merchant of Venice* and examines how the translation was received in light of the “norms and conventions of the time” (p. 83). She admits, however, that further investigation is needed “to achieve a more complex view of the issue” (p. 83).

Huang and Xin (2020) present an overview of research on translation criticism (TC) in the Translation Studies community. As they observe, “evaluation and quality assessment are among the key concepts associated with criticism” (p. 738), and they are sometimes used interchangeably as synonyms in Translation Studies. In their findings, they identify “drama” as one of the underexplored “subgenres of literature” (p. 750). They also point to the “paradigmatic shift from micro (i.e. linguistic) to macro (i.e. cultural) perspectives across the whole period” and “a call for TC to move a step forward into the sociological paradigm” (p. 751). They also predict that “TC research from the sociological perspective may be a future direction of the field” (p. 751). Although some studies on theatre translation employ sociological frameworks, quality is not their focus. Hanna (2016) applies Bourdieu's sociology to study “the socio-cultural dynamics of Shakespeare translation in Egypt.” Mollanazar and Shabani Rad (2018) use the same framework to explore the “genesis of the drama translation field in Iran” during the Qajar period. Shabani Rad (2022, 2025) further investigates the field's evolution during the subsequent Pahlavi I and II periods. Aaltonen (2013) employs Actor–Network Theory and Performance Studies to empirically examine the interactions of different actors in a theatre translation process. Nevertheless, the quality of theatre translation remains underexplored.

Lauscher (2000) argues that “translation quality” is “a matter of agreement and consensus” (p. 149) or “a matter of communication, co-operation and consent” (p. 164) and that “actual translation processes” (p. 161) should be considered when establishing quality criteria. Defining tangible quality criteria grounded in the perspectives of human actors involved in theatre translation networks provides a foundation for practical, theoretical, pedagogical, and cultural

policy development in the field. This study employs Actor–Network Theory. It aims to explore the quality criteria of different human actors within potential theatre translation networks in Iran and to identify the links between them (S. Aaltonen, personal communication) to develop a quality classification system. To this end, the following research question is posed:

What criteria contribute to the quality of theatre translation from the perspective of Iranian theatre practitioners?

### 3. Method

#### *3.1. Theoretical Framework*

This study adopts Actor–Network Theory as its theoretical framework, following Aaltonen (2013) and Abdallah (2012). Aaltonen (2013) argues that theatre translation bears “the fingerprints of many subjectivities” (p. 385), while Abdallah (2012) proposes that “a quality classification system should be developed by the actors” (p. 37). Building on these perspectives, this study aims to develop a quality classification system for theatre translation. To this end, the views of Iranian theatre translation practitioners were examined to identify the links among them.

#### *3.2. Design and Instruments*

The study adopts a survey design in line with its purpose. Data were triangulated through exploratory interviews, content analysis of the relevant literature, and a questionnaire. The interviews and content analysis informed the development of the questionnaire, which served as the primary data-collection instrument of the study.

#### *3.3. Participants*

The aim of this study was to uncover the quality criteria of different stakeholders in theatre translation processes. Therefore, “purposive sampling” was used to explore “rich and diverse information” (Saldanha & O’Brien, 2014, p. 180). Fourteen Iranian theatre translation practitioners were interviewed until “saturation of information” was reached (Seidman, 2019, p. 61). The participants in the study also reflected “the range of participants” within the population (p. 61). They included translators, directors, actors, dramaturges, and other theatre professionals, some of whom had multiple roles across different projects. The study continued into the survey phase with a larger sample. All participants were assured that their information and data would remain confidential. Participation, however, was entirely voluntary, and the participants could withdraw at any point in the research process.

### *3.4. Procedure*

The interviewees were asked whether it was convenient for them to meet in person, whether they preferred online or telephone interviews, or whether they preferred to receive the questions and provide written answers. Most interviewees preferred online interviews; some were interviewed by telephone, and others answered questions sent to them. All responses were recorded in video, audio, or written form. The interviewees were asked open-ended questions, and no time limit was imposed. The online and telephone interviews lasted from approximately half an hour to two hours, and some interviews required two sessions. The interviews were transcribed and used to generate questionnaire statements. The sources introduced by the interviewees were also examined, and additional statements were incorporated into the initial questionnaire.

### *3.5. Thematic Analysis*

After “qualitative content analysis” (Dörnyei, 2007, pp. 245–257), a pool of approximately 650 statements was identified. The statements were refined for clarity and relevance. Repeated, overlapping, ambiguous, and taken-for-granted statements, as well as statements unrelated to the purpose of the study, were omitted. In the “initial coding” (p. 251), about 60 themes were coded and labelled descriptively. In the “second-level coding,” in an attempt “to go beyond a mere descriptive labelling” (p. 252), some overarching themes, including “quality of theatre translation,” were identified.

### *3.6. Validation of the Instrument*

The questionnaire was validated both qualitatively (by experts) and quantitatively (using SmartPLS 12.2). It was given to two readers with academic backgrounds for feedback on clarity, comprehensibility, writing, and editing. The questionnaire was also sent to two international Translation Studies scholars who were experienced in theatre translation and audiovisual translation research. Drawing on discussions of face, content, and construct validity in Sun (2016), the questionnaire was sent to five Iranian theatre practitioners to enhance its validity. After the experts commented on the questionnaire, a short follow-up interview was conducted to gather any further ideas or suggestions. At this validation stage, modifications were made to the statements, and items were added or omitted. The online questionnaire was then reviewed by a reader with editing experience to provide feedback on its formatting, the time required to complete it, and any additional suggestions. The questionnaire, comprising 59 five-point Likert-scale items, was piloted with 30 participants. Although participants were free to take as much time as needed, completing the questionnaire took approximately 15 minutes on average. Some participants were interviewed

after completing the questionnaire to provide additional feedback. The 60th item invited participants to share any further comments or suggestions about their experience.

### *3.6.1. Validity of the Questionnaire*

Building on the indicators identified in the exploratory interview phase, the quality criteria were systematically categorized to consolidate conceptually related elements. Following Dörnyei (2007, p. 252), the “relevant data segments” were subjected to qualitative analysis to identify “more abstract commonalities.” Through an iterative process of comparison, the criteria were grouped based on shared conceptual and functional features, resulting in 11 higher-order factors. Each factor was assigned a label representing the core feature of the criteria it encompassed:

Factor 1: Introductory principles

Factor 2: Meanings underlying the text

Factor 3: Linguistic style and atmosphere making

Factor 4: Written and spoken language

Factor 5: Punctuation marks and graphics

Factor 6: Choice of words, structures, and appropriateness of language

Factor 7: Source and target language, culture, and text

Factor 8: Knowledge and competence of the translator

Factor 9: Consultation, and the structure of the process from translation to performance

Factor 10: Reprints and retranslations

Factor 11: Macro-level issues

These factors subsequently served as formal hypotheses, which were tested quantitatively using confirmatory factor analysis (CFA) “to test the accuracy of these formal hypotheses” (Ary et al., 2019, p. 305). Items with factor loadings below the commonly used threshold of 0.30 or those that did not demonstrate adequate alignment with their respective constructs were eliminated iteratively. In this pilot phase, eight items (3, 6, 7, 17, 29, 34, 37, and 38) were therefore excluded from the instrument (see Appendix A). Item removal was conducted to enhance convergent validity by improving the values of average variance extracted (AVE) and composite reliability (CR). After refinement, all constructs achieved acceptable levels of factor loadings, AVE, and CR, indicating satisfactory convergent validity and internal consistency of the instrument.

### *3.6.2. Reliability of the Questionnaire*

The test results indicate optimal correlations among the items and the reliability of the questionnaire used in this research. The total Cronbach’s alpha of the questionnaire was very good (0.922), and the slight differences among the Cronbach’s alpha values of the factors below 0.60 can be ignored. After validation, the second version of the questionnaire (Appendix B) was distributed to the participants. Additionally, it was distributed through theatre-related channels and groups on

the Telegram messaging application, which was very popular among the target population, so that practitioners who were willing and interested in the research could participate voluntarily.

## 4. Results

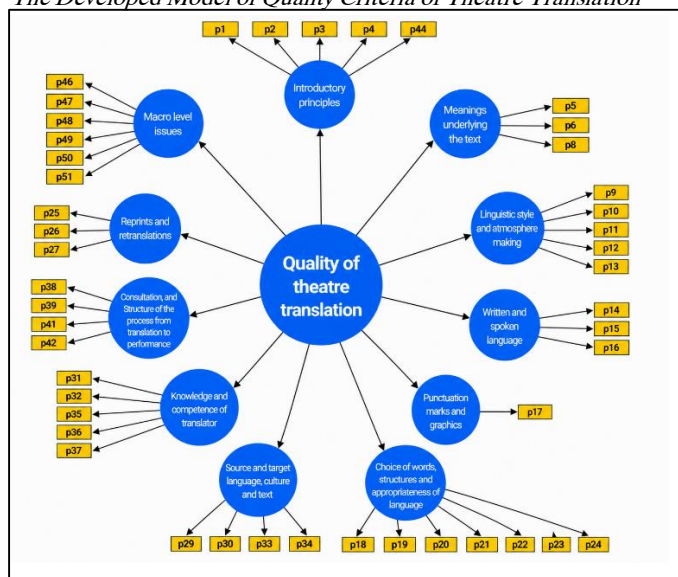
The present study aimed to develop a quality classification system for theatre translation. It drew on Actor-Network Theory as its theoretical framework, which considers the production process as a network of interacting human and non-human actors. The study explored the perspectives of Iranian theatre translation practitioners as human actors within theatre translation production networks. Interviews with theatre practitioners and content analysis of the relevant literature informed the development of the questionnaire, which served as the primary instrument of the study. The questionnaire was qualitatively and quantitatively validated before distribution. The data were then analysed to uncover the quality criteria of theatre translation from the practitioners' perspectives.

The biographical data obtained from the questionnaire showed that the participants included both males and females aged 18–65 years. Their experience in theatre translation processes, ranging from less than 5 to more than 10 years, was distributed across different roles (translators, directors, actors, etc.).

To answer the research question, the developed model was introduced and implemented using SmartPLS 12.2. After the initial model fitting and evaluation of the path coefficients and goodness-of-fit indices, the modified model was presented in Figure 2. At this stage, several questionnaire items (7, 28, 40, 43, and 45) were also removed (see Appendix B). Boxplots were also used to identify outliers. Three participants (out of 107) whose responses fell outside the acceptable range were excluded, as these responses substantially distorted parameter estimates and compromised the stability and significance of *t* and *p* values.

**Figure 2**

*The Developed Model of Quality Criteria of Theatre Translation*



## 4.1. Checking the Fit of the Model

### 4.1.1. Fit of the Measurement Model

*Reliability indices.* The overall *Cronbach's alpha* value of 0.871 and *composite reliability* of higher than 0.7 indicate good reliability and acceptable fit of the measurement model. *Convergent validity.* The Average Variance Extracted (AVE) values of nearly all research variables exceed 0.4, indicating good convergent validity.

*Divergent validity* was analysed using the Fornell-Larcker criterion, and a good fit of the measurement model was approved.

### 4.1.2. Fit of the Structural Model

*T-values* exceeded the critical value of 1.96, which shows the significance of the relationships between the variables at the 95% confidence level.

*P-values* of the model paths at the desired error level of 0.05 were calculated, which show the significance levels for all paths and relationships between the variables.

### 4.1.3. Fit of the General Model

As the value of Goodness of Fit (GOF) exceeded 0.36, a very good fit of the overall model was confirmed.

## 4.2. Examining Path Coefficients, T-values and P-values

The results of examining the model paths in Table 1 show that the research hypotheses are meaningful.

**Table 1**

*The Results of Examining the Model Paths*

|                                    | Hyp                                                                            | Path Coefficients | T-value | P-value |
|------------------------------------|--------------------------------------------------------------------------------|-------------------|---------|---------|
| <b>Theater translation Quality</b> | Introductory principles                                                        | 0.574             | 7.719   | 0.000   |
|                                    | Meanings underlying the text                                                   | 0.609             | 10.046  | 0.000   |
|                                    | Linguistic style and atmosphere making                                         | 0.630             | 8.161   | 0.000   |
|                                    | Written and spoken language                                                    | 0.574             | 6.487   | 0.000   |
|                                    | Punctuation marks and graphics                                                 | 0.319             | 2.658   | 0.003   |
|                                    | Choice of words, structures and appropriateness of language                    | 0.777             | 14.793  | 0.000   |
|                                    | Source and target language, culture and text                                   | 0.482             | 4.950   | 0.000   |
|                                    | Knowledge and competence of the translator                                     | 0.788             | 13.705  | 0.000   |
|                                    | Consultation, and the structure of the process from translation to performance | 0.660             | 10.642  | 0.000   |
|                                    | Reprints and retranslations                                                    | 0.549             | 7.239   | 0.000   |
|                                    | Macro-level issues                                                             | 0.787             | 12.503  | 0.000   |

### 4.3. Factors and Indicators Influencing Quality of Theatre Translation

In the analysis, forty-six quality criteria remained that linked the participants' ideas. The criteria and underlying factors are presented in Table 2.

**Table 2**

*Factors and Quality Criteria of Theatre Translation*

| <i><b>Factors</b></i>                                                  | <i><b>Indicators</b></i>                                                                                                                                                                                                    |
|------------------------------------------------------------------------|-----------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| <b>1. Introductory principles</b>                                      | Ensuring the theatrical translation is subtle and unobtrusive (allowing the audience to engage with it as they do with other performance elements such as stage design, costumes, lighting, and other performance elements) |
|                                                                        | Testing translation in rehearsals to determine which words, sentences, and structures best express the intended meanings                                                                                                    |
|                                                                        | Shaping the translation through director and performance team input (including actors' performance and expression, stage design, lighting, and other elements)                                                              |
|                                                                        | Considering theatre translation as an artistic work belonging to the field of theatre                                                                                                                                       |
|                                                                        | Making it possible for the actors to remember the dialogues                                                                                                                                                                 |
| <b>2. Meanings underlying the text</b>                                 | Understanding and accurately conveying subtexts and actions in different scenes                                                                                                                                             |
|                                                                        | Enabling non-verbal actions (rhythm, tone, moods, emotions, etc.)                                                                                                                                                           |
|                                                                        | Understanding and portraying the relationships between the characters                                                                                                                                                       |
| <b>3. Linguistic style and atmosphere making</b>                       | Discerning shifts in each character's register (e.g., from colloquial to formal or poetic language) and rendering them accurately                                                                                           |
|                                                                        | Recognizing and rendering different styles of expression (such as colloquial, formal, slang, classical poetry, free verse, and blank verse, among others)                                                                   |
|                                                                        | Portraying the setting, circumstances, details, and atmosphere of the original play accurately                                                                                                                              |
|                                                                        | Creating the appropriate atmosphere, such as comedy, tragedy, or tragicomedy (as intended by the original play)                                                                                                             |
|                                                                        | Conveying different emotions (uncertainty, anxiety, waiting, confusion, happiness, among others) through speech rhythm and the music of language, with pauses, silences, and variations in speech speed                     |
| <b>4. Written and spoken language</b>                                  | Using vocabulary and syntactic structures that actors can easily articulate in performance                                                                                                                                  |
|                                                                        | Avoiding excessive, nonstandard, or colloquial word splitting (i.e., splitting that changes standard forms)                                                                                                                 |
|                                                                        | Breaking words (as used in everyday speech) to supplement the language of translation                                                                                                                                       |
| <b>5. Punctuation marks and graphics</b>                               | Employing punctuation marks and graphics effectively                                                                                                                                                                        |
| <b>6: Choice of words, structures, and appropriateness of language</b> | Using words, idioms, habitual phrases, and linguistic structures appropriate to each character (considering social class, age, culture, gender, education, etc.) in the play                                                |
|                                                                        | Ensuring fluency and clarity                                                                                                                                                                                                |
|                                                                        | Choosing, arranging, and combining words to accurately convey emotions (fear, excitement, joy, among others) and traits (forgetfulness, linguistic disarray, euphoria, among others)                                        |
|                                                                        | Maintaining coherence in word choice appropriate to the play's cultural context                                                                                                                                             |
|                                                                        | Ensuring the comprehensibility of sentences, structures, and vocabulary for the audience                                                                                                                                    |
|                                                                        | Using language appropriate to the historical period of the original text                                                                                                                                                    |
|                                                                        | Choosing words from the commonly accepted vocabulary of the society at the time                                                                                                                                             |

|                                                                                          |                                                                                                                                                                             |
|------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|-----------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| <b>7: Source and target language, culture, and text</b>                                  | Considering a playwright's works and their key elements to grasp the original text (and the author's language style)                                                        |
|                                                                                          | Ensuring the source play text is completely and accurately translated without deletions or additions                                                                        |
|                                                                                          | Creating the impression that the work is authored by a target-language playwright                                                                                           |
|                                                                                          | Creating the impression that the work was written in the target culture                                                                                                     |
| <b>8: Knowledge and competence of the translator</b>                                     | Mastery of the target language and culture                                                                                                                                  |
|                                                                                          | Proficiency in transferring cultural concepts from the source to the target context                                                                                         |
|                                                                                          | Knowledge of theatre, performance, and their requirements                                                                                                                   |
|                                                                                          | Familiarity with translation techniques and theories                                                                                                                        |
|                                                                                          | Mastery of the source language and culture                                                                                                                                  |
| <b>9: Consultation, and the structure of the process from translation to performance</b> | Presence of knowledgeable consultants alongside the translator                                                                                                              |
|                                                                                          | Collaboration between the translator and the director                                                                                                                       |
|                                                                                          | Presence of a dramaturge alongside the director                                                                                                                             |
|                                                                                          | Presence of a researcher throughout the translation-to-performance process.                                                                                                 |
| <b>10: Reprints and retranslations</b>                                                   | Responsiveness of the theatre translator and publisher to reader feedback in subsequent editions                                                                            |
|                                                                                          | Retranslation of dramatic texts across historical periods                                                                                                                   |
|                                                                                          | Contribution of earlier, less successful translations to the quality of subsequent translations                                                                             |
|                                                                                          |                                                                                                                                                                             |
| <b>11: Macro-level issues</b>                                                            | Communication and intellectual exchange with global theatre                                                                                                                 |
|                                                                                          | Interplay of economic, social, cultural, and related contextual factors                                                                                                     |
|                                                                                          | Presence of an association dedicated to identifying and introducing contemporary international plays                                                                        |
|                                                                                          | Familiarity of the translator, director, and production team with global drama.                                                                                             |
|                                                                                          | Collaborative interaction among actors involved in theatre translation (theatre practitioners, translators, publishers, journals, intellectuals, and other cultural agents) |
|                                                                                          | Familiarity of the translator, director, and production team with global theatre theory                                                                                     |

#### 4.4. *Quality Criteria of Importance*<sup>1</sup>

Thirty-three criteria received higher mean scores, indicating stronger agreement among the participants (Table 3). The options on the Likert scale were strongly agree (1), agree (2), no opinion (3), disagree (4), and strongly disagree (5). The mean scores for the items representing these criteria ranged from 1 to 2 on the scale, within the agreement zone. These criteria begin with the translator's "mastery of the target language and culture" and end with the "responsiveness of the theatre translator and publisher to reader feedback in subsequent editions." When the process is considered from translation to performance and beyond, this progression appears reasonable. Notably, "mastery of the target language and culture" takes precedence over "mastery of the source language and culture," which is also a plausible finding, as competence in the target language and culture is essential for effectively communicating meaning.

<sup>1</sup>. This category is used here following Ameri et al. (2018).

“Fluency and clarity” and “accuracy” (criteria 15 and 27) both fell within the category Criteria of Importance. This is not surprising, given that, in Iran, theatre translators are usually not involved in the performance process. Although they are not expected to provide a literal version to the production team, as is typically the case in British theatre, they are generally expected to deliver complete translations, whether published or unpublished, that are ready for performance. These translations may then undergo revisions during rehearsals to become fully suitable for staging. This may partly explain why criteria related to the testing and refinement of translations during rehearsals (criteria 34 and 37) fell into the category Secondary Importance (Table 4).

A remarkable finding of the study was that the participants placed equal emphasis on the “presence of a dramaturge alongside the director” and the “presence of a researcher throughout the translation-to-performance process.” While collaboration with dramaturges is common in theatre-making networks, the involvement of researchers in such processes remains rare.

**Table 3**  
*Quality Criteria of Importance*

| Items                                                                                                                                                                                                      | M    |
|------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|------|
| 01 Mastery of the target language and culture                                                                                                                                                              | 1.19 |
| 02 Discerning shifts in each character's register (e.g., from colloquial to formal or poetic language) and rendering them accurately                                                                       | 1.37 |
| 03 Recognizing and rendering different styles of expression (such as colloquial, formal, slang, classical poetry, free verse, and blank verse, among others)                                               | 1.40 |
| 04 Communication and intellectual exchange with global theatre                                                                                                                                             | 1.43 |
| 05 Portraying the setting, circumstances, details, and atmosphere of the original play accurately                                                                                                          | 1.45 |
| 06 Proficiency in transferring cultural concepts from the source to the target context                                                                                                                     | 1.48 |
| 07 Knowledge of theatre, performance, and their requirements                                                                                                                                               | 1.49 |
| 08 Creating the appropriate atmosphere, such as comedy, tragedy, or tragicomedy (as intended by the original play)                                                                                         | 1.50 |
| 09 Understanding and accurately conveying subtexts and actions in different scenes                                                                                                                         | 1.54 |
| 10 Familiarity with translation techniques and theories                                                                                                                                                    | 1.55 |
| 11 Considering a playwright's works and their key elements to grasp the original text (and the author's language style)                                                                                    | 1.57 |
| 12 Mastery of the source language and culture                                                                                                                                                              | 1.57 |
| 13 Presence of knowledgeable consultants alongside the translator                                                                                                                                          | 1.58 |
| 14 Using words, idioms, habitual phrases, and linguistic structures appropriate to each character (considering social class, age, culture, gender, education, etc.) in the play                            | 1.59 |
| 15 Ensuring fluency and clarity                                                                                                                                                                            | 1.61 |
| 16 Interplay of economic, social, cultural, and related contextual factors                                                                                                                                 | 1.61 |
| 17 Presence of an association dedicated to identifying and introducing contemporary international plays                                                                                                    | 1.65 |
| 18 Enabling non-verbal actions (rhythm, tone, moods, emotions, etc.)                                                                                                                                       | 1.67 |
| 19 Conveying different emotions (uncertainty, anxiety, waiting, confusion, happiness, among others) through speech rhythm and the music of language, with pauses, silences, and variations in speech speed | 1.67 |
| 20 Familiarity of the translator, director, and production team with global drama                                                                                                                          | 1.67 |
| 21 Collaborative interaction among actors involved in theatre translation (theatre practitioners, translators, publishers, journals, intellectuals, and other cultural agents)                             | 1.70 |
| 22 Familiarity of the translator, director, and production team with global theatre theory                                                                                                                 | 1.73 |

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|                                                                                                                                                                                                                                |      |
|--------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|------|
| 23 Choosing, arranging, and combining words to accurately convey emotions (fear, excitement, joy, among others) and traits (forgetfulness, linguistic disarray, euphoria, among others)                                        | 1.74 |
| 24 Understanding and portraying the relationships between the characters                                                                                                                                                       | 1.76 |
| 25 Maintaining coherence in word choice appropriate to the play's cultural context                                                                                                                                             | 1.77 |
| 26 Employing punctuation marks and graphics effectively                                                                                                                                                                        | 1.78 |
| 27 Ensuring the source play text is completely and accurately translated without deletions or additions                                                                                                                        | 1.82 |
| 28 Collaboration between the translator and the director                                                                                                                                                                       | 1.82 |
| 29 Ensuring the comprehensibility of sentences, structures, and vocabulary for the audience                                                                                                                                    | 1.83 |
| 30 Presence of a dramaturge alongside the director                                                                                                                                                                             | 1.87 |
| 31 Presence of a researcher throughout the translation-to-performance process                                                                                                                                                  | 1.87 |
| 32 Ensuring the theatrical translation is subtle and unobtrusive (allowing the audience to engage with it as they do with other performance elements such as stage design, costumes, lighting, and other performance elements) | 1.95 |
| 33 Responsiveness of the theatre translator and publisher to reader feedback in subsequent editions                                                                                                                            | 1.96 |

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#### *4.5. Quality Criteria of Secondary Importance*

Thirteen criteria with mean scores of 2 or above were categorized as Secondary Importance (Table 4). Most items in this category scored between 2 and 2.5; only two exceeded 2.5, and none reached a mean score above 3, which approaches the disagreement zone. Items 45 and 46, indicating that theatre translation should create “the impression that the work is authored by a target-language playwright” and is “written in the target culture,” received mean scores of 2.8 and 3, respectively. Although these scores correspond to an approximately neutral position and a neutral position, respectively, the absence of unanimous agreement is noteworthy, as it suggests a divergence from a strong preference for target-language norms. This, in turn, points to another significant finding of the study.

In line with recent contributions on theatre translation, this study did not adopt binary frameworks (e.g., foreignization/domestication or literal/performable; see Brodie & Cole, 2017) but instead categorized quality criteria under related thematic groupings. The findings indicate that criteria reflecting preferences for either source- or target-language norms, when articulated from different perspectives, received varying levels of support. When formulated in general terms, such as “fluency and clarity,” “comprehensibility,” “subtle and unobtrusive,” and “actors can easily articulate,” these criteria fell within or very near the agreement zone. However, a different pattern emerged when the items were made more explicit. Specifically, they were expressed as “choosing words from the commonly accepted vocabulary of the society at the time,” “creating the impression that the work is authored by a target-language playwright,” and “creating the impression that the work was written in their own culture (target culture).” In this case, the responses moved away from the agreement pole and approached a mean value of 3.

**Table 4***Quality Criteria of Secondary Importance*

| Items                                                                                                                                                             | M    |
|-------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|------|
| 34 Testing translation in rehearsals to determine which words, sentences, and structures best express the intended meanings                                       | 2.00 |
| 35 Using language appropriate to the historical period of the original text                                                                                       | 2.04 |
| 36 Using vocabulary and syntactic structures that actors can easily articulate in performance                                                                     | 2.05 |
| 37 Shaping the translation through director and performance team input (including actors' performance and expression, stage design, lighting, and other elements) | 2.13 |
| 38 Avoiding excessive, nonstandard, or colloquial word splitting (i.e., splitting that changes standard forms)                                                    | 2.19 |
| 39 Retranslation of dramatic texts across historical periods                                                                                                      | 2.19 |
| 40 Considering theatre translation as an artistic work belonging to the field of theatre                                                                          | 2.20 |
| 41 Making it possible for the actors to remember the dialogues                                                                                                    | 2.28 |
| 42 Breaking words (as used in everyday speech) to supplement the language of translation                                                                          | 2.44 |
| 43 Contribution of earlier, less successful translations to the quality of subsequent translations                                                                | 2.44 |
| 44 Choosing words from the commonly accepted vocabulary of the society at the time                                                                                | 2.50 |
| 45 Creating the impression that the work is authored by a target-language playwright                                                                              | 2.80 |
| 46 Creating the impression that the work was written in their own culture (target culture)                                                                        | 3.00 |

## 5. Discussion

In this research, Actor–Network Theory was employed as the theoretical foundation, which considers the interaction of different actors (human and non-human) in production processes. The aim of the study was to uncover the quality criteria of potential human actors in potential theatre translation networks for a quality classification system. Forty-six criteria linked the participants' responses and were grouped under 11 factors, each highlighting different aspects of the overall process. Based on the values attributed to the items, 33 criteria were identified as Criteria of Importance. The remaining 13 were classified as being of Secondary Importance.

Some of the criteria uncovered in this study resonate with established concepts such as speakability and performability. Despite the longstanding debate over performability, it remains central to scholarly attention and practical application, although the focus has shifted to “how performability is articulated, from different perspectives” (Espasa, 2017, p. 279). No “stable” or “universal” framework for performability can be proposed, as the relevant criteria vary across theatrical cultures (see Bigliuzzi et al., 2013, p. 4). The findings of the present study may therefore serve as a tentative framework for understanding the criteria that influence performability within a specific context.

The final analysis revealed some remarkable findings. Participants simultaneously emphasized “fluency” and “accuracy” as Criteria of Importance. These seemingly contradictory positions may stem from a view of translators not as collaborators in the production process but as agents expected to translate the play and hand it over to directors for further work (for a broader discussion of the status of theatre translators in one theatrical system, see Aaltonen, 2023).

Nevertheless, this apparent contradiction may be mitigated by including the translator, as a language expert, throughout the process from translation to performance. Translations for theatre can remain closely aligned with the source text while also being comprehensible to the target audience. In practice, theatre translation “egotistically” (Aaltonen, 2000, p. 48) foregrounds key elements of the source text in ways that benefit the target culture. These elements may include discourses (Upton, 2011, p. 36), images (Ambrosi, 2013), and emotions (Ambrosi, 2013; Curran, 2013). Such effects are not typically achieved through “excessive faithfulness” to the original (Pieri, 2013, p. 166), as this may ultimately render the translation “less faithful” (Mann et al., 2017, p. 270; see also Brater, 2013, p. 137). Theatre translators can strike a balance between fluency and accuracy, domestication and foreignization, and related tensions (see Heras, 2013, p. 161; Johnston, 2011, p. 19). In this sense, the source and target are conceived as “one and the same thing” (Aaltonen, 2000, pp. 48–49), and the original grows in the target culture “like a child” (p. 105). It is the “requirements,” “pragmatics,” or “needs of the stage” (Aaltonen, 2000) that set the scene for equivalence in theatre translation. “In the theatre, equivalence means something other than linguistic and semantic mapping” (Griffiths, 2017, p. 81). Brodie and Cole (2017), while acknowledging Venuti’s contribution to translation studies, argue that “it is in the dialogues between all those involved in staging and theorizing translated drama that the best approach for any individual play can be determined” (pp. 7–8). Ultimately, accuracy and fluency can be realized in performance within a creative atmosphere in which the translator is integrated into the production team, providing other members with access to the language and culture of the original (see Rose & Marinetti, 2011, p. 153). Although theatre translation in Iran is usually not collaborative, several of the criteria identified in this study suggest the potential for a more integrated, team-based approach that includes the translator.

Furthermore, with regard to the structure of theatre translation networks, one significant finding of this study was the suggestion that the “presence of a researcher throughout the translation-to-performance process” can improve the quality of the work. This aligns with Murjas’s (2011) observation that theatre translation “in its broader sense comes to constitute both a (fundamentally collective) research method and an outcome” (p. 255).

Another considerable finding of this study was that a given phenomenon, when framed and articulated from different perspectives, may elicit varying responses. It was expected that criteria reflecting preferences for source- or target-language norms and grouped under their respective themes would generate similar levels of agreement. However, when formulated with different emphases, these criteria produced divergent responses. This variation may be attributable to framing effects, whereby foregrounding particular aspects of a phenomenon elicits different responses from participants (for discussions of framing and framing effects, see, among others, Flusberg et al., 2024; Kuang & Bicchieri, 2024; Sullivan, 2023; Wang et al., 2025). Nonetheless, this issue merits further investigation.

Regarding macro-level indicators of quality, participants emphasized that economic, social, and cultural factors influence a society's theatre translation as a whole. These may include interactions among actors within the broader field of theatre (e.g., practitioners, journalists, publishers, translators, and intellectuals). Of particular significance are effective international engagement and the presence of institutions or communities capable of identifying and introducing the most up-to-date theatrical works worldwide to society. Such engagement contributes to practitioners' familiarity with global theatre and contemporary theoretical developments. One anticipated indicator was the interaction between translators and playwrights in the case of contemporary works. The absence of this aspect may be attributed to insufficient international exchange. Many of these considerations may be significant when viewed in light of sociopolitical contexts. As Johnston (2011) observes, "translation and theatre encourage us to relativize not just the apparent truths of any given situation, but also the frameworks in which those truths are dramatized" (p. 16).

Many of the criteria uncovered in this study are also discussed in the literature on theatre translation; however, some may be viewed as challenging by certain theatre practitioners. For example, one criterion suggests that theatre translations should enable actors to memorize their lines. Finburgh (2011) holds the opposite opinion: "It is not the text that must modify itself in the rehearsal room in order to accommodate the actors, but the actors who must evolve their practices in order to accommodate the text" (p. 238). By contrast, many theatre practitioners may consider "the theatrical word" to be "the actor's comfort zone" (Nigri, 2013, p. 105). It would also be valuable to examine how theatre practitioners across different theatrical cultures, as well as within individual cultural contexts, respond to the quality criteria explored in this study.

## 6. Conclusion

This study examined the quality of theatre translation from the perspective of Actor–Network Theory, which accounts for the interactions among different actors (human and non-human) in shaping the final product. The aim was to develop a quality classification system for the collaborative practice of theatre translation. The findings identified forty-six quality criteria, grouped into eleven underlying factors, that connect the participants' perspectives. These criteria may, in various ways, influence the quality of theatre translation.

The study focused on the Iranian theatrical context, and the participants were practitioners with experience in theatre translation networks. It explored the quality criteria of theatre translation, an underinvestigated topic in translation criticism. Given the lack of an instrument designed to capture quality criteria in theatre translation networks, a questionnaire was developed for this study. The researcher-developed instrument was informed by a series of interviews, validated both qualitatively and quantitatively, and piloted before distribution and final quantitative analysis. However, the study does not claim generalizability. Several factors may limit the

generalizability of the findings, including the limited number of participants and the voluntary nature of participation. Although the participants were experienced in theatre translation processes, the voluntary nature of the study may have excluded certain perspectives on the quality of theatre translation. Furthermore, as the study is based on the views of a limited sample within a single theatrical milieu, it may not capture all dimensions of theatre translation quality. To enhance generalizability, the research could be replicated with different samples, and parallel studies could be conducted in other theatrical contexts and compared through meta-analysis. Nonetheless, the study opens avenues for future research and provides a foundation for practical applications. The findings may be useful for theatre practitioners (e.g., translators and directors), translation and theatre educators, researchers, critics, and cultural authorities. When using the system to improve the quality of a work before the start of a project, the human actors in the network may decide which criteria to pursue or add their own. Translation and theatre teachers, as well as students, can use the system to reflect on the intricacies of theatre translation. Critics can use the criteria for objective theatre translation criticism. Authorities and decision-makers can consider the extratextual aspects of the system to improve the quality of theatre translation in society.

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