



Critics' Voices on Translation Quality: A Thematic Analysis of Emergent Criteria in Ketab-e Mah-e Adabiyat

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Abstract

Translation reviews provide valuable sources of data for identifying the explicit and implicit criteria that critics employ when evaluating translated texts. They offer insights into how translation quality is understood and assessed in practice. The present study aimed to identify the major criteria of a good translation based on reviews published in Ketab-e Mah-e Adabiyat over its last five years of publication. Employing thematic analysis and drawing on Chesterman's (2007) model of reaction, response, and repercussions, the study analyzed the evaluation criteria reflected in these reviews. The findings revealed two main themes: faithful representation of the source text and production of a high-quality target text. Together, these themes suggest a dual conceptualization of translation quality, in which translators are expected to remain faithful to the source text's meaning and style while simultaneously producing a natural and idiomatic target text. The findings may help translators better understand critics' expectations and assist translation students in developing a clearer understanding of the qualities expected of successful translations in real-world translation criticism.

Keywords: Translation criticism, translation reviews, translation quality, good translation criteria, critics' expectations

Published: 30.12.2026

Accepted: 25.11.2026

Received: 23.10.2026

Cite this article: Eidi Attarzadeh, Z. (2026). Critics' voices on translation quality: A thematic analysis of emergent criteria in Ketab-e Mah-e Adabiyat. *Translation and Interpreting Research*, 3(12), 85-97.
<https://doi.org/10.22054/tir.2026.96866.1109>



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Print ISSN: 3092-6599

Online ISSN: 3060-7019

Publisher: Allameh Tabataba'i University Press

1. Introduction

Translation is a tool that bridges the gap between different languages and cultures. Like any other product, translations need to be evaluated and criticized in order to assess their quality and identify their strengths and weaknesses. However, unlike translation evaluation, translation criticism (TC) does not necessarily result in a score, which is considered one of the main differences between evaluation and criticism (Hewson, 2011). Instead, TC involves analytical and interpretative judgments about translation choices and their effects (Hewson, 2011). From this perspective, TC plays a vital role in Translation Studies (TS), and over the years, researchers have proposed various models to assist critics in evaluating translations effectively (e.g., Farahzad, 2012; Hewson, 2011; House, 2014; Reiss, 2000).

Nevertheless, research on TC itself remains relatively limited. According to Huang and Xin (2020), studies on TC accounted for only about 0.48% of translation-related entries in Bitra. This statistic highlights both the scarcity of scholarly works in this field and the need for further research. TC represents a crucial sub-domain within the broader field of TS, serving as a link between translation theory and practice. While the practice of criticizing translations is centuries old, its formal academic identity was established through James Holmes's mapping of the field in 1972, which categorized TC as a branch of applied TS (Lauscher, 2000).

Despite its recognized importance, TC has historically suffered from what some scholars term "assessment chaos," referring to the lack of generally accepted criteria that may result in arbitrary and subjective judgments (Williams, 2002). To address this issue, several TC and Translation Quality Assessment (TQA) models have been proposed; however, these models mainly represent theoretical frameworks and do not necessarily reveal the criteria employed by critics in actual critical practices.

According to Fatehinejad (2013), criticism plays a vital role in the scientific and cultural development of societies by identifying the strengths and weaknesses of scholarly and literary works. Constructive criticism is generally welcomed by accomplished authors, who recognize that no work is free from flaws. However, Fatehinejad (2013) argues that such a culture of constructive criticism has not yet been fully established in Iran. Critics are often met with defensive reactions, and their reviews are frequently interpreted as expressions of personal hostility rather than professional evaluation. As a result, the number of critical studies published in academic and literary journals remains limited and has even declined over time. He concludes that this lack of systematic criticism contributes to the publication of low-quality translations and scholarly works, as authors and translators are less likely to be held accountable for errors. At the same time, Fatehinejad (2013) emphasizes that criticism should be conducted responsibly, objectively, and with the primary aim of improving the quality of translations and promoting scholarly and cultural development.

While translation quality has been widely discussed theoretically, less attention has been given to how translation critics themselves conceptualize quality when reviewing actual translations. One of the few magazines publishing translation reviews in Iran is *Ketab-e Mah-e Adabiyat*, which ceased publication in 1393/2014. *Ketab-e Mah-e Adabiyat* was a monthly journal published by *Khane-ye Ketab-e Iran* with the aim of providing information on books and publishing-related issues and establishing creative communication among authors, publishers, librarians, and other professionals active in the country's publishing and cultural sectors (Ibna, 2013).

Although this magazine covered many foreign books, only some articles focused specifically on the quality of their translations, making these reviews a valuable source for examining critics' evaluative practices. Rather than applying an existing evaluation framework, this study seeks to explore the criteria that emerge from critics' own discourse and judgments in this magazine via thematic analysis.

To this end, the following research question is addressed: What criteria do critics in *Ketab-e Mah-e Adabiyat* employ in evaluating translations?

2. Literature Review

Here, some of the various models of TC are examined and explained, from the first functionalist approaches of Reiss (2000) and House (2014) to systemic, descriptive, and more recent interpretative and argumentation-based models.

According to Huang and Xin (2020), attention to TC rose with Reiss's model in 1971 and then with House's initial model in 1977. Therefore, we can start with these two functionalist models, which were the first attempts to create a systematic model for TC. Drawing on Karl Bühler's three functions of language, Reiss (2000) identified three text types: content-focused (informative), form-focused (expressive), and appeal-focused (operative), later adding a fourth, audio-medial (multimedial), type. In Reiss's framework, an "optimal" translation is one in which the hierarchy of elements in the source text type is maintained in the target text: informational content for informative texts, artistic form for expressive ones, and the persuasive effect for operative ones (Reiss, 2000). One of her strengths is that, aside from text types, Reiss (2000) considers linguistic and extralinguistic components, or the context, that affect the meaning of a text. However, critics such as Lauscher (2000) note that Reiss's model (2000) "cannot be applied to all texts" (p. 152), and its reliance on bilingual dictionaries to establish equivalence may struggle to account for the complexities of literary texts.

Later on, Juliane House (2014) developed her TQA model. House defines translation as a linguistic-textual operation involving the recontextualization of a source text (ST) into a target language (TL). In her original model, she argues that any text is written in a specific situation and breaks down this concept into the dimensions of language use and language user. A textual profile for the ST and target text (TT) is created, and the ST profile serves as the norm for assessment. She identified any mismatches between these dimensions as "covertly erroneous errors." In her revised model, she utilizes register and breaks it down into parameters, including Field (topic), Tenor (participant relationship), and Mode (channel/participation), to again create a textual profile for both the ST and TT. She also included genre in her model so that any shift in genre could also be identified. However, a central contribution of House's work is the distinction between overt and covert translation. In overt translation, the target audience is not directly addressed, and the text remains tied to the source culture (e.g., a political speech), whereas in covert translation, the text enjoys the status of an original in the target culture through the application of a "cultural filter" to adapt to target norms (e.g., a tourist brochure) (House, 2014). While influential, especially for didactic purposes, her model assumes only two text functions, which is a limiting factor; in addition, some of her concepts, such as the "cultural filter," still need clarification (Lauscher, 2000). It has also been criticized for being complex and for potentially losing sight of specific literary features (Hewson, 2011).

Van den Broeck (1985) suggested an analytic model focused on "factual equivalence." He proposed a "hypothetical reconstruction" of the ST's functions, which he termed "adequate translation." This acts as a *tertium comparationis* against which the TT is measured. This allows the critic to distinguish between mandatory shifts (governed by linguistic rules) and optional shifts (originating from the translator's choices).

More recent approaches have integrated interdisciplinary tools into TC. Williams (2002) proposed the application of Argumentation Theory to TQA. He argues that microtextual error counts are insufficient for determining the acceptability of a translation as a whole. Based on Stephen Toulmin's model of argument macrostructure, Williams (2002) posits that a translation must accurately reproduce the core elements of the original argument, including claims (conclusions), grounds (evidence), warrants (the

bridge between claims and grounds), backing (laws and principles), qualifiers (words or phrases that clarify rational weight), and rebuttals (exceptions) to meet the minimum criteria of adequacy. In this framework, a “major error” is defined as a failure to render one of these essential argumentative elements.

Later on, Hewson (2011) proposed a new model that reframes translation criticism as an interpretative act. He seeks to understand the “interpretative potential” of a translation by examining the consequences of translational choices. Hewson’s (2011) model utilizes a three-level analysis: the micro-level (examining syntactic, lexical, and stylistic choices), the meso-level (assessing the potential effects of those choices on voices and interpretations within a specific passage), and the macro-level (an assumption constructed by projecting micro- and meso-level results to hypothesize about the overall nature of the translation). Hewson (2011) identifies several categories of effects: voice effects (accretion, reduction, deformation) and interpretational effects (expansion, contraction, transformation). Drawing on Lecerle’s theory, he distinguishes between “just interpretations” (conforming to the text’s pragmatic structure) and “false interpretations” (disregarding the text or “encyclopaedic” knowledge). He introduces categories of interpretational effects, such as contraction, expansion, and transformation, to determine whether a translation encourages a “just interpretation” or a “false interpretation” of the original, as introduced by Lecerle (1999 as cited in Hewson, 2011). Translations are then placed on a continuum from “divergent similarity” (optimal) to “relative divergence,” “radical divergence,” and “adaptation.” In this approach, the translator’s role is both that of a reader and a rewriter, which Hewson illustrates by expanding Lecerle’s ALTER model (1999 as cited in Hewson, 2011) to show the translator’s dual status.

Lauscher (2000), however, observes a persistent gap between theoretical models and professional practice. She argues that quality is ultimately a matter of “agreement and consensus” among stakeholders, including authors, publishers, editors, and readers. Lauscher (2000) highlights that every TT is a “concrete affair” influenced by case-specific values and strategies agreed upon during the translation process. Therefore, prescriptive judgment in criticism is only valid if the critic acknowledges the complexity of the translation situation and the cooperative decisions behind the final product.

This shift from universal theoretical models toward a more stakeholder-oriented understanding of translation quality highlights how different participants in the translation process conceptualize a “good” translation. Among these stakeholders, readers (and critics as a particular type of reader) occupy a particularly significant position, as their expectations influence both the reception of translations and judgments of translation quality. Accordingly, the following section reviews research on readers’ expectations and the criteria they employ in evaluating translations.

Several TQA models have been proposed to assist evaluators in assessing the quality of translations. Mateo (2014) examined several major TQA models, including SICAL, LISA QA, SAE J2450, and QAT, and found that, despite differences in their design, they share a number of core quality criteria. The most common criteria include language (e.g., grammar, spelling, and punctuation), terminology (adherence to established glossaries or client-defined terminology), accuracy (including the faithful transfer of meaning and the avoidance of omissions), and style. Across these models, consistency, clarity, stylistic appropriateness, and the avoidance of mistranslation are repeatedly emphasized as essential indicators of translation quality. Based on this comparison, Mateo (2014) concludes that a quality translation is ultimately one that fulfills its intended purpose.

Regarding readers’ expectations, several studies have investigated the criteria readers associate with a successful translation. For example, Khoshsaligheh et al. (2020) explored the expectations of Iranian readers regarding successful literary translation through a questionnaire with 385 participants. Their findings identified seven expectancy norms, ranked from the most to the least valued: “immersion”, “faithfulness”, “footnoting”, “translation language”, “translation strategies”, “readership”, and

"paratext" (p. 82). "Immersion" emerged as the most important criterion, suggesting that readers value translations that facilitate engagement with the story while conveying the essence of the ST. "Faithfulness" to the author's style and the appropriate use of "footnotes" were also highly valued, indicating that readers appreciate translations that preserve ST features while providing necessary explanations. Rather than perceiving footnotes as disruptive, readers viewed them as enhancing comprehension. The readability of the TT and the use of clear Persian were also considered important. In contrast, paratextual features such as the translator's introduction received the lowest level of importance. Overall, the study suggests that Iranian readers prefer a balanced approach between ST fidelity and TL naturalness, thereby questioning the applicability of Venuti's domestication–foreignization dichotomy in the Iranian literary context (Khoshsaligheh et al., 2020).

Bolouri and Jalali (2023) explored Iranian readers' expectations of translated fiction by analyzing readers' reviews posted on three websites. They identified five major categories of reader expectations: "translational, textual/linguistic, peritextual, formatting, and features of good literary translators" (p. 209). Among these, "fluency" emerged as the most important characteristic of a successful translation, followed by loyalty to the author's style, tone, and characters' register. However, there was a considerable gap between these two criteria, indicating that readers regarded fluency as substantially more important than preserving stylistic features. At the textual level, readers placed greater emphasis on comprehensibility (39%) and appropriate punctuation (19%) than on other linguistic features. They also valued paratextual elements, particularly translators' introductions and the inclusion of existing criticism (66%). Furthermore, readers commented on the qualities of a good translator, suggesting that translators should possess "linguistic knowledge" (37%), "perfect knowledge of the ST" (22.2%), and "writerly ability" (18.5%) (Bolouri & Jalali, 2023, p. 225). Such studies provide valuable insights into the characteristics of a successful translation by drawing on the expectations of its ultimate recipients, the readers.

Eidi Attarzadeh (2025), in a thematic analysis of Iranian X users' tweets mentioning translators, also identified several aspects of translation that attracted readers' criticism. These included linguistic and informational errors, weaknesses in translators' writing skills that affected the quality of the translation, and deviations from the ST through the addition or omission of content. The findings further indicated that readers valued faithful translations that accurately represented the original text and expressed disapproval of translations in which parts of the ST were censored or omitted.

Although these studies attempt to identify the criteria of a good translation, most of them, as discussed above, have focused on ordinary readers. However, critics who publish their reviews in literary magazines can be considered a particular, and perhaps more specialized, type of reader who may hold different views about what constitutes a good translation. This gap in the literature provided the motivation for the present study, which investigates the evaluative criteria employed by translation critics in assessing published translations.

3. Methodology

This section presents the theoretical framework adopted for the present study and describes the data collection and analysis procedures, the analytical tools, and the research corpus. Its purpose is to explain how the data were selected and analyzed thoroughly.

The theoretical framework adopted for the present study is derived from Chesterman's (2007) model of reaction, response, and repercussions. In this model, Chesterman categorizes different types of feedback into three groups. The first category, reaction, refers to "the mental and emotional responses of readers" (p. 179). However, this type of feedback is often invisible, as it does not manifest itself

externally. Investigating such reactions may require specialized tools and methods, making it more suitable for studies specifically designed to examine emotional responses.

The second category is response, in which people's reactions are expressed through observable actions, such as writing a translation criticism on the internet or, as in the present study, in a magazine (Chesterman, 2007). Thus, response represents the external manifestation of readers' reactions. The present study focuses exclusively on this category, in which critics express their admiration or dissatisfaction through their written reviews. As discussed in the following sections, most of these reviews do not follow a specific model of TC. While some compare the ST and the TT and explicitly identify translation problems, others are more subjective and simply express the critics' opinions about the translation. Therefore, the response category encompasses all of the different types of feedback analyzed in this study (Chesterman, 2007).

The final category in Chesterman's (2007) model is repercussions, which refers to describing "the effects of translations at the cultural level" (p. 180). Unlike the previous categories, repercussions become evident over a longer period of time and therefore may require longitudinal studies and close observation of changes in cultural norms and criteria.

This study employed thematic analysis, a qualitative approach used to identify, analyze, and interpret patterns. This approach was a suitable choice for the purpose of this study, since the researcher sought to identify the explicit and implicit criteria embedded in critics' reviews, where individual critics expressed these criteria using different wording and varying levels of detail. Thematic analysis enabled the researcher to code these scattered qualitative data and organize them into meaningful themes.

To achieve this, Braun and Clarke's (2006) six-step approach to thematic analysis was followed. The first step involved reading the collected data to become familiar with the dataset. Next, initial codes were generated based on the research question. In the third step, the codes were developed into potential themes. The fourth step involved reviewing the themes to ensure that they accurately represented the dataset as a whole. In the fifth step, the themes were defined and named to clearly specify their scope and meaning. Finally, the themes were analyzed and reported in a coherent manner to demonstrate the validity and significance of the findings.

The corpus of this case study consists of *Ketab-e Mah-e Adabiyat* magazine. This magazine published articles, reviews, and criticisms of both translated and non-translated books, primarily literary works, on a monthly basis. It was published from 1376/1997 to 1393/2014 and produced a total of 200 issues during this period (Jamali & Jamshidi, 2021). For the purposes of the present study, the researcher limited the corpus to the magazine's final five years of publication (1389/2010–1393/2014) in order to account for potential changes in approaches and criteria in TC over a longer period.

All relevant articles published during this period were carefully examined. Relevant articles were defined as those discussing translation, translated books, or issues related to translation quality and criticism. During the five-year period, 1019 articles were published across 50 issues, of which 47 were identified as relevant to the present study. Thus, roughly 5% of the published articles addressed translation criticism or discussed translation quality. The reasons for this relatively small proportion may vary; however, investigating them falls outside the scope of this study. Nevertheless, the 47 selected articles provided sufficient data to achieve data saturation and answer the research question.

All articles were retrieved from the *Magiran* archive. In addition, two of the examined issues (No. 36 and 41) contained sections devoted exclusively to translation-related topics. For data collection, the researcher first reviewed the titles of all articles published during the selected period to identify those focusing on translated books or translation. The full texts of the selected articles were then read carefully, and all passages related to translation quality and evaluation criteria were extracted and

analyzed using MAXQDA 24. ChatGPT 5.6 was used under the researcher's supervision to assist with the coding process and refine code labels to improve their clarity.

4. Results and Discussion

One of the noteworthy findings of this study is the relatively small number of translation reviews ($n = 47$) published in *Ketab-e Mah-e Adabiyat* despite the large number of foreign works discussed in the magazine. Although many translated books were reviewed for their content, the translation itself and the translator were often overlooked, as if the Persian text had originally been written by the source author. This observation further highlights the relative invisibility of translators in this magazine during the period under investigation.

Out of the 47 collected and analyzed translation reviews, 15 (31.9%) were written by women, 21 (44.6%) by men, and 11 (23.4%) were critiques from book review sessions with no specific author. Most articles did not follow any specific model of translation criticism. Only three employed models such as House (2014), a finding that is also consistent with the observations of Mousavi Razavi and Gholami (2019), who reported a similar lack of systematic use of such models. These articles provided and compared excerpts from the ST and the TT, identified their strengths and weaknesses, and sometimes proposed remedies, which, according to Reiss (2000), is one of the responsibilities of a translation critic. Nevertheless, comparisons between the ST and TT were found in only 20 (42.5%) of the articles, and three of these, provided examples only from the TT without presenting the corresponding ST. This may suggest that the critics were either unfamiliar with these models or found them difficult to apply and highlight the need for TC models that are both theoretically sound and sufficiently practical for real-world critical contexts.

Most of the articles discussed translations from English ($n = 25$, 53.1%), followed by French ($n = 8$, 17%) and Arabic ($n = 7$, 14.8%). The remaining articles focused on translations from Turkish, Russian, and other languages ($n = 7$, 14.8%). The authors of these reviews were mostly graduate students studying different language-related fields, such as Persian literature, French, English, and Arabic, although not all articles specified the authors' academic major.

A total of 44 codes comprising 958 coded instances were identified in the analyzed dataset. These codes were organized into two overarching themes: faithful representation of the source text ($n = 481$, 50.2%) and producing a high-quality target text ($n = 463$, 48.3%). The first theme consisted of three subthemes: semantic fidelity, stylistic fidelity, and preservation of ST integrity, whereas the second comprised four subthemes: linguistic quality, reader accessibility, professional translation practice, and balance between source fidelity and target naturalness (see Table 1). Fourteen code instances were excluded from the thematic structure because they occurred infrequently and did not contribute meaningfully to any of the identified themes.

Table 1: Frequencies and Percentages of Identified Themes and Subthemes in Data

Theme	N (%)	Subtheme	N (%)
Faithful Representation of the Source Text	481 (50.2%)	Semantic Fidelity	222 (46.1%)
		Stylistic Fidelity	168 (34.9%)
		Preservation of ST Integrity	91 (18.9%)
Producing a High-Quality Target Text	463 (48.3%)	Linguistic Quality	246 (53.1%)
		Reader Accessibility	107 (23.1%)
		Professional Translation Practice	60 (12.9%)
		Balance Between Source Fidelity and Target Naturalness	50 (10.7%)

As the statistics show, both themes have almost equal weight. This might suggest that critics in *Ketab-e Mah-e Adabiyat* do not conceptualize a good translation only in terms of either fidelity to the ST or the quality of the TT. Instead, the findings show that both themes are considered almost equally important. Therefore, critics expect a high-quality translation to demonstrate both faithful representation of the ST by representing the meaning, style, and textual logic of the ST accurately, and the production of a well-written TT by producing a readable, appropriate, and professionally handled text in the TL.

4.1. Faithful Representation of the Source Text

This theme explains how critics conceptualize a faithful translation. According to the findings, faithfulness involves not only preserving what the ST says through accurate interpretation and the faithful transfer of meaning, but also preserving how the ST author expresses that meaning by maintaining the text's style, register, atmosphere, and aesthetic qualities. Furthermore, critics viewed faithfulness as preserving the integrity of the ST by avoiding unjustified omissions and additions.

4.1.1. Semantic Fidelity

Semantic fidelity emerged as the largest subtheme within Theme 1 ($n = 222$), indicating that critics regarded the accurate transfer of ST meaning as a vital element of translation quality. In this subtheme, the most frequently occurring criterion was the accurate transfer of meaning ($n = 69$), while one of the most commonly reported shortcomings was mistranslation ($n = 31$). The following comment from one critic illustrates this emphasis on preserving meaning:

The writer, with the aid of the tools and materials at their disposal, creates a form of meaning and content in the SL; the translator, with the aid of those same tools, makes that meaning and content their own and re-expresses it in the TL. In this respect, the translator is entrusted with the task of preserving meaning.

Critics frequently defined fidelity to the ST ($n = 32$) in terms of the successful transfer of the intended meaning rather than literal correspondence. Critics also paid close attention to small shifts in meaning, such as changes in intensity ($n = 10$), connotations ($n = 12$), and the mishandling of proper names ($n = 16$). For example, one critic mentioned that “the word «رؤیا» in Persian carries positive semantic connotations and is used to refer to pleasant dreams. Given the adjective ‘uneasy’ in ST, the use of this word in this context does not seem appropriate.”

Furthermore, critics attributed several translation errors to an inadequate understanding of the ST. In some cases, they argued that errors originated from misreading the text ($n = 12$) or misinterpreting grammatical relations ($n = 24$). One critic took issue with Azhandeh's handling of the plural forms, arguing as follows:

Azhandeh has regarded the plural -s at the end of “Arslans” and “Tabiyas” as an integral part of these words. However, no attention has been paid to the fact that the definite article “the” is not normally used before proper nouns. If “Arslans” and “Tabiyas” were intended to be proper nouns, the word “the” would not precede them.

These findings suggest that critics perceive translation as a process that begins with accurate comprehension of the ST, followed by its reformulation in the TL. In this view, inadequate comprehension leads to poor translation. This is consistent with the interpretive theory of translation proposed by Lederer (2010), which considers correct understanding of the ST as the essential first step of the translation process. The expectations expressed by the critics reflect this same view.

4.1.2. Stylistic Fidelity

Following semantic fidelity, stylistic fidelity emerged as another major concern for critics. They emphasized maintaining the stylistic features of the ST (n = 47), preserving register (n = 30), and recreating the author's intent (n = 22). Boase-Beier (2019) views style as "an expression of its author's choices" (p. 6), arguing that these choices should be preserved as far as possible in the TT. The findings of the present study suggest that critics hold a similar view, as illustrated in the following quotation: "The translator should follow the author's style as far as possible and recreate it in the TT."

Additionally, critics frequently criticized translations that replaced literary devices (n = 13), failed to convey figurative meanings (n = 8), or did not preserve the ambiguity of the ST (n = 12). As noted by Chesterman (2004), explicitation is one of the S-universals commonly observed in translation. However, some critics argued that when ambiguity constitutes an intentional stylistic feature of the ST, it should be preserved in the TT rather than simplified for the reader. Critics also associated stylistic fidelity with preserving the structural characteristics of the ST (n = 19), maintaining verb tenses and aspect (n = 11), and avoiding unjustified syntactic reordering (n = 6), provided that the translation remained natural and readable in the TT.

4.1.3. Preservation of ST integrity

Preservation of ST integrity is the third subtheme within Theme 1. It reflects critics' concern with unnecessary translator interventions, with avoiding unjustified additions (n = 37) and unjustified omissions (n = 31) occurring most frequently. This suggests that critics expected translators to preserve the completeness and integrity of the ST unless modifications were clearly justified. Critics also objected to form-driven distortions (n = 14), indicating that translators sometimes create a more aesthetically pleasing TT. Although translator interventions were not rejected completely, critics emphasized that any necessary additions should be made transparently (n = 9). The following review captures this position:

Sometimes, the translator is compelled to add words or sentences to the text in order to convey its true message. Such additions should be distinguished from the text by a marker, such as placing them in parentheses. Another important point to bear in mind is that the fewer such additions there are—that is, the more clearly the translator can convey the text's message without adding anything to it—the better and more valuable the translation will be.

4.2. Producing a High-Quality Target Text

This theme explains how critics conceptualize a high-quality TT. According to the findings, producing such a TT requires translators to use high-quality linguistic elements, such as appropriate equivalents. The translation should also be idiomatic, follow the syntactic norms of the TL, and be as clear as possible. In addition, it involves making the translation accessible to readers by promoting readability and providing appropriate paratextual support when needed. Furthermore, critics viewed translation as requiring a professional approach, including adequate research, subject-matter knowledge, and linguistic expertise. Finally, they emphasized that a high-quality translation should achieve an appropriate balance between ST fidelity and naturalness in the TT, avoiding both excessive literalness and over-domestication.

4.2.1. Linguistic Quality

Critics did not view a good translation as merely a faithful reproduction of the ST. They also expected it to be a high-quality text in the TL. Linguistic quality emerged as the largest subtheme within Theme 2. The most frequently occurring code in this subtheme, and across the entire dataset, was appropriate and context-sensitive equivalent selection ($n = 86$). This code served as an umbrella category for various aspects of equivalent selection mentioned by critics, including avoiding archaic or arbitrary equivalents, using the same equivalent consistently throughout the translation, selecting accurate equivalents for technical terminology, and being sensitive to differences in terminological definitions. In one instance, a critic pointed out the problem of unfamiliar equivalents:

The second translator has used the unfamiliar word «طغرا» for the expression “gold monogram”. This word may convey the intended meaning in this context; however, it should be noted that the use of such an uncommon word, which is naturally unfamiliar to readers who are not acquainted with classical Persian literary texts, is not appropriate.

Following appropriate equivalent selection, idiomaticity in the TL ($n = 62$) emerged as another major criterion, reflecting critics’ expectation that the translation should read naturally in the TL, as one critic noted, “this text is so fluent and well-written that its translated nature is not apparent at all.” Critics also emphasized that the translation should conform to the syntactic norms of the TL ($n = 48$).

In addition, critics valued clarity ($n = 24$), coherence ($n = 14$), and appropriate punctuation in the TT ($n = 12$). They argued that inappropriate punctuation could negatively affect the flow and readability of the text. Overall, this subtheme demonstrates that critics evaluated translation quality at multiple linguistic levels rather than focusing solely on vocabulary. However, as the frequency of the codes suggests, some linguistic aspects were considered more important than others.

4.2.2. Reader Accessibility

This subtheme shows that critics conceptualize translation quality in relation to readers’ needs, expectations, and comprehension. They expect the translation to be understandable for its readers ($n = 39$) while also providing sufficient paratextual support when needed ($n = 39$). Rather than simplifying the ST, critics argued that translators should provide appropriate introductions, footnotes, glossaries, or indexes whenever necessary. In this way, the TT becomes more accessible by offering readers sufficient support to engage with the translation without losing important aspects of the ST. For instance: “A second advantage is that the translator has made the text more accessible to Persian-speaking readers by providing the full names and, where appropriate, adding the Hijri dates alongside the Gregorian dates.” This subtheme also suggests that critics view translators not merely as individuals who replace words from one language with another, but as professionals who anticipate potential difficulties that readers may encounter and provide the necessary guidance to overcome them.

4.2.3. Professional Translation Practice

The final product of translation is the outcome of a professional practice. According to the critics, producing a high-quality translation requires adequate research ($n = 12$), subject-matter expertise ($n = 12$), and linguistic competence ($n = 8$). Therefore, merely mastering two languages is only one part of the translation process. As one critic stated: “Translators should have sufficient and accurate knowledge of what they translate; however, translation is carried out in great haste nowadays.”

Furthermore, the process of translation does not end once the translation has been completed. Critics emphasized that a good translation should be carefully checked and revised ($n = 9$) to ensure editorial accuracy ($n = 14$), such as the absence of typographical and other editorial errors. As another critic

noted, "In addition, the editing of the work is also worthy of praise, especially at a time when published books are full of editorial problems and typographical errors."

4.2.4. Balance Between Source Fidelity and Target Naturalness

In this subtheme, critics disapproved of both excessive source-oriented fidelity ($n = 20$) and over-domestication ($n = 10$), instead advocating a balanced approach between these two extremes. As one critic put it:

Perhaps we should believe that absolute fidelity to the ST may entail the risk of distorting it. Moreover, for a translation to be acceptable to the reader, it is necessary to move slightly away from the ST so that its spirit and underlying thought can be effectively conveyed in the TL.

Schleiermacher (2012, p. 49 as cited in Munday, 2016, p. 48) argues that "either the translator leaves the writer in peace as much as possible and moves the reader toward him, or he leaves the reader in peace as much as possible and moves the writer toward him." According to Munday (2016, p. 48), Schleiermacher's preferred strategy is to "move the reader towards the writer," an approach commonly referred to as foreignization. However, as mentioned, the findings of the present study suggest that the critics favored a more balanced approach. As discussed in the previous sections, critics expected translations to remain faithful to the ST while also reading naturally in the TL in a way that did not disrupt the natural flow and readability of the TT.

The thematic structure identified in this study shows considerable similarities with the studies reviewed in the literature. Several criteria derived from critics' evaluations, including readability, fidelity to the ST, stylistic preservation, translator competence, and a balance between ST fidelity and TL naturalness, have also been reported in studies exploring readers' expectations (e. g., Bolouri & Jalali, 2023; Khoshsaligheh et al., 2020). Similarly, many of the dominant criteria identified in the present study correspond to the dimensions emphasized in major TQA models, particularly accuracy, terminology, language quality, style, and the avoidance of mistranslation and omissions (Mateo, 2014).

Overall, the findings suggest that, from the critics' perspective, a good translation is one that faithfully represents the ST while also producing a high-quality TT for its readers. Both dimensions are considered essential in the Iranian context, and a translation that fulfills only one of these criteria is likely to be criticized. These findings also support the conclusion of Khoshsaligheh et al. (2020) that, in the Iranian context, strict adherence to either foreignization or domestication is unlikely to satisfy readers' expectations. Instead, both readers and critics appear to favor a balanced approach between ST fidelity and TL naturalness.

5. Conclusion

This study identified several key criteria that, according to critics writing in *Ketab-e Mah-e Adabiyat*, characterize a successful translation. These criteria include semantic fidelity, stylistic fidelity, preservation of source-text integrity, linguistic quality, reader accessibility, professional translation practice, and a balance between source-text fidelity and target-language naturalness. Comparing these findings with previous studies on readers' expectations suggests that critics' expectations overlap considerably with those of ordinary readers. In many aspects, the two groups value similar qualities in translation. However, critics appear to evaluate translations in a more meticulous manner, paying close attention to details such as lexical connotations, grammatical relations, stylistic nuances, and other subtle linguistic features that ordinary readers may not notice. An additional point worth considering is that many of the criteria emphasized by the critics have long been discussed in translation theories and TQA models. Nevertheless, critics continued to identify

these same issues in published translations. The reasons for this require further investigation. One possible explanation is that the period examined in this study (1389–1393) coincided with the early years of PhD programs in TS in Iran. Consequently, many university instructors teaching translation may not have had formal academic training in TS or sufficient familiarity with translation theories and TQA models. Another possible explanation is that many translators themselves lacked formal education in TS, resulting in recurring problems that critics repeatedly identified. However, these explanations remain speculative and should be examined through more focused empirical research.

Like any study, the present research has certain limitations. To account for possible changes in translation norms over time, the analysis was limited to the final five years of *Ketab-e Mah-e Adabiyat* publication. Future research could investigate the magazine's earlier issues and compare the findings with those of the present study to determine whether critics' perceptions of translation quality have changed over time. Furthermore, since this study focused on a single literary magazine, future studies could examine translation criticism published across multiple literary magazines to develop a broader and more generalizable understanding of the criteria employed by Iranian translation critics.

AI Declaration

This article was edited for vocabulary, structure, and grammar using ChatGPT 5.6. The extracted quotations were translated using ChatGPT 6; however, the researcher checked the accuracy of the translations and revised them where necessary.

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