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A Quantitative-Analytical Examination of Dystopian Literature Translated from English to Persian Between 1978 and 1988 in Iran: A Case Study of Novels

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ABSTRACT

It seems Translation studies and Persian Literature have been intertwined together, but few numbers of studies have been done on the Persian translation of dystopian literature. The research examined the Persian translations of English dystopian novels in the politically pivotal decade of 1978 to 1988 in Iran, the decade that included the Islamic Revolution (1979) and the Iran-Iraq War (1980-1988). Adopting Pym's (2014) historiographic model, the research followed a quantitative-analytical method to investigate the quantity of Persian-translated dystopian novels, the role of the translators, and the ideological reasons for choosing dystopian books. Based on the paradigms of translation archaeology, historical criticism, and explanation, this research investigated the sociopolitical processes embedded in translational decision-making. The results indicated that, despite rigorous censorship and ideological supervision, translators employed dystopian literature as a means of resistance and political critique deliberately. Translations of texts such as 1984, Animal Farm, Darkness at Noon, The Iron Heel, and This Perfect Day are not merely linguistic conversions, but profound contextualized actions that testify to the involvement of the translators with the political realities of the era in Iran. This study made a contribution to translation history in demonstrating how literary translation, especially in repressive or transitional settings, is a locale of ideological negotiation and intellectual activism.

Keywords: Dystopian Novels, Translation History, Archeology of Translation, Historical Criticism, Explanation.



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1. INTRODUCTION

Dystopian literature often serves as a mirror to societal and political anxieties, capturing the fears, crises, and imagined futures of its time. As Moylan (2018) argued, dystopian narratives are products of the traumatic conditions of the twentieth century—an era marked by widespread exploitation, war, genocide, ecological collapse, economic instability, and the commodification of everyday life. Moylan argues that the aforementioned historical pressures provided an adequate foundation for "the fictive underside of the utopian imagination" (p. 147). To this end, dystopian fiction is not merely creative narratives of imaginary places, but also scathing depictions of totalitarian social and political orders that tend to reflect or be in direct contrast to the circumstances of their production and consumption.

Between 1978 and 1988, Iran underwent profound political and societal transformation, including the 1979 Islamic Revolution, the subsequent establishment of the Islamic Republic, and the protracted Iran-Iraq War (1980–1988). These events brought about substantial shifts in the nation's ideological and cultural frameworks, influencing not only domestic literature but also the selection and treatment of foreign texts in translation. In spite of increasing censorship and ideological limitations throughout this decade, some English dystopian fiction—specifically George Orwell's *1984* and *Animal Farm*, Arthur Koestler's *Darkness at Noon*, and Jack London's *The Iron Heel*, and Ira Marvin Levin's *This Perfect Day*—were translated into Persian and ready to be published. The existence of politicized writing in the Iranian post-revolutionary publishing industry is an interesting model through which to examine translation not simply as a linguistic transference, but rather as an activity squarely situated in cultural and political contexts.

The historiography of translated dystopian literature in Iran during this specific decade has received limited scholarly attention. Few studies have examined the identities of the translators, the frequency and patterns of such translations, or the socio-political conditions under which they were produced. More importantly, existing research rarely investigated how these translated dystopian works were ideologically framed or how they interacted with the broader discourses of resistance, conformity, and political narrative in post-revolutionary Iran.

In an attempt to bridge this gap, the present study draws on Pym's (2014) model of historiography that hypothesizes three dimensions of analysis for translational history: archaeology, historical criticism, and explanation. Archaeology addresses who translated what, when, for whom, and in what circumstances (Pym, 2014). Historical criticism examines the function of a translation in promoting intellectual or cultural developments at the time of its production, and the worth it was accorded within its own historical context (Pym, 2014). The analysis would seek to explain why specific translations took place at specific points in history, why they relate to broader ideological forces, and what we can learn from them about cultural or political shifts (Pym, 2014). Besides, this research quantified the prevalence of translated dystopian fiction in this decade.

This study wanted to investigate how translation functioned both as a linguistic process and an ideologically influenced, historically conditioned act by analyzing Persian translations of English dystopian novels produced between 1978 and 1988 according to Pym's (2014) historiographic model. Specifically, it investigated who translated



these works, the socio-political conditions under which they were produced, and how these translations reflected or negotiated dominant ideological discourses. In addition to this contextual analysis, the study also aimed to quantify the presence of dystopian literature in the Iranian translation landscape by identifying the frequency and patterns of such translations during this decade. Collectively, these researches contributed to a greater knowledge of how literary translation engaged with political circumstances and cultural resistance in post-revolutionary Iran.

Research Questions

1. What is the archaeology of the Persian translations of English dystopian novels based on the historiography of Pym (2014) in Iran between 1978 and 1988?
2. What is the historical criticism of the Persian translations of English dystopian novels based on the historiography of Pym (2014) in Iran between 1978 and 1988?
3. What is the explanation of English novels of dystopia translated into Persian in Iran between 1978 and 1988?
4. What is the frequency of English novels of dystopia translated into Persian in Iran between 1978 and 1988?

2. REVIEW OF LITERATURE

Dystopian literature has long been a powerful way to explore issues like political oppression, surveillance, and the control of ideology. As Claeys (2016) explained, dystopian stories often show what happens when societies break down under authoritarian rule, acting as warnings about the dangers of centralized power. Similarly, Booker (1995) pointed out that dystopias challenge systems that strip people of freedom and justice, making the genre deeply political and tied to historical crises. Moylan (2018) described dystopia as the "fictive underside of the utopian imagination" (p. 147), shaped by the devastating events of the twentieth century—wars, genocide, environmental damage, economic collapse, and ideological extremism. These real-world events gave rise to a type of fiction that questions the failures of modern societies and critiques dominant political ideas. Sypnowich (2018) also highlighted the ethical and political strength of dystopian fiction, believing that it helps readers think critically about injustice and authoritarian tendencies in the world around them.

In Iran, the period between 1978 and 1988 was marked by major political upheavals —the 1979 Islamic Revolution, the establishment of the Islamic Republic, and the long and devastating Iran-Iraq War. Despite strict censorship during this time, several key dystopian novels such as *Animal Farm*, *1984*, *Darkness at Noon*, *The Iron Heel*, and *This Perfect Day* were translated into Persian. These translations raise important questions about why these texts were chosen, how they were translated, and what messages they conveyed in such a politically charged environment.

Scholars in Iran have explored how translation interacts with ideology and historical context. For example, Madahi and Mollanazar (2021) studied how the political climate of post-revolutionary Iran influenced the translation of popular science texts. They found that translators often played an active role in shaping how texts were received—choosing works that fit cultural or religious

values and adding their own interpretations through footnotes and commentary. In a similar vein, Rassouli and Parham



(2025) examined how Iranian translation studies have approached different historical periods, genres, translator roles, and ideological frameworks over time.

A particularly relevant study by Alinouri and Farahzad (2021) investigated how resistance literature was translated into Persian during the Iran-Iraq War. Their research showed that the sociopolitical context of the war played a major role in shaping translation choices. Translated texts often emphasized themes like resistance, nationalism, and ideological commitment—supporting the dominant narratives of the time. This study shed light on how translation can serve as a tool for both cultural expression and political messaging during conflict.

Rassouli and Parham (2025) also emphasized the growing importance of translation history in Iran, calling for more reflection on how different factors—like historical context, genre, language pairs, and translator identity—shape the field. Their findings showed that translation practices in Iran are both diverse and deeply connected to the country's cultural and political landscape.

Together, these studies showed how translation in Iran has often been shaped by censorship, national identity, and political agendas. For instance, Haddadian-Moghaddam (2014) provided concrete examples of how Western literary works were filtered during the Iran-Iraq War to align with revolutionary values. Her research shows how translation has sometimes been used to block foreign ideas and protect cultural identity.

Still, despite these valuable contributions, very little attention has been paid to the specific case of dystopian literature translated into Persian during the decade after the revolution. While some individual translations—like Orwell's novels or Koestler's *Darkness at Noon*—have been discussed, there hasn't been a systematic study of which dystopian novels were translated, how often, by whom, or why during 1978 to 1988.

To address this gap, the current study used Pym's (2014) historiographic model, which offers three ways to study translation history. The first is archaeology, which looks at who translated what, for whom, and under what conditions. The second is historical criticism, which considers the value and impact of a translation at the time it was published. The third is explanation, which explores why a translation happened when it did and what cultural or political shifts it might reflect. This model allows for a balanced view that considers both individual translator choices and the broader historical forces shaping them.

In addition to this historiographic approach, the study also included a frequency-based analysis of translated dystopian novels—something rarely explored in existing research. By looking at how often these works were translated and when, the study aimed to uncover patterns related to ideology, recurring themes, and the complex relationship between political power and literary expression.

All of these approaches together help build a more complete picture of how English dystopian literature was translated and received in post-revolutionary Iran.



3. METHODOLOGY

Based on the goals of this study, the Persian translation of dystopian novels was analyzed between 1978 and 1988 based on Pym's (2014) model, which investigates translation history that includes archaeology of translation, historical criticism, and explanation; thus, it was a qualitative part of the research that explored the underlying characteristics and patterns of translation practices. In the second phase, the frequency of English dystopian novels that were translated from English to Persian was calculated, moreover, their retranslations and reprints were also calculated. So, the second phase of the study was quantitative, and descriptive statistics were used. Therefore, the design of this study was mixed-method.

Corpus

The website of Khaneh-ye Ketab was consulted and 867 translations, embracing first translations, retranslations, and reprints were identified as all Persian translations of English novels published during the period under the study in Iran. To identify the Persian translations of dystopian novels in the decade of 1978 to 1988, the researcher investigated their synopses, reviews, translators' commentaries or prefaces, blurbs, and summaries of all the 867 translations and found only 16 Persian translations of dystopian novels, embracing first translations, retranslations and reprints which includes the corpus of this study.

Data Collection

This is a library, quantitative, and analytical research. The primary data was collected by analyzing all translations' synopsis, reviews, translators' commentaries or prefaces, their blurbs, and summaries of the reprints or retranslations between 1978 to 1988 which are collected from the website of Khaneh-ye Ketab at <http://www.ketab.ir/> to identify English dystopian novels translated into Persian in the decade of 1978 to 1988 in Iran, then translated dystopian novels' synopsis, reviews, their translators' commentaries or prefaces, their blurbs, and summaries of the reprints or retranslations were examined to investigate the archeology of the translated dystopian novels in this decade based on the terminology of Pym (2014) which includes analyzing archeology of translation .i.e., who translated, what, how, where when, for whom, with what effect? (Pym, 2014, p.5), historical Criticism, that is, assess the way translations help or hinder progress (Pym, 2014, p.5), and explanation: the part of translation history that tries to say why archaeological artifacts occurred when and where they did, and how they were related to change (Pym, 2014, p.5). Moreover, this analysis calculated the number of dystopian novels translated from English to Persian in that decade and also shed lights on the reasons behind the fluctuations in the number of dystopian novels translated during this decade.

Data Analysis

The data analysis of this study was both qualitative and quantitative. In the first phase, the three above-mentioned stages of the historiography of translation based on Pym (2014) was investigated. The first phase was qualitative. In the second phase, the frequency of dystopian novels translated into Persian between 1977 to 1988 was enumerated. Their retranslations and reprints were also listed and enumerated. The second phase was quantitative and the frequency of these works was calculated based on descriptive statistics. Therefore, this study had a mixed-method



design.

4. RESULTS AND DISCUSSIONS

4.1. Results of Research Question 1: Archaeology of Translation

According to Pym (2014), translation archaeology is the study of who translated what, when, where, for whom, and what effect it had. Table 4.1 shows a full list of English dystopian books that were translated into Persian during the decade that was studied.

Table 1

List of the Identified Persian Translations of Dystopian Novels between 1978 and 1988

Title (in English)	Title (in Persian)	Author	Translator	Year of Publication	Year of Translation
Animal Farm	قلعه حیوانات	George Orwell	Amīr Shāhī	1945	1981
			Amīr Shāhī		1982
	قلعه حیوانات		Hujat Imāmī		1983
	قلعه حیوانات		Muhammad Fīrūz Bakht		1983
	مزرعه حیوانات		Sāmsūn Ārāmākīyān		1983
	مزرعه حیوانات		Humāyūn Nūr Aḥmar		1983
	مزرعه حیوانات		Humāyūn Nūr Aḥmar		1984
	مزرعه حیوانات		Sālih Hussiynī		1986
	قلعه حیوانات		Muhammad Fīrūz Bakht		1987
Nineteen Eighty-Four	1984	George Orwell	Zhīlā Sāzigār	1949	1982
			Şālih Hūsiynī		1983

			Zhīlā Sāzigār		1983
Darkness at Noon	ظلمت در نیمروز	Arthur Koestler	Maḥmūd Rīyāḍī, ‘Alī Islāmī	1940	1982
The Iron Heel	پاشنه آهنین	Jack London	Muḥammad Subḥdam	1908	1982
					1984
This Perfect Day	یونی کامپ	Ira Marvin Levin	Jamshīd Nirsī	1970	1984

In 1980s, *Animal Farm* and 1984 were translated and retranslated many times. During this decade, the people who translated these works were among the most active and well-known translators. Saleh Hosseini and Amir Shahi came out as the most productive translators of totalitarian dystopian literature.

4.3 Results of Research Question 2: Historical Criticism

This section looks at how the Persian translations of the dystopian novels helped culture grow and the improvements of people's way of thinking between 1978 and 1988. Even with censorship and ideological filtering taking place, the chosen texts show a way of resisting indirectly. Thematically, these translations were in line with experiences after the revolution and fears during the war.

According to Katouzian (2011), the Islamic Revolution of Iran in 1979 was not merely a reaction to authoritarian rule, but the culmination of a deeper historical cycle in Iran marked by the struggle between arbitrary rule and the demand for the rule of law. He situated the Islamic Revolution within a broader framework of Iran's political history, in which periods of despotism were repeatedly interrupted by popular uprisings that sought legal reform and political accountability (Katouzian, 2011). Moreover, Katouzian (2011) emphasized that the Revolution was driven by widespread discontent with the monarchy's authoritarianism, economic inequality, and suppression of political freedoms (Katouzian, 2011). According to Britannica (2025), Following the 1979 Iranian Revolution, the Iraqi leadership sought to exploit Iran's military and political chaos to resolve border disputes, gain control of Iran's oil-rich western (largely Arab) province, and achieve hegemony in the Persian Gulf. According to Britannica (2025), Iran-Iraq War (1980–88), was a prolonged military conflict between Iran and Iraq during the 1980s. It began on September 22, 1980, when Iraqi armed forces invaded western Iran along the countries' joint border. Finally, Fighting was ended by a 1988 cease-fire.

The paratextual elements (blurbs, prefaces, titles) indicated that dystopian fiction was not merely accepted but frequently utilized to critique dictatorship, censorship, or inequality in allegorical contexts. For instance:

- *Animal Farm*, which has been retranslated nine times, shows how people became disillusioned with revolutions and how they were worried about corruption and power.
- 1984 criticizes authoritarian surveillance and the suppression of truth, which is similar to what happened under the



Pahlavi regime and after the revolution.

- *Darkness at Noon* and *The Iron Heel* show how people betrayed their beliefs, fought for their rights, and lost their civil liberties—these were important themes during the Iran-Iraq War and during the ideological change.

This Perfect Day shows how people were controlled by technology and forced to be the same, which reflects fears of losing freedom and identity under strict political systems.

Figure 1

Percentages of Translations of Dystopian Novels to All Translations Practiced in Each Year

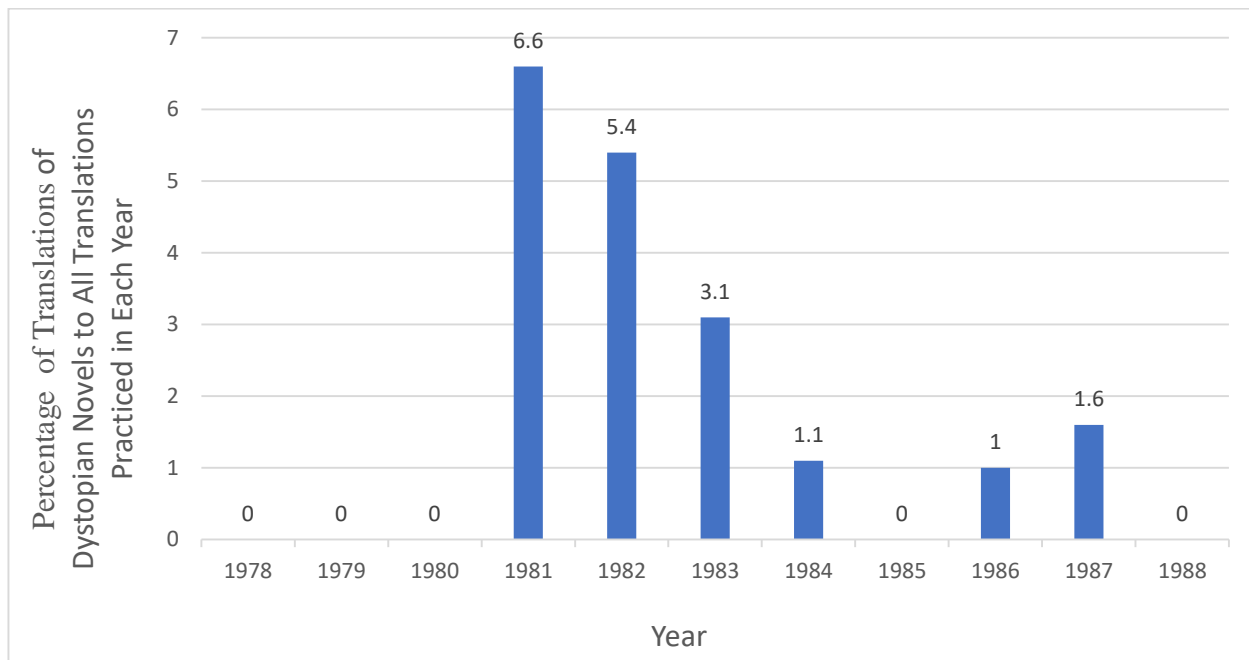


Figure 4.1 shows the percentage of translations of dystopian novels to all translations practiced each year. From 1981 to 1984, the percentage was higher than other years because these years were concurrent with the Iran-Iraq War period. So, the policies of the government, the taste of the readers, and the situation demanded to translate dystopian novels more. From 1985 to 1988, the percentage of translated dystopian novels decreased because these years were concurrent with the end years of Iran-Iraq War. In 1981, the *Animal Farm* was retranslated. *Animal Farm* was again retranslated in 1982, moreover, *Nighty Eighty-Four* and *Darkness at Noon* were retranslated this year. *Animal Farm* and *Nighty-Eighty-Four* were retranslated several times in 1983 by different translators. In 1984, *Animal Farm* and *The Iron Heel* were retranslated. Moreover, *This Perfect Day* was translated this year. Also, *Animal Farm* was retranslated in 1986 and 1987.

4.4 Results of Research Question 3: Explanation

The para-textual elements (blurbs, prefaces, titles) indicated that dystopian novels were not only accepted but frequently utilized to critique dictatorship, censorship, or inequality in allegorical terms. For instance, the explanation phase looks into why these particular dystopian novels were chosen and translated in this decade. Pym (2014) asserted that historical explanations must consider the convergence of translation with overarching ideological movements



and transformative patterns.

The decade in question saw:

- The Islamic Revolution (1979)
- The rise of the Islamic Republic
- The Iran-Iraq War (1980–1988)

In this setting, dystopian literature gave translators and publishers a way to subtly criticize ideas. These pieces were first written to criticize fascism, communism, and industrial control, but they also fit well with what was going on in Iran. The frequent translation of Orwell's works exemplifies the strategic function of translation in negotiating and reinterpreting political discourse.

4.5. Results of Research Question 4: Frequency of Translated Dystopian Novels Between 1978 and 1988

The frequency of translations was calculated. A total of 16 translation events (translations, retranslations, and reprints) occurred between 1978 and 1988.

Table 2

Frequency of Translated Dystopian Novels in Each Year

Year	Total Number of All Published Translations	Frequency of translated Dystopian Novels	As shown in table 2, the frequency of translated dystopian novels between 1978 and 1980 is zero because of the Islamic Revolution (1978) in Iran, the revival of
1978	3	--	
1979	18	--	
1980	16	--	
1981	15	1	
1982	74	4	
1983	190	6	
1984	261	3	
1985	106	--	
1986	99	1	
1987	59	1	
1988	47	--	

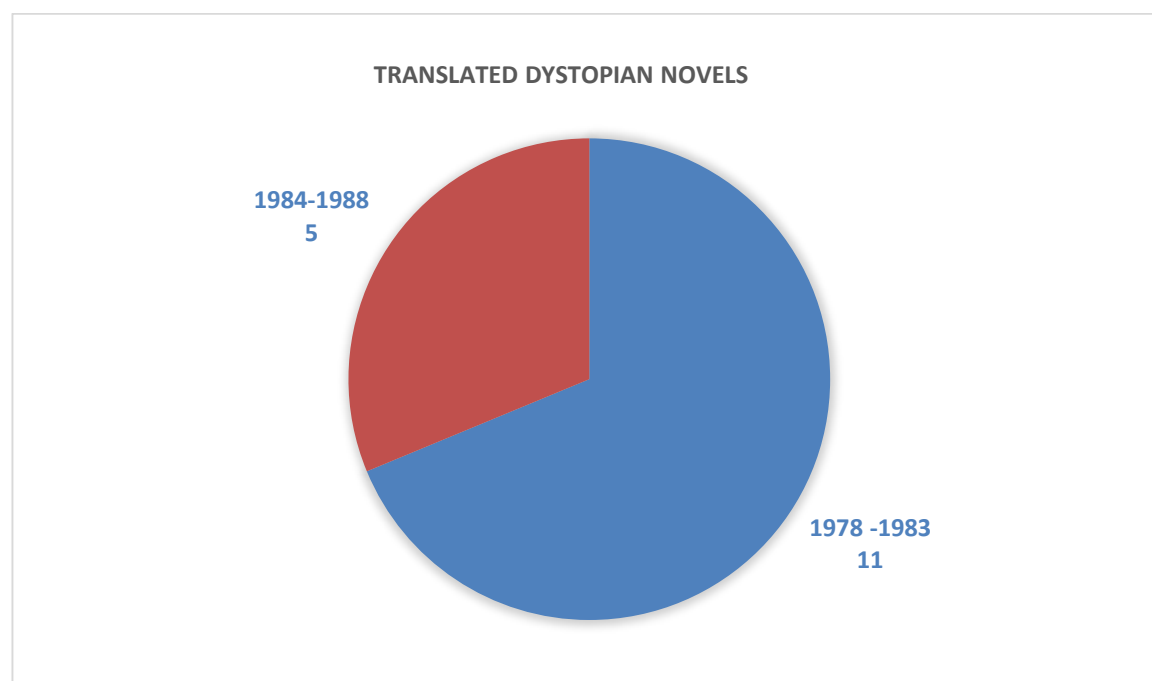
the country, and the beginning of the Iran-Iraq war. So, the condition for translation of dystopian novels did not exist. The frequency of translated dystopian novels in 1981 is 1, in 1982 is 4, in 1983 is 6, and in 1984 is 3. So, the frequency of translated dystopian novels in 1982, 1983, and 1984 are the most to depict the dictatorship of the Pahlavi regime, the war situation and its effect, and the dictatorship of Saddam Hussein. The frequency of translated dystopian novels in 1985 is zero, in 1986 is 1, in 1987 is one, and in 1988 is zero. So, the frequency of translated dystopian novels between 1985 and 1988 decreased because these years were concurrent with the end of the war.



Despite fluctuations in political conditions and ongoing war, the interest in dystopian fiction remained consistent. Notably, 1983 marked the peak year with six separate translations/reprints. This corresponds with heightened wartime nationalism and ideological tightening, during which these allegorical works offered an indirect form of critique.

Figure 2

Frequency of Translated Dystopian Novels During the first and second five years of the specified period of the study



As Figure 2 illustrates, the frequency of translated dystopian novels during the first five years of the specified period was higher than in the second five years. This increase coincided with the intensification of the Iran-Iraq War (1978–1988). During this time, the government, publishers, and translators sought to highlight the dictatorship of the Pahlavi regime, the threat posed by Saddam Hussein, and the war's conditions and consequences by increasing the number of dystopian translations. In contrast, the second half of the period coincided with the final years of the war, during which the number of translated dystopian novels declined.

4.6 Summary of the Findings

The findings of this study revealed that between 1978 and 1988, a total of 16 translation events—including first translations, retranslations, and reprints—of English dystopian novels occurred in Iran. The most frequently translated works were George Orwell's *Animal Farm* and *1984*. Translators such as Saleh Hosseini and Amir Shahi emerged as key figures in mediating these politically charged texts. Thematically, the translated novels addressed issues of totalitarianism, surveillance, censorship, and ideological manipulation—topics deeply resonant with Iran's socio-political climate during the Islamic Revolution and the Iran-Iraq War. Despite censorship, dystopian literature



provided a culturally acceptable space for indirect critique and intellectual resistance, confirming that translation functioned as an ideologically engaged and historically responsive act in this period.

The findings demonstrated that translation functioned as a space for ideological negotiation and subtle resistance during a politically repressive era. Translators selectively engaged with dystopian texts not only for their literary merit but also for their allegorical potential to critique totalitarianism, propaganda, and war. The paratextual elements often reinforced or subtly guided these readings.

Applying Pym's model, the archaeological dimension identified key figures (e.g., Hosseini, Shahi), while historical criticism illustrated how translated dystopias resonated with Iranian realities. The explanation phase clarified why these texts were not only permitted but popular: they offered politically safe but ideologically rich avenues for reflection. By framing political critique within fictional and allegorical forms, these translations operated beneath the surface of state censorship, allowing for a kind of "coded discourse" that could resonate with readers without drawing direct repression.

Furthermore, the repeated retranslation of certain novels, particularly *Animal Farm* and *1984*, highlighted a continuing effort by translators to reintroduce or reinterpret these texts in light of changing socio-political climates. The diversity of translators and publishers suggests not a top-down mandate, but an organic and persistent interest in these works as cultural artifacts with subversive potential. Thus, the translators' decisions to engage with dystopian fiction can be viewed as both individual acts of resistance and collective expressions of dissent embedded within the act of cultural mediation.

5. CONCLUSION

This study showed that English dystopian novels translated into Persian between 1978 and 1988 played a complex and meaningful role in post-revolutionary Iranian cultural discourse. Despite an environment of censorship and ideological oversight, translators and publishers utilized literature to reflect on domestic anxieties, critique power structures, and negotiate between resistance and conformity. Translation, in this context, emerged as both an intellectual act and a political one—a medium through which dystopia offered hope, critique, and the possibility of imagining alternatives.

These findings contributed to a deeper understanding of translation as a historically situated practice that is inseparable from the ideological frameworks in which it operates. They underscored the agency of translators as cultural actors who navigate between textual fidelity and sociopolitical engagement. Future studies may explore the reception of these translations among Iranian readers, investigate censorship records for additional context, or extend the analysis to include dystopian works translated in later decades to trace evolving patterns of resistance, conformity, and cultural memory.



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