

Iranian Translation Teachers' Role Identities: Synergy, Conflict, and Identity Negotiation Through a DSMRI Lens

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ABSTRACT

Translation teachers occupy a complex position at the intersection of pedagogy, research, and professional practice, yet their role identities remain underexplored in non-Western contexts such as Iran. Drawing on the Dynamic Systems Model of Role Identity (DSMRI), this qualitative study examined (1) how Iranian translation teachers develop their professional role identities and (2) how their main and sub-role identities interact. Semi-structured interviews were conducted with nine translation teachers from two Iranian universities, and the data were analyzed using thematic analysis. Participants' accounts suggested that role identity was shaped through the interplay of four DSMRI components: beliefs, self-perceptions, goals, and perceived action possibilities. Teachers also described dynamic interactions among their roles, including synergy, conflict, and temporal strategies for managing competing professional demands. These findings provide insight into translation teachers' role identities in the Iranian context and illustrate the usefulness of the DSMRI for understanding identity negotiation. The study offers implications for translation teacher education and professional development in comparable contexts.

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Introduction

Professional identity has become a central construct in educational research (Widagsa et al., 2026), shaping how teachers perceive themselves and enact their work within institutional and socio-cultural contexts. In higher education, “teacher identity tends to emphasize an individual’s positioning and significance within social and organizational contexts” (Hu et al., 2025, p. 2), and consequently is increasingly recognized as a key determinant of teaching effectiveness (Ghafar Samar et al., 2011). This identity-oriented perspective is particularly relevant to translation teaching, a profession recognized as formal academic discipline in universities across different countries, including Iran (Farsinejad & Fatehi Rad, 2022), and widely acknowledged as demanding and multi-faceted (Khasawneh et al., 2023).

Within translation studies, however, translation teachers’ professional and role identities remain underexplored (Sela-Sheffy, 2023), particularly in non-Western contexts such as Iran. While identity research has expanded considerably in language education, the specific case of translation teachers, who must simultaneously function as educators, researchers, and professional translators, has received limited attention (Chen & Huang, 2022). This gap is noteworthy given that translation teachers are expected to excel in teaching, conduct research, and maintain active professional practice (Kang & Shi, 2020; Carreres & Noriega-Sánchez, 2011).

Consequently, translation teachers must assume and balance multiple professional roles and sub-roles (Ameri, 2024). These roles shape their professional development; for example, the practitioner role identity may enhance research performance, whereas a strong educator role identity may constrain research engagement due to workload pressures (Liu, 2021). Theoretically, role identity refers to individuals’ internalization of behaviors, values, and attitudes associated with social or professional roles (Gordon, 1976). The notion of teacher role identity (Farrell, 2011) encompasses how teachers conceptualize themselves in relation to their professional roles, including their beliefs and perceptions about translation teaching. Importantly, this identity is dynamic, evolving under the influence of personal characteristics, prior experiences, and professional environments (Chen & Huang, 2022). As Chen and Huang (2024) state, role identity should be understood as an ongoing process of self-identification.

Professional role identity also intersects with professional development, as teachers’ identities evolve through engagement in development activities (Hong et al., 2024), with professional development serving as both a catalyst for and outcome of identity construction (Stebick et al., 2023). Thus, examining how translation teachers integrate their multiple role identities is essential for understanding their professional development (Sela-Sheffy, 2023).

Despite the growing recognition of the complexity inherent in translation teachers’ professional lives, empirical research that systematically investigates how these professionals develop and negotiate their multiple role identities remains scarce, particularly within the Iranian higher education context. Addressing this gap, the present study adopts the Dynamic Systems Model of Role Identity

(DSMRI) (Garner & Kaplan, 2019) as a theoretical framework to explore the processes through which Iranian translation teachers construct their professional identities. Accordingly, this study seeks to answer the following research questions:

- 1) How are Iranian translation teachers' main role and sub-role identities developed?
- 2) How do Iranian translation teachers' main role and sub-role identities interact?

A brief note of previous works

Teacher Identity

Identity fundamentally denotes what “kind of person” an individual is understood to be within a given context (Gee, 2000, p. 99). Identity is increasingly understood as dynamic, evolving across the lifespan and shaped by temporal and contextual influences (Hu, 2023). Its inherently multifaceted nature, incorporating diverse and sometimes competing dimensions of the self, renders identity a complex construct (Fathi et al., 2024). Although not directly observable, identity is manifested through individuals' beliefs, values, assumptions, and actions, as well as through how they interpret themselves and their surrounding environment (Harter, 1999). Consequently, identity has become a central construct across disciplines (Ismail et al., 2025).

Two major theoretical traditions have informed conceptualizations of teacher identity. The first emphasizes coherence and continuity, understanding teacher identity as relatively stable over time while still susceptible to change in response to contextual factors (Horn et al., 2008; Day et al., 2006; Wittman, 2019). The second, grounded in George Herbert Mead's sociological framework, foregrounds identity as socially constructed through interaction and role enactment (Søreide, 2006), emerging through engagement with students, colleagues, and institutional structures (Taylor, 2017). Contemporary scholarship increasingly recognizes teacher identity as a synthesis of these perspectives.

A broad consensus now holds that identity is neither fixed nor unitary but fluid, fragmented, and continuously negotiated (Huang, 2021, Zamani, 2026). Teachers possess multiple sub-identities requiring ongoing alignment to avoid internal tensions (Beauchamp & Thomas, 2009; Chen & Huang, 2022). Teacher identity development is a continuous process of constructing and reconstructing the self within specific contexts (Henry, 2016). A range of theoretical frameworks has been proposed to capture this phenomenon (Ahmad et al., 2019).

This study draws on the Dynamic Systems Model of Role Identity (DSMRI) as an overarching theoretical lens. From a DSMRI perspective, identity is a dynamic system of interrelated components, beliefs, goals, self-perceptions, and perceived action possibilities, that evolve over time in response to contextual influences (Garner & Kaplan, 2019).

Aspects of Teacher Identity

Teacher identity is commonly conceptualized as comprising personal and professional dimensions, with the former relating to the individual self and the latter to one's role within the profession (Beauchamp & Thomas, 2009). While prior research has largely focused on tensions between these

domains, comparatively less attention has been directed toward tensions within professional identities themselves.

Importantly, teacher identity is continuously constructed in relation to contextual conditions (Toom, 2019). Situated identity, in particular, is shaped by institutional environments and local practices. For instance, research-intensive university contexts may strengthen teachers' identification as researchers (Long & Huang, 2017). More broadly, professional identity encompasses teachers' understandings of "what", "how", and "who" they are as educators (Meeus et al., 2018, p. 17).

Recognizing its multidimensionality, scholars emphasize the need to account for contextual and institutional influences when examining teacher identity (Pennington & Richards, 2016). A widely cited framework proposed by Day et al. (2006) distinguishes among personal, situated, and professional dimensions. Personal identity refers to experiences and roles outside the workplace; situated identity reflects teachers' engagement within specific institutional contexts; and professional identity concerns how teachers conceptualize and enact their roles. While personal identity relates to the broader sense of self, situated and professional identities are more directly associated with the role of "teacher" (Day et al., 2006). These dimensions are interrelated and dynamically influence teachers' experiences, practices, and professional trajectories (Popper-Giveon & Shayshon, 2017).

From a DSMRI perspective, these dimensions can be understood as interacting subsystems within a broader identity system. Personal, situated, and professional aspects are not discrete categories but dynamically interconnected components that shape and constrain one another through ongoing feedback processes (Kaplan & Garner, 2017). This perspective enables a more nuanced analysis of how contextual and individual factors jointly influence identity development over time.

Teachers' Professional Role Identity

Building on the foregoing discussion, this study specifically foregrounds teachers' professional role identities as the central analytical focus. Over the years in their profession, "teachers construct and reconstruct (usually tacitly) a conceptual sense of who they are (their self-image) and this is manifested through what they do (their professional role identity)" (Farrell, 2011, p. 54). Identity formation is therefore often understood as a process of negotiating tensions among competing expectations, responsibilities, and institutional demands (Yuan et al., 2019). These roles are both socially constructed and individually interpreted, giving rise to multiple and evolving sub-identities (Popper-Giveon & Shayshon, 2017).

In translation education, teachers' professional identity is shaped by their position as university faculty members, encompassing responsibilities in teaching, research, and administration (Torres-Simón & Pym, 2016). This identity can be conceptualized through three interrelated sub-roles: trainer/educator, researcher, and practitioner. The trainer/educator role involves pedagogical expertise, curriculum design, and student development (Popper-Giveon & Shayshon, 2017). The researcher role reflects institutional expectations for scholarly productivity and is often associated with tensions related to workload and capacity (Long & Huang, 2017). The practitioner role

underscores the importance of engagement with professional translation practice to maintain alignment with industry developments (Hlavac et al., 2024).

While these roles are often treated separately, recent scholarship emphasizes the need for an integrated perspective. The interaction among teaching, research, and practice is increasingly conceptualized as cyclical and mutually reinforcing, contributing to teachers' ongoing professional development (Garner & Kaplan, 2021). Accordingly, integrative frameworks, such as the Trainer/Educator–Researcher–Practitioner model, conceptualize translation teachers' role identities as a holistic and interconnected system.

Theoretical Framework

This study is grounded in the Dynamic Systems Model of Role Identity (DSMRI; Garner & Kaplan, 2019), which explores translation teachers' beliefs, self-understandings, goals, and professional behaviors. Within this model, role identity is a contextually situated system composed of four interacting components. First, ontological and epistemological beliefs concern teachers' assumptions about knowledge, learning, and translation as a field (Kaplan et al., 2020). Second, self-perceptions include self-definitions as educators, researchers, and practitioners, including self-efficacy (Bandura, 1997). Third, purposes and professional goals may be immediate or long-term, intrinsic or extrinsic (Garner & Kaplan, 2017). Fourth, perceived action possibilities refer to strategies teachers believe they can enact (Kaplan & Garner, 2019). These four components interact constantly, influencing moment-to-moment decisions (Kaplan & Garner, 2019). Relative coherence or incoherence among components presages either stronger professional motivation or identity-based dilemmas (Garner & Kaplan, 2017). The DSMRI extends Complex Dynamic Systems theory, emphasizing the nonlinear, dynamic nature of identity (Hiver et al., 2022; Hassani & Malekshahi, 2024).

Method

Design of the Study

This study adopted a qualitative, cross-sectional design using semi-structured interviews with nine translation teachers. Although data were collected at a single point in time, participants were invited to reflect retrospectively on their professional experiences and perceived changes in their role identities over the course of their careers. Accordingly, the analysis focuses on participants' retrospective accounts of how they constructed, negotiated, and integrated their main and sub-role identities, rather than directly observing identity development over time. This design is appropriate for exploring teachers' perceptions of identity change while acknowledging that longitudinal research would be required to examine developmental trajectories directly.

Participants

A total of nine translation teachers were recruited from Shahid Bahonar University of Kerman and Velayat University of Iranshahr using a purposive sampling strategy, whereby participants were selected based on their accessibility as well as their relevance to the research focus (Creswell, 2012).

Given the exploratory and qualitative nature of the study, sample size was determined based on the principle of data saturation, with data collection ceasing when no substantially new themes or insights emerged from the interviews (Morrow, 2005). Data collection continued until saturation was achieved. After the eighth interview, no substantially new themes emerged regarding the four DSMRI components or role interactions. One additional interview was conducted to confirm saturation.

To ensure confidentiality, participants were assigned anonymized labels (Instructor 1–Instructor 9). As presented in Table 1, the sample comprised five female and four male instructors, with ages ranging from 35 to 51 years. All participants were affiliated with translation-related or closely aligned disciplines, including Translation Studies, Applied Linguistics, English Language and Literature, and Linguistics, and held advanced academic qualifications (PhD or PhD candidacy). Their teaching experience ranged from 8 to 22 years, indicating a cohort of relatively experienced educators.

Table 1. Participants' Demographic Profile

ID	Gender	Age	Degree	Field of Study	Teaching Experience (Years)
Instructor #1	M	46	PhD	English Language and Literature	18
Instructor #2	M	41	PhD	Applied Linguistics	12
Instructor #3	M	44	PhD	Translation Studies	14
Instructor #4	M	49	PhD student	Applied Linguistics	16
Instructor #5	F	51	PhD	Linguistics	22
Instructor #6	F	45	PhD	Translation Studies	14
Instructor #7	F	40	PhD	Translation Studies	15
Instructor #8	F	35	PhD	Translation Studies	8
Instructor #9	M	44	PhD	Translation Studies	17

Data Collection and Analysis

A semi-structured interview guide was developed to elicit open-ended, in-depth responses using prompts and probes (Hatch, 2002). The guide had two parts: the first explained the study's purpose, gathered demographic data, and obtained informed consent. The second included questions exploring the four DSMRI components, beliefs, self-perceptions, goals, and perceived action possibilities, as well as interactions among role and sub-role identities. The first researcher conducted all interviews in quiet locations at Shahid Bahonar University and Velayat University. Before each session, participants were informed of the study's purpose, voluntary participation, and confidentiality, after which they signed the consent form. The interviews were conducted in Persian to ensure that the participants felt comfortable in discussing their experiences and expressing their feelings in their mother tongue. The 15–20 minute interviews were audio-recorded using Easy Voice Recorder, transcribed verbatim, and formed the foundation for accurate data analysis.

This study employed thematic analysis (Miles et al., 2014) following Braun and Clarke's (2021) six-phase procedure. Recognized as a flexible method (Fugard & Potts, 2020), it combines deductive and inductive strategies (Patton, 2015). Deductive analysis, informed by existing theories, guided examination of DSMRI components, while inductive analysis allowed new themes to emerge regarding role and sub-role identity interactions. The six phases comprised: (1) familiarization through verbatim transcription and repeated reading; (2) generating initial codes; (3) grouping codes into candidate themes around DSMRI components; (4) reviewing and developing themes via two-level quality checks; (5) refining, defining, and naming themes; and (6) producing a final analytic narrative that presents a compelling account of the data.

To increase trustworthiness, member checking and peer debriefing were employed (Ary et al., 2018). For member checking (Merriam, 2009), data excerpts and interpretations were shared with a subset of participants, whose feedback was incorporated to confirm, modify, or refine the findings. For peer debriefing, a disinterested peer, an expert in qualitative research familiar with the context, independently analyzed a sample of transcripts. Subsequent discussion between the first author and the peer debriefer confirmed the reasonableness of the final interpretations.

Findings

Within the DSMRI framework, teachers' professional role identity is unpacked through four interrelated components: beliefs, self-perceptions, goals, and perceived action possibilities. Beliefs reflect ontological and epistemological assumptions about translation and its teaching; self-perceptions capture how teachers define themselves relative to students, institutions, and the profession; goals articulate pedagogical and professional priorities; and perceived action possibilities highlight opportunities and constraints shaping practice. Together, these dimensions reveal a dynamic identity landscape in which translation teachers continuously adapt, leverage resources, and redefine their professional roles.

Beliefs

In the DSMRI framework, beliefs represent the ontological and epistemological assumptions shaping a teacher's professional identity. Ontologically, they define what teachers perceive translation to be, for example, as a science, an art, or both. Epistemologically, these beliefs determine how knowledge of translation is constructed, acquired, and validated, through formal instruction, experiential learning, or professional practice. For this study's participants, beliefs evolve with experience, student engagement, and reflection on professional challenges. These beliefs form the foundation of professional identity, influencing curriculum design, classroom practice, and student mentoring.

Belief in Translation as a Science and Profession

Participants strongly view translation as a scientific discipline with structured methodologies rather than as a mere linguistic skill. This ontological stance positions translation as a field with its own epistemic authority, just like linguistics or literature. Instructor #3 articulated this conviction:

“Translation is a science. It used to be under linguistics, but now it is recognized as a separate discipline worldwide, with BA, MA, and PhD programs producing professional translators.”

This belief has epistemological implications: teachers consider formal academic education essential for cultivating systematic knowledge of translation theories and practices. Instructor #7 added that a proper balance of theoretical knowledge and practical training is crucial, particularly at the undergraduate level:

“Both theory and practice should be taught in parallel, but the focus in undergraduate courses must be on practical translation exercises.”

Belief in Experiential And Real-world Practice

The teachers also emphasized an experiential epistemology, believing that real translation competence is constructed through practice in authentic contexts. Instructor #6 noted:

“The best way to learn translation is through constant practice in different fields. If possible, training should take place in professional environments such as official translation offices.”

This indicates that teachers valued situated learning and view knowledge as embodied in practical tasks, rather than purely derived from textbooks or lectures.

Another participant, Instructor #7, echoed this view and stressed that exposing students to authentic scenarios is crucial for competence building:

“I always say that translation is not something you learn only by reading about it, you have to do it, preferably in real situations where deadlines and clients are involved.”

Belief About Technology and Autonomy

A recurring belief among participants is the need for student independence and critical engagement with translation tools. Many see over-reliance on machine translation (MT) as detrimental to learning. Instructor #8 warned against this dependency:

“I tell my students to imagine a time when there is no machine translation. Those who can translate independently will succeed.”

Instructor #1 observed that earlier cohorts of students, who lacked tools like Google Translate, were more engaged in developing core translation skills:

“In the past, when there was no Google Translate or AI, students learned more because they had to translate on their own.”

To counteract the risks of technological overuse, some teachers advocated for offline translation exercises and dictionary-based tasks to foster analytical thinking. Instructor #9 expressed this as:

“A better method might be to have students translate offline in class without access to online tools, using traditional dictionaries, and then analyze their work.”

Ontologically, participants viewed translation as an objective, structured discipline with rules, theories, and professional norms, leading them to treat translation training as a rigorous academic subject rather than a casual language exercise. Epistemologically, they perceived translation

knowledge as constructed through a dialectic between theory and practice: formal frameworks provide the foundation, but real-world practice fosters true competence, aligning with constructivist epistemology. These beliefs formed the ideological backbone of teachers' professional identities, positioning them as mentors who prioritize skill-building, critical thinking, and student autonomy over rote learning, while also influencing pedagogical decisions such as designing real-world translation tasks and limiting over-dependence on digital tools.

Self-Perceptions

Navigating Multifaceted Professional Roles

In the DSMRI framework, self-perception refers to how teachers define and position themselves within their professional landscape. For Iranian translation teachers, self-perception is not fixed, it evolves in response to pedagogical experience, institutional demands, and individual reflection. The participants in this study largely reject a singular identity (e.g., “just a teacher”) and instead describe themselves as multifaceted professionals, dynamically occupying roles such as teacher, mentor, consultant, translator, researcher, and even motivator.

This role-fluidity is particularly evident in how teachers adjusted their behavior depending on classroom context and student needs. For example, Instructor #1 described a versatile and layered view of their teaching identity:

“First, I let students translate, then I discuss their work. I am a consultant when they ask questions, a critic when I evaluate, and a motivator when they make progress.”

This fluid self-perception illustrated a teacher who actively adapted their identity to meet the pedagogical moment, providing support, feedback, and encouragement as needed. It also suggests a high level of pedagogical intentionality, where the teacher consciously shifts between sub-identities to scaffold learning more effectively.

Similarly, Instructor #3 underscored the enduring nature of his self-perception as a guide and facilitator. He noted:

“Since my first semester teaching, I’ve seen myself as a guide who helps students overcome translation challenges.”

This statement not only reinforces the idea of mentorship and support but also highlights how teachers often define their role through a learner-centered orientation. Instructor #3’s view reflects a deeply embedded self-concept as someone who walks beside students, rather than simply delivering knowledge from the front of the class.

Other teachers described a developmental shift in their self-perceptions over time. Instructor 7, for instance, observed how her professional identity gradually expanded beyond teaching to include research as a vital and complementary component:

“Initially, I considered myself primarily a teacher, but over time I realized that teaching and research complement each other.”

This progression reflects a broader pattern seen across participants: while many began their careers with a strong teacher identity, exposure to institutional expectations, academic discourse, and professional growth opportunities led to a more complex, layered self-perception. For Instructor #7 and others, assuming the role of researcher did not replace their teacher identity, but rather enriched it, leading to a more integrated teacher-researcher-translator role identity.

Across the interviews, a collective narrative of professional evolution emerges: teachers gain confidence, take on more responsibility, and reconfigure their self-perception relative to students, content, and institutions. Importantly, this transformation is often intentional and self-directed, informed by experience and reflection rather than imposed change. In sum, self-perception among Iranian translation teachers is a dynamic, negotiated identity shaped by classroom practice, institutional structures, professional development, and personal reflection. The movement from a unitary role (e.g., "teacher") to a hybrid identity (teacher-mentor-researcher-translator) reflects both the flexibility and complexity of translation teaching in academic contexts that demand multi-competency professionals.

Goals

Teachers' professional role identities are closely intertwined with the goals they set for their teaching practices, which go far beyond delivering course content or meeting curriculum requirements. These goals are rooted in a commitment to preparing students for the realities of the professional translation market, fostering autonomy, and building resilience. In the interviews with teachers, they saw themselves not just as instructors but as mentors, trainers, and professional coaches who equip students with both technical skills and the mindset required for real-world translation work.

Preparing Students for the Translation Market

A dominant goal across participants was to train students to become market-ready professionals. Teachers mostly talked about equipping students with the practical competencies required to succeed in competitive translation environments. For instance, Instructor #4 highlighted this professional aim:

"My goal is to prepare students so they can enter the translation market as competent professionals."

Instructor #7 further stressed the importance of professional readiness by integrating authentic translation tasks into the curriculum:

"I focus on exposing students to real translation assignments, so they know what challenges await them in the job market."

These market-oriented goals shaped teachers' role identities, moving them from being mere conveyors of knowledge to career-oriented trainers who prepared students for industry demands.

Fostering Independence and Resilience

Another major goal was to encourage student autonomy, helping learners stand on their own as translators rather than relying on technology or spoon-fed solutions. Instructor #8 noted:

"I want my students to stand on their own feet and translate without depending on online tools."

Instructor #1 also linked independence to critical thinking and problem-solving skills, which are essential in translation work:

"If students always rely on machine translation, they'll never develop problem-solving skills. My goal is to train critical, self-reliant translators."

Connecting Classroom to Real-World Challenges

Teachers considered it as their responsibility to bridge the gap between academic training and the real-world translation industry. Instructor 3 explained how he integrated professional scenarios into classroom activities:

"I design projects that simulate real translation contexts to help students experience professional demands."

In addition, Instructor #4 supported this by incorporating team-based translation projects that mimicked industry collaboration:

"Translation is rarely a solo job in the real world. I assign group projects to teach students how to work as a team and meet deadlines."

Raising Standards of Accuracy and Quality

For some Iranian translation teachers, maintaining high standards of linguistic accuracy and professional quality is not merely a teaching goal, it is a defining part of their professional role identity. This focus reflects a commitment to cultivating translators who can compete in both local and international markets, where precision, fluency, and stylistic appropriateness are non-negotiable. The participants emphasized that producing a "passable" translation is insufficient; rather, students should learn to refine their work until it meets professional publication standards. Instructor #2 articulated this clearly:

"My goal is for students to achieve professional-level precision in both source and target languages. Accuracy is the foundation of good translation."

This statement underscores the belief that accuracy functions as the backbone of translation quality, without which, even stylistically elegant work loses credibility. The emphasis here is not just on grammatical correctness but also on semantic fidelity, contextual appropriateness, and terminological consistency.

Instructor #5 reinforced this commitment by pointing out the importance of error-free work before market entry:

"If a translation contains even small mistakes, it can damage the translator's reputation. I train my students to review their work multiple times before submitting it."

This participant highlighted how accuracy is not only a matter of linguistic skill but also of professional ethics. Students are encouraged to adopt a revision-focused mindset, ensuring that the final product reflects both competence and integrity.

In addition, Instructor #6 stressed the role of consistent terminology in producing professional-quality translations, especially in specialized fields:

"I always tell my students: once you choose a term, stick to it throughout the text. Consistency shows professionalism and attention to detail."

Accuracy is framed not only as correctness but also as terminological discipline—an aspect often overlooked by novices yet highly valued in legal, medical, and technical translation. For many teachers, accuracy and quality are identity-defining goals that shape their teaching strategies, leading them to integrate rigorous quality control exercises such as peer-review sessions, iterative revisions, and real-world simulations. In doing so, they embody the role of quality guardians who prepare graduates to become trusted professionals. In conclusion, these professional and pedagogical goals drive identity formation, positioning teachers as mentors, career coaches, and facilitators of real-world competence rather than traditional lecturers. Their market-oriented mindset blends academic knowledge with practical training, shaping a teacher-translator identity that bridges education and industry, thereby reinforcing their role as guides who prepare students for the challenges and opportunities of professional translation.

Perceived Action Possibilities

In the DSMRI framework, perceived action possibilities refer to the resources, opportunities, and constraints shaping how teachers enact their professional roles. For Iranian translation teachers, these possibilities are shaped by institutional policies, technological infrastructure, and time constraints, all of which directly affect identity development. Teachers frequently note a mismatch between their professional goals and available support, forcing them to adopt adaptive strategies, improvise teaching methods, and prioritize tasks to maintain high professional standards.

Technological Limitations and Lack of Resources

A couple of participants described serious technological shortcomings, such as outdated labs, lack of computers, and absence of essential software, as a major barrier to modern translation teaching. Instructor #8 highlighted this problem:

"I proposed buying translation memory software for the lab, but nothing happened. We have to rely on ourselves."

Instructor #5 also underscores the importance of proper infrastructure for professional translation training, noting that the absence of these tools compromises teaching quality:

"For professional translation training, you at least need proper software and systems, but we don't have them."

Instructor #1 recounted how even basic tools such as online dictionaries or CAT tools were inaccessible:

"Students often don't even have proper dictionaries, let alone advanced translation software. The university does not consider this a priority."

These limitations seemingly shaped teachers' roles, pushing them to compensate through creative assignments such as manual translation exercises, peer-review sessions, or simulated translation projects, which require more effort and planning.

Institutional Policies and Research Pressure

A recurring theme among participants was the institutional emphasis on research over teaching, which influenced how teachers distributed their time and effort. Instructor #1 articulated this tension as:

"The ministry demands research publications and neglects the quality of teaching."

Instructor #3 similarly mentioned that institutional evaluation criteria focused excessively on research outputs (e.g., journal articles), often at the expense of teaching quality:

"Research is valued more than teaching when it comes to promotions. Unfortunately, this makes teachers focus on publishing rather than improving their classes."

This imbalance of priorities made teachers split their professional identities, alternating between "researcher" and "teacher" roles in different periods.

Time Management and Adaptive Strategies

To cope with competing responsibilities, teachers often resorted to strategic time partitioning, dedicating semesters to teaching and breaks to research. Instructor #9 explained this approach:

"During the semester I focus on teaching, but I dedicate summers to research."

Instructor #3 provided a similar account:

"I've learned to separate my tasks, teaching during the term, translation projects in between, and research during holidays. Otherwise, it's impossible to manage everything."

Such strategies reconfigured teachers' identities, allowing them to switch between roles in response to institutional demands and personal goals.

Creativity and Resilience

In the face of persistent institutional and infrastructural constraints, the participants demonstrated notable resilience and creativity in their teaching practice. These challenges, ranging from the absence of essential translation software to limited classroom resources, often become catalysts for innovative pedagogical solutions. By necessity, teachers adopt resourceful strategies that simulate real-world translation workflows without depending on technology or costly tools. Instructor #7 illustrated this approach by integrating role-based simulation projects into coursework:

"I compensate for the lack of software by creating mock translation agency projects where students play the roles of translators, editors, and reviewers."

Such activities not only mirrored professional translation processes but also foster collaboration, peer evaluation, and critical thinking, skills essential for long-term success in the field.

Also, Instructor #2 described adapting to resource shortages by developing offline project workflows and using physical reference materials:

"When we don't have internet access, I ask students to use printed dictionaries and glossaries, then we compare their solutions with professional translations to discuss strengths and weaknesses."

This example showed that creativity in resource-limited contexts often led to deeper engagement with translation fundamentals, encouraging students to rely on analytical judgment rather than automated assistance. In sum, such adaptive strategies reinforce teachers' self-image as problem-solvers and innovators, demonstrating that professional teaching identity can be strengthened even in restrictive environments through inventive pedagogical design. Within the DSMRI framework, identity is dynamic and shaped by the interaction of role components. For Iranian translation teachers, this interaction is nonlinear; their main and sub-role identities, teacher, translator, researcher, and mentor, constantly overlap, conflict, and adapt in response to contextual pressures and personal goals. The following themes illustrate how these identities interact in ways that both enrich and complicate their professional development.

Navigating Integration and Synergy of Roles

In the DSMRI framework, role interaction is not always characterized by conflict. For many Iranian translation teachers, their identities as teachers, translators, and researchers were complementary and mutually reinforcing rather than contradictory. This integration was a recurring theme, with participants describing how their sub-identities enriched their main teaching role, creating a synergy that enhanced both credibility and pedagogical effectiveness. For instance, Instructor #7 emphasized how her engagement with translation practice directly fed into her teaching identity:

"When I actively work on translation projects, I can bring those experiences into the classroom. Students appreciate that I am not just teaching theory but sharing what I actually do as a translator."

Similarly, Instructor #4 highlighted the reciprocal relationship between research and teaching, describing how one continually informs the other:

"My research on translation strategies shapes the way I teach. I use my findings in class discussions, so teaching and research go hand in hand for me."

Other teachers articulated this synergy as a safeguard against stagnation. Instructor #8, for instance, explained that research keeps teaching intellectually vibrant:

"The link between research and teaching is very close. If research does not accompany teaching, the teacher risks intellectual stagnation."

Instructor #4 also drew on his identity as a practicing translator to establish credibility with students, suggesting that this practical engagement reinforced his authority in the classroom:

"My practical translation work helps me bring real examples to class. When students see that I actually translate myself, they trust me more."

Instructor #8 extended this idea further, noting that none of her roles could be isolated from the others:

"I have never seen teaching as separate from practical translation and research. Each one, in some way, feeds the other."

These accounts underscore how teachers actively cultivated a hybrid professional identity, in which the main role of teacher was enriched by the sub-roles of translator and researcher. Rather than perceiving their identities as fragmented, they saw them as integrated streams of professional practice: translation provided authenticity and relevance, while research kept pedagogy innovative and theoretically grounded. This interplay highlights that, in the Iranian academic context, role integration serves as a strategy for sustaining professional development, enhancing credibility, and maintaining motivation amid institutional challenges.

Navigating Tensions and Conflicts

While some teachers described synergy between their sub-roles, others pointed to tensions and conflicts that complicated their professional identity. These conflicts often arose from competing demands of teaching, research, and professional translation work, each requiring different skills, time commitments, and institutional recognition. For example, Instructor #1 articulated the frustration of feeling pulled in different directions by institutional priorities:

"The ministry demands research publications and neglects the quality of teaching."

This sense of imbalance created role strain, as teachers felt forced to prioritize research for career advancement while simultaneously identifying strongly as educators. Similarly, Instructor #3 described how these institutional pressures undermined his teaching identity:

"Research is valued more than teaching when it comes to promotions. Unfortunately, this makes teachers focus on publishing rather than improving their classes."

Some teachers also highlighted tensions between teaching and translation practice. Instructor #6 noted how limited time made it difficult to balance both:

"If I spend too much time on professional translation projects, my teaching suffers. But if I focus only on teaching, I lose touch with the real market."

These examples illustrate how role interaction is not always seamless. For many teachers, maintaining multiple sub-identities produced internal conflicts and trade-offs, forcing them to negotiate priorities and sometimes compromise one role for another.

Balancing Teaching and Research

Another recurring theme was the deliberate balancing of teaching and research. Participants consistently described developing strategies to manage these dual responsibilities, recognizing that both were integral to their professional identities but difficult to pursue simultaneously. As illustrated in the Perceived Action Possibilities section, several teachers, like Instructor#3 and Instructor#9, reported intentionally allocating different periods of the academic year to teaching, research, and translation practice. Rather than attempting to perform all professional roles concurrently, they strategically sequenced these activities in response to institutional calendars and workload demands.

This balancing strategy demonstrates that role interaction is not limited to synergy or conflict but also involves temporal sequencing, whereby teachers actively prioritize different roles at different times. Such sequencing enabled participants to maintain multiple professional identities while responding to competing institutional expectations, highlighting the dynamic and adaptive nature of role identity negotiation.

Negotiating Student Expectations and Institutional Demands

Teachers also described tensions between student-centered teaching identities and the bureaucratic demands of the institution. While they saw themselves as mentors responsible for preparing students for the translation market, institutional constraints such as lack of resources or outdated curricula limited their ability to fully enact this role. Instructor #8 expressed frustration about inadequate technological support:

"I proposed buying translation memory software for the lab, but nothing happened. We have to rely on ourselves."

Instructor #7 echoed this concern by stressing how the absence of professional tools undermines teaching goals:

"For professional translation training, you at least need proper software and systems, but we don't have them."

These constraints meant that teachers often had to improvise, finding creative ways to meet student expectations despite institutional neglect. As Instructor #3 explained:

"I design projects that simulate real translation contexts to help students experience professional demands."

Here, role interaction takes the form of negotiation: teachers balance the mentor identity demanded by students with the resource-limited reality imposed by institutions, leading them to adopt creative, adaptive strategies that redefine their professional role in practice.

Identity Shifts Across Career Stages

Finally, role interaction was shaped by career trajectories and experience levels. Teachers reported that their sub-identities evolved over time, gradually moving from singular roles (e.g., "just a teacher") to more integrated identities as they gained professional maturity. Instructor #9 reflected on this gradual transformation:

"Initially, I considered myself primarily a teacher, but over time I realized that teaching and research complement each other."

Similarly, Instructor #1 described how practical translation became a stronger part of his identity after years of teaching:

"At first, I focused only on teaching, but gradually I realized that practicing translation myself makes me a better teacher."

Participants' accounts suggest that professional role identity is dynamic and may evolve over time as teachers accumulate experience and reconfigure their self-concept. Early career teachers may

emphasize teaching, but with institutional exposure and professional practice, they grow into more hybrid identities, integrating teaching, research, and translation.

Synthesis

Across the interviews, Iranian translation teachers revealed that their main and sub-role identities interact through a complex mix of synergy, conflict, temporal sequencing, and adaptation. The DSMRI framework helped illuminate these interactions as dynamic processes rather than static labels. While institutional pressures sometimes destabilized the balance, teachers often reconfigured their identities in creative and resilient ways, ensuring that teaching, research, and translation remain interconnected aspects of their professional selves. This dynamic interplay underscores the multi-competency nature of translation teaching in Iranian universities.

Discussion

The present study aimed to investigate how Iranian translation teachers develop their main role and sub-role identities and how these identities interact, using the Dynamic Systems Model of Role Identity (DSMRI) as a theoretical lens (Garner & Kaplan, 2019). The findings of this study reveal that translation teachers' professional identities are dynamic, multifaceted, and continuously negotiated through the interplay of beliefs, self-perceptions, goals, and perceived action possibilities, contributing to research on translation teacher identity (Chen & Huang, 2022; Ameri, 2024) from the under-explored Iranian context.

Regarding the first research question, participants' retrospective accounts suggest that professional identity is not simply acquired through experience but continuously reconstructed as teachers respond to changing institutional expectations and professional demands. This finding supports the DSMRI perspective that role identity emerges from the dynamic interaction among beliefs, self-perceptions, goals, and perceived action possibilities rather than from any single component (Garner & Kaplan, 2019; Kaplan & Garner, 2017). However, the present findings also suggest that these identity components are shaped by the particular institutional realities of Iranian universities, where resource limitations and competing professional expectations require teachers to continually renegotiate their roles. Participants consistently described translation as requiring both theoretical understanding and practical expertise. While this finding is consistent with previous research emphasizing the inseparable relationship between theory and practice in translation education (Carreres & Noriega-Sánchez, 2011), the interviews further suggest that this belief functions as an identity resource, enabling teachers to integrate their roles as educators, researchers, and practitioners rather than viewing them as competing identities.

Teachers' self-perceptions were not static but evolved significantly over their careers. Many described a trajectory from a singular identity ("just a teacher") to a hybrid identity encompassing mentor, researcher, and practitioner, supporting the DSMRI's assertion that role identity undergoes ongoing transformation (Garner & Kaplan, 2021; Chen & Huang, 2022). This role-fluidity is consistent with Beauchamp and Thomas's (2009) representation of teacher identity as encompassing

multiple sub-identities requiring ongoing alignment. Teachers' professional goals extended beyond curriculum delivery to include market readiness, student autonomy, accuracy, and professional ethics, aligning with Hlavac et al.'s (2024) observation that translation teachers must maintain alignment with industry developments. These goals are not merely instructional objectives but constitutive elements of professional role identities (Garner & Kaplan, 2017). This finding also suggests that hybrid professional identities are not simply the result of accumulated experience but reflect universities' increasing expectations that translation teachers simultaneously excel in teaching, research, and professional practice. This interpretation complements previous work on translation teacher identity (Chen & Huang, 2022; 2024) by highlighting how institutional expectations shape identity integration.

Teachers consistently reported a mismatch between their professional goals and institutional resources. Although previous studies have similarly documented the influence of workload and institutional constraints on teacher identity (Liu, 2021; Long & Huang, 2017), the present findings suggest that such constraints are not merely external barriers but actively shape how teachers negotiate their professional identities. Participants described adapting creative strategies; however, these adaptations should not be interpreted as fully resolving institutional challenges. Rather, they illustrate an ongoing tension between teachers' professional ideals and the realities of resource-constrained university environments. This finding reinforces the DSMRI view that perceived action possibilities are dynamically shaped by contextual conditions (Kaplan & Garner, 2017), while also suggesting that institutional constraints deserve greater attention in studies of translation teacher identity.

Regarding the second research question, Iranian translation teachers' main and sub-role identities interact through a complex mix of synergy, conflict, temporal sequencing, and adaptation, a dynamic interplay central to understanding professional development in translation teaching (Sela-Sheffy, 2023). Many teachers experienced their roles as complementary and mutually reinforcing: translation practice fed into teaching by providing authentic examples and enhancing credibility, while research shaped pedagogical approaches. Rather than representing fixed relationships, these synergies appeared to depend on teachers' professional experience and institutional context. This observation is consistent with the dynamic systems perspective on identity (Garner & Kaplan, 2021), while extending previous work on translation teacher identity (Chen & Huang, 2024) by suggesting that role interaction varies across career stages and institutional environments rather than remaining stable over time.

Despite synergy, teachers also reported significant tensions. Institutional pressure to prioritize research over teaching created role strain, echoing Long and Huang's (2017) observation that research-intensive contexts may strengthen researcher identity at the expense of teaching identity. Time-related conflicts between teaching and translation practice were also evident, consistent with Liu's (2021) finding that workload pressures constrain multiple role enactment. To manage these

conflicts, teachers developed adaptive strategies for temporally sequencing their roles, such as dedicating semesters to teaching and summers to research. This finding extends the DSMRI framework by illustrating how perceived action possibilities are not merely constraints but resources for creative identity management. Finally, role interaction was shaped by career trajectories: teachers evolved from singular to integrated configurations as they gained experience, supporting Chen and Huang's (2024) assertion that role identity is an ongoing process of self-identification and Garner and Kaplan's (2021) dynamic systems perspective on teacher identity development. Taken together, these findings suggest that identity negotiation may involve strategic sequencing of professional roles over time, whereby teachers deliberately allocate different periods to teaching, research, and professional practice. Although the DSMRI recognizes the dynamic interaction of multiple role components (Kaplan & Garner, 2017), this temporal dimension has received relatively limited attention in previous applications of the framework and may represent an important mechanism of identity management among translation teachers.

Overall, while several findings are consistent with previous studies on teacher identity, this study extends the literature by illustrating how translation teachers in the Iranian higher education context negotiate multiple professional roles within a specific institutional environment. In particular, the findings suggest that teachers manage competing responsibilities not only through role integration but also through temporal sequencing, strategically allocating different periods to teaching, research, and professional practice. This highlights the value of examining translation teacher identity as a dynamic and context-dependent process through the DSMRI framework.

Implications and Suggestions for Further Research

This study makes three main contributions to the literature. First, it extends research on translation teacher role identity to the underexplored Iranian higher education context, where empirical evidence remains limited. Second, it demonstrates the usefulness of the DSMRI for examining the interconnected roles of translation teachers as educators, researchers, and practitioners. Third, the findings suggest that teachers manage competing professional roles through temporal sequencing, for example, prioritizing teaching during semesters and research during academic breaks, thereby illustrating an adaptive mechanism of identity negotiation that has received limited attention in previous DSMRI-based research. Together, these findings contribute to a more context-sensitive understanding of translation teacher identity and professional development.

Several practical implications emerge from the findings. For Iranian university administrators and policymakers, the results highlight the need to address resource and infrastructure gaps, such as translation memory software, computer labs, and reliable internet access, that constrain teachers' ability to prepare market-ready professionals. Balanced evaluation criteria that recognize both teaching excellence and research productivity would reduce role strain for teachers who strongly identify as educators. Translation teacher education programs should prepare novice teachers for multiple, sometimes conflicting, role demands through professional development initiatives that

explicitly address identity negotiation strategies. Furthermore, because translation practice enhances teaching credibility, universities should support teachers' continued engagement with professional translation work through reduced teaching loads, sabbaticals for practice, or institutional partnerships with translation agencies.

Several limitations should be acknowledged. The cross-sectional design, while analytically oriented toward retrospective developmental trajectories, cannot capture real-time identity dynamics. Accordingly, interpretations concerning identity development are based on participants' retrospective accounts rather than direct longitudinal observation. In addition, the semi-structured interviews were relatively brief (15–20 minutes), which may have limited the depth and richness of participants' narratives. Although the focused interview protocol and thematic consistency across participants provided sufficient data to address the research questions, longer or multiple interviews could have generated more detailed accounts of identity negotiation and professional role development. Future longitudinal research would provide stronger evidence for developmental patterns. The sample of nine teachers from two universities limits generalizability, suggesting that future research should include larger, more diverse samples across multiple Iranian universities, including private institutions and different geographic regions. Data were collected through self-report interviews, which are subject to memory bias and social desirability effects; future studies could incorporate classroom observations, reflective journals, or institutional document analysis to triangulate findings. The study focused exclusively on translation teachers; comparative research with teachers of other disciplines such as linguistics or literature would help identify which aspects of identity development are specific to translation teaching and which are shared across higher education contexts. Finally, future research should examine how the rapid advancement of artificial intelligence and machine translation technologies affects translation teachers' beliefs, goals, and perceived action possibilities, particularly as concerns about student over-reliance on technology evolve alongside increasingly sophisticated AI.

Conclusion

This study investigated Iranian translation teachers' professional role identities through the lens of the DSMRI. The findings suggest that participants perceived their identities as developing through the dynamic interaction of beliefs, self-perceptions, goals, and perceived action possibilities, with teachers evolving from singular to integrated role configurations over time. Specifically, teachers held strong ontological beliefs about translation as a scientific discipline and epistemological beliefs about competence being constructed through a dialectic between theory and practice. Their self-perceptions evolved from a singular "just a teacher" identity toward a hybrid identity encompassing mentor, researcher, and practitioner, while their professional goals extended beyond curriculum delivery to include market readiness, student autonomy, accuracy, and professional ethics. Role identities interacted through complex patterns of synergy, conflict, temporal sequencing, and adaptive negotiation. Teaching, translation practice, and research formed a mutually reinforcing

system in which practice enhanced credibility and research shaped pedagogy, though institutional pressure to prioritize research and time-related conflicts created significant tensions. To manage these conflicts, teachers developed adaptive strategies such as temporally sequencing their roles across semesters and summers, demonstrating how perceived action possibilities can serve as resources for creative identity management. Despite institutional constraints including technological limitations and inadequate infrastructure, teachers demonstrated remarkable creativity and resilience, developing innovative solutions such as simulation-based projects and offline workflows. The study contributes empirical evidence from the under-explored Iranian context to the growing literature on translation teacher identity and demonstrates the utility of the DSMRI framework for understanding the dynamic, multifaceted nature of professional identity in translation teaching.

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