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Hopefulness and Hopelessness Conceptualization in Iranian Society: A Cognitive View

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ABSTRACT

This paper seeks to demonstrate the rate and cognitive model of hopelessness and hopefulness in Iranian society over five decades, from the 1970s to the 2010s. It also responds to the view that Iranians are currently experiencing greater hopelessness than in the past. Emotions prevalent in a society, including hopelessness and hopefulness, can be reflected in language. In fact, these emotions, like others, are encoded in language through cognitive mechanisms such as conceptual metaphor and linguistic construction. The study used a written and spoken corpus encompassing films, novels, news broadcasts, and official speeches, as well as the models employed—namely, Kövecses (2020) and findings from Construction Grammar. It was observed that hopefulness and hopelessness exhibited a fluctuating pattern across all subsets of the corpus over the five decades examined. The results indicated that hopelessness increased significantly and steadily in Iranian society over this fifty-year period, in line with global trends showing an increase in hopelessness. Moreover, regarding the cognitive model of hope, it is worth noting that Iranians conceptualize “hopelessness” as ‘inability’ and contrast it with “hopefulness” which is conceptualized in terms of an ‘object’ and ‘reliance on another entity’.

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1. Introduction

It is generally assumed that many individuals worldwide, particularly in Iranian society, are currently experiencing significantly higher levels of hopelessness than in the past. The Gallup Global Research Institute (2025) reported an increase in hopelessness worldwide over time. Evidence of this problem can be found in reports from both domestic and international news agencies. For example, *Mehr News Agency* reported, “The problem of social hopelessness within our society is in a concerning state” (para. 1). Similarly, *the New York Post* (2023) published a report titled “Teens feel hopeless, suicidal more than ever, CDC¹ warns.”

Hopelessness, characterized by negative expectations towards the future (A. T. Beck et al., 1974) and an inability to provide gratification (Akhtar, 2015), is considered a primary cause of daily suicides and suicidal ideations (A. X. Beck et al., 1975; Fergusson et al., 2003; Troister et al., 2015; Wetzel et al., 1980; Zhang et al., 2015). Furthermore, the widespread occurrence of depression in society, the prevalence of lethargy among individuals, and a loss of self-esteem are among the other consequences of hopelessness (Fergusson et al., 2003; Nolen-Hoeksema & Hilt, 2009; Tandon & Solomon, 2009). Therefore, the hypothesis among Iranians and scholars that hopelessness has significantly increased over time within Iranian society, in line with global trends, necessitates the present investigation.

Despite its remarkable importance, only a limited amount of literature is available on hopelessness across various fields of study. For example, psychoanalytic literature directly related to hopelessness is extremely scarce (Akhtar, 2015, 2017). In fact, the term “hopelessness” appears only twice in the entire corpus of Freud’s work (Guttman et al., 1980). Additionally, within linguistics, there is a dearth of research specifically focused on the topic hope. In the realm of natural language, this topic has not been examined in Persian, with the notable exception of a single study conducted by Meshkinfam and Naghzhguy-Kohan (2023); however, there are a limited number of studies in Persian literary language (Hashemi & Ghavam, 2013; Iranzadeh & Arsh-Akmal, 2021; Naseri & Ghoreishi, 2013; Noorian, 2020; Qobadi & Kolahchian, 2007). Likewise, the investigation of hopelessness and hopefulness in natural language has not received substantial attention from researchers in languages other than Persian, except for a few synchronic studies (Lakoff et al., 1991; Quigley & Christianson, 2008; Šarić, 2020; Tissari, 2017). Moreover, studies of hope in the literary genre of other languages have also been attracted scholarly attention (see, e.g., Cairns, 2020; Ruiz, 2007). Therefore, the present study appears to be the first research endeavor to examine the concepts of hopelessness and hopefulness, as well as their diachronic evolution within Iranian society in modern times, using non-literary Persian.

In a broader sense, language serves as a mirror reflecting the characteristics of a society. Since language is the product of human cognition and social interaction (Langacker, 1987), every common concept in a society is usually encoded in language. For instance, the prevailing emotional state of a society, whether hopelessness or hopefulness, can be conveyed through language. Through linguistic examination of these concepts, it is therefore possible to achieve a deeper understanding of their functioning and evolution within a society.

These encoded concepts are manifested in linguistic constructions, that is, conventionalized pairings of form and function (Goldberg, 2006, p. 3), whether metaphorical or non-metaphorical. Because emotions are often abstract in nature, language frequently uses conceptual metaphors to facilitate their comprehension. Indeed, concrete domains are employed to conceptualize abstract domains. In addition to conceptual metaphors, specific non-metaphorical constructions are also used to encode emotions. In this study, the token frequency of such metaphors and non-metaphorical constructions related to emotions, including hopelessness and hopefulness, represents a valuable metric for investigating the prevalence of these emotions in a particular

1. Center for Disease and Control and Prevention available at: www.cdc.gov

society, both at a given point in time and over time. Moreover, a qualitative analysis of these constructions provides valuable insights into the cognitive model of hope among Iranians. Accordingly, the present research is grounded in the theoretical foundations of Conceptual Metaphor Theory, as proposed by Kövecses (2020), and the framework of Construction Grammar.

2. Theoretical Framework

This section is devoted to a comprehensive discussion of two theoretical frameworks: Construction Grammar and Conceptual Metaphor Theory, aiming to illustrate how language encodes diverse concepts. The discussion commences with an overview of Construction Grammar Theory, followed by an analysis of Conceptual Metaphor Theory.

2.1 Construction Grammar

Over the past three decades, there has been a marked increase in scholarly interest in construction-based approaches to language (e.g., Goldberg, 2006; Goldberg & Herbst, 2021; Hilpert, 2008; Lakoff, 1987; Langacker, 2005; Meshkinfam et al., 2022). All constructionist approaches are subsumed under the overarching term “Construction Grammar.” Therefore, no single Construction Grammar exists presently (Hoffmann & Trousdale, 2011, p. 4).

Construction Grammar functions on the assumption that all levels of grammar encompass constructions. By “construction,” we refer to the conventionalized pairings of form and meaning (Goldberg & Herbst, 2021, p. 285; Hoffmann & Trousdale, 2011, p. 2). Figure 1 exemplifies a construction:

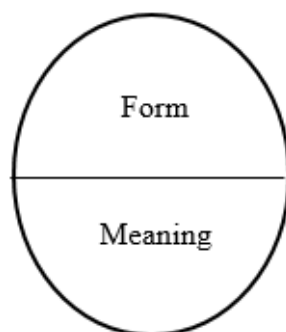


Figure 1. Linguistic Construction

All constructionists agree that all levels of grammatical description involve a structured default inheritance network of constructions (Goldberg, 2006, p. 215). The constructions are not merely listed; rather, they constitute a structured inventory within the mental framework of speakers (Croft & Cruse, 2004, pp. 262–265). To provide a concrete instance, a morphological construction can be demonstrated using the following structure (Booij, 2010, p. 2).

1. $[[x]_v \text{ er}]_N$ ‘one who Vs’

The forthcoming section will illuminate the mechanism of metaphorical constructions, as discussed within the framework of Conceptual Metaphor Theory.

2.2 Conceptual Metaphor Theory

Metaphor is a fundamental area of inquiry within cognitive linguistics. By “conceptual metaphor,” we refer to a set of correspondences between a more concrete source domain and a more abstract target domain (Kövecses, 2002, 2010, 2020; Lakoff & Johnson, 1980). In effect, a domain transfer from the more tangible to the more abstract takes place on the basis of shared or analogous semantic characteristics. Accordingly, a conceptual metaphor denotes the comprehension of a given concept or domain in relation to another. The mechanism by which conceptual metaphor operates can be illustrated in Figure (2) as follows:



Figure 2. Conceptual Metaphor Mechanism

Kövecses (2020) construes conceptual metaphor as consisting of four distinct levels: image schema, domain, frame, and mental space (p. 47). To explain this notion, he employs a part of Shakespeare's Sonnet 18 as an example and expounds upon each level of love conceptualization:

2. Shall I compare thee¹ to a summer's day?
 Thou² art³ more lovely and more temperate:
 Rough winds do shake the darling buds of May,
 And summer's lease hath⁴ all too short a date;
 Sometime too hot the eye of heaven shines,
 And often is his gold complexion dimmed (Shakespeare, 2023, p. 171)

- Image schema: INTENSITY IS HEAT/COLD
- Domain: EMOTION IS TEMPERATURE: INTENSITY OF EMOTION IS DEGREE OF HEAT/COLD
- Frame: LOVE IS FIRE: LOVE'S INTENSITY IS THE DEGREE OF HEAT OF FIRE
- Mental space: THE FLUCTUATION IN THE INTENSITY OF THE POET'S LOVE IS THE FLUCTUATION IN THE DEGREE OF A SUMMER DAY'S HEAT

The following sentences serve as other examples of conceptual metaphor.

3. I *demolished* his argument (ARGUMENT IS WAR) (Lakoff & Johnson, 1980, p. 5)
4. I don't *have* the time to *give out* (TIME IS MONEY) (Lakoff & Johnson, 1980, p. 8)

This study endeavors to employ the aforementioned theoretical frameworks to identify and analyze metaphorical and non-metaphorical constructions pertaining to hopelessness and hopefulness within the selected corpus. This analysis, expounded upon in the subsequent section, aims to determine the changing rate of hopelessness and hopefulness in the Iranian society over time and to understand the cognitive model of hope within the Iranian population across time.

3. Method

This study investigated changes over time in both the frequency and the cognitive model of hopelessness and hopefulness in Iranian society, using a selected corpus. The analysis covered five decades, during which the concept of hope changed considerably in the corpus. The decades examined, from the 1970s to the 2010s, were chosen due to their temporal proximity to the present.

The corpus for this study included a selection of 6 best-selling stories and 6 best-selling films from each decade, totaling 30 items per category. These were obtained using a systematic random sampling method. Additionally, official speeches and television news were incorporated into the corpus to the extent of theoretical saturation and availability.⁵

1. you

2. you

3. are

4. has

5. The names of the films and stories used as sources in the corpus have been compiled in the Appendix A and Appendix B. However, in order to protect the privacy of the individuals who delivered the speeches, their names have been withheld.

In this study, a thorough analysis of both metaphorical and non-metaphorical constructions associated with hopelessness and hopefulness was conducted. Constructions were classified into two distinct categories: metaphorical and non-metaphorical. The former were identified using the Method for Identifying Metaphorically Used Words in Discourse, presented by Pragglejaz (2007). This method (MIP) involves the following procedure (Pragglejaz, 2007, p. 3):

- Read the entire text-discourse to establish a general understanding of the meaning.
- Determine the lexical units in the text-discourse.
- (a) For each lexical unit in the text, establish its meaning in context—that is, how it applies to an entity, relation, or attribute in the situation evoked by the text (contextual meaning). Take into account what comes before and after the lexical unit. (b) For each lexical unit, determine if it has a more basic contemporary meaning in other contexts than the one in the given context. Basic meanings are not necessarily the most frequent meanings of the lexical unit. (c) If the lexical unit has a more basic current-contemporary meaning in other contexts than the given context, decide whether the contextual meaning contrasts with the basic meaning but can nevertheless be understood in comparison with it.
- If so, mark the lexical unit as metaphorical; otherwise, classify it as non-metaphorical.

From a quantitative perspective, the token frequency of these constructions was calculated across the five selected decades to ascertain the rate of hopelessness and hopefulness in Iranian society, using the statistical tools of mean and relative frequency. Notably, token frequency was defined as the number of linguistic elements that appeared within the given corpus (Croft, 2003; Haspelmath, 2008). Furthermore, the cognitive model of Iranians regarding hope was presented from a qualitative standpoint, elucidating how Iranians conceptualized the concepts of hopelessness and hopefulness over the fifty-year period through the analysis of aforementioned linguistic constructions.

4. Results

In this study, the metaphorical and non-metaphorical constructions under investigation were drawn from a corpus consisting of films, stories, television news broadcasts, and official speeches. These constructions were systematically classified into distinct categories in order to measure their token frequency and to examine the cognitive model. The results were presented in tables based on conceptual source domains and entrenched constructions schemas for each decade. Furthermore, some figures were employed to illustrate the total frequency of metaphorical and non-metaphorical constructions across a period of five decades revealing the changing rate of hopelessness and hopefulness. Because it was infeasible to present the entire dataset, only a limited number of representative examples were provided for each subset of the corpus. Specifically, three metaphorical instances were included to indicate hopelessness, whereas two metaphorical instances were provided to indicate hopefulness. In addition, one non-metaphorical construction example was provided for hopelessness and hopefulness.

4.1 Films

Films are among the best available sources for examining the language, culture, and social conditions of a society. This is due to the fact that films reflect the social reality of a particular period in that society. Indeed, nothing is as valuable as analyzing the films produced and displayed within a society, in addition to field research, for penetrating the inner layers of a community (Jarvie, 1970, p. 103). For this reason, films were included in the selected subsets

of the corpus in the present study. Examples (5)–(11) present metaphorical and non-metaphorical constructions encoding hopelessness and hopefulness in films.

• HOPELESSNESS IS INABILITY

5. *be xodā sangin=e barā=m ne-mi-tun=am*
 to God heavy=be.PRS.3SG for=POSS.1SG NEG-IND-able.PRS=1SG
vāqean ne-mi-keš=am
 really NEG-IND-pull.PRS=1SG¹

“I swear to God, it is difficult for me, I cannot really tolerate” (Gole, 1975, 00:23:41).

• HOPELESSNESS IS DEATH

6. *man āxar az dast=et degħ-marg mi-š=am*
 1SG end PREP hand=POSS.2SG agonizing-death IND-become.PRS=1SG

“Eventually, I will die an agonizing death because of you” (Abyar, 2013, 00:32:11).

• HOPELESSNESS IS CAPTIVITY

7. *hame=ye donyā čāhār-divāri=ye*
 all=EZ world four-wall=be.PRS.3SG

“The whole world is a walled enclosure” (Kimiya, 1999, 00:05:26).

• HOPEFULNESS IS REFUGE

8. *tufān harif=e man nist vagħti to nāxodā=i*
 storm opponent=EZ 1SG not-be.PRS.3SG when 2SG helmsman=be.PRS.2SG

“I do not have to worry about any storms when you are my helmsman” (Sayad, 1977, 00:05:13).

• HOPEFULNESS IS OBJECT

9. *če xub=e del-ā=mun az omid por=e*
 what good=be.PRS.3SG heart-PL=POSS.1PL PREP hope full=be.PRS.3SG

“It is great that we are filled with hope” (Mehrjui, 2007, 00:08:40).

• [heyf ‘alack’=e [X]INF]NP ‘hopelessness’

10. *heyf=e dust-dāšt-an=e kas=i ke šāyestegi=ye*
 alack=EZ like-have.PST-INF=EZ someone=REL who worthiness=EZ
dust-dāšt-an=o na-dār=e
 like-have.PST-INF=OM NEG-have.PRS=be.PRS.3SG

“It is unfortunate to love someone who does not deserve being loved” (Sayad, 1977, 00:32:12).

• [[X]CL enšālā/enšālā [X]CL] ‘hopefulness’

11. *enšālāh be pāy=e ham pir š=id*
 God-willing PREP foot=EZ each-other old become.PRS=2SG

“God willing, may you grow old together” (Jeyrani, 1998, 00:28:28).

Table 1 presents the frequency analysis of source domains for metaphors of hopelessness and hopefulness in the films, spanning from the 1970s to the 2010s.

1. **Abbreviations:** ART = article, COM=comparative, EZ = Ezafe, IND = indicative, INDF = indefinite, NEG = negative, OM = object marker, PRS= present, PST = past, PTCP = participle, PL = plural, POSS= possessive, PREP = preposition, REL = relativizer, SG = singular, SBJV = subjunctive, 1 = first person, 2 = second person, 3 = third person.

Table 1. Source Domains for Conceptual Metaphors of Hopelessness and Hopefulness in Films (1970s–2010s)

Decades	1970s	1980s	1990s	2000s	2010s	Total	Total relative frequency
Source domains							
HOPELESSNESS							
Inability	35	15	44	40	52	186	17.81%
Lack of possession	12	19	21	44	33	129	12.35%
Destruction	6	13	17	31	52	119	11.39%
Death	18	17	29	17	20	101	9.67%
Stagnation	5	7	25	35	20	92	8.81%
Malaise	9	10	19	22	31	91	8.71%
Loneliness	24	8	7	11	23	73	7%
Loss of ownership	3	8	10	21	9	51	4.88%
Captivity	4	5	11	16	6	42	4.02%
End	1	9	6	6	4	26	2.49%
Lack of refuge	3	2	4	2	12	23	2.20%
Burning	4	3	3	3	5	18	1.72%
Old age	0	0	14	3	0	17	1.62%
Darkness	4	3	2	6	1	16	1.53%
Animal	0	0	1	8	6	15	1.43%
Downward	2	1	2	3	6	14	1.34%
Object	2	1	0	0	4	7	0.67%
Tear	1	2	0	1	1	5	0.47%
Losing	0	0	0	2	3	5	0.47%
Incurability	1	1	1	1	0	4	0.38%
Proper noun	3	0	0	0	0	3	0.28%
Backward	1	0	1	0	1	3	0.28%
Cold	1	0	1	0	0	2	0.19%
Bitterness	0	0	0	2	0	2	0.19%
HOPEFULNESS							
Dynamism	8	8	9	1	1	27	22.5%
Object	5	3	6	2	2	18	15%
Possession	5	2	5	1	1	14	11.66%
Health	3	2	3	1	0	9	7.5%
Non-loneliness	2	2	2	1	1	8	6.69%
Medicine	2	1	1	2	0	6	5%
Refuge	1	0	3	0	2	6	5%
Life	0	3	2	0	0	5	4.16%
Upward	0	0	2	0	3	5	4.16%
Capability	0	0	1	3	0	4	3.33%
Freedom	0	0	2	1	1	4	3.33%
Breathing	2	1	0	0	0	3	2.5%
Forward	0	1	2	0	0	3	2.5%
Light	0	0	1	1	1	3	2.5%
Youthfulness	0	0	1	1	0	2	1.66%
Wakefulness	1	0	0	0	0	1	0.83%
Victory	1	0	0	0	0	1	0.83%
Beginning	0	1	0	0	0	1	0.83%

As shown in Table 1, the primary source domain for metaphors of “hopelessness” in films from the 1970s to the 2010s is ‘inability.’ Specifically, in the 1970s and the 1990s, the concept of ‘inability’ occurred with the highest frequency of occurrence. In contrast, ‘lack of possession’ was the dominant domain in the 1980s and the 2000s. Finally, in the 2010s, representations of hopelessness—both regarding society and the self—were characterized by themes of ‘destruction’ and ‘inability.’

Similarly, the analysis of hopefulness metaphors in films across the five decades indicated that from the 1970s to the 1990s, the concept of hopefulness was most commonly expressed in terms of ‘dynamism.’ Furthermore, ‘dynamism’ served as the most frequent source domain for conceptualizing hopefulness in films throughout all five decades. In contrast, during the 2000s, the dominant perspective on hopefulness in Iranian society centered on the concept of ‘capability,’ and in the 2010s, it shifted to the ‘upward’ schema.

Table 2 presents the token frequencies of non-metaphorical constructions encoding hopelessness and hopefulness across the fifty-year period.

Table 2. Non-Metaphorical Constructions of Hopelessness and Hopefulness in Films (1970s–2010s)

Decades	1970s	1980s	1990s	2000s	2010s	Total	Total relative frequency
Non-metaphorical constructions							
HOPELESSNESS							
[mote'asef(am) 'to be sorry' ke 'that'[X] _{CL}]	1	0	0	1	0	2	66.67%
[heyf=e 'alack' [X] _{INF} NP]	1	0	0	0	0	1	33.33%
HOPEFULNESS							
[[X] _{CL} enšālā 'God willing' /enšālā [X] _{CL}]	3	0	8	3	4	18	32.14%
[xodā 'God' [X] _{CL} (na)konad 'may (not) grant it' / xodā (na)konad [X] _{CL}]	5	0	3	1	0	9	16.12%
[del=e 'heart of' [X] _{NP} xāstan 'want' [X] _{CL}]	0	4	4	1	0	9	16.07%
[elāhi 'oh God' [X] _{CL}]	1	2	0	3	2	8	14.28%
[[X] _{NP} dust-dāstan 'to like' [X] _{CL}]	0	3	2	0	0	5	8.92%
[omid=e 'hope of' [X] _{NP} be / be omid=e [X] _{NP}]	0	1	1	0	1	3	5.35%
[[X] _{NP} rā bebin 'see' [X] _{CL}]	1	0	0	0	0	1	1.78%
[del=e 'heart of' [X] _{NP} xoš budan 'to be happy' [X] _{CL}]	1	0	0	0	0	1	1.78%
[[X] _{NP} fekr-kardan 'to think' [X] _{CL}]	0	1	0	0	0	1	1.78%
[[X] _{NP} ārezu-dāstan 'to wish' [X] _{CL}]	0	0	1	0	0	1	1.78%

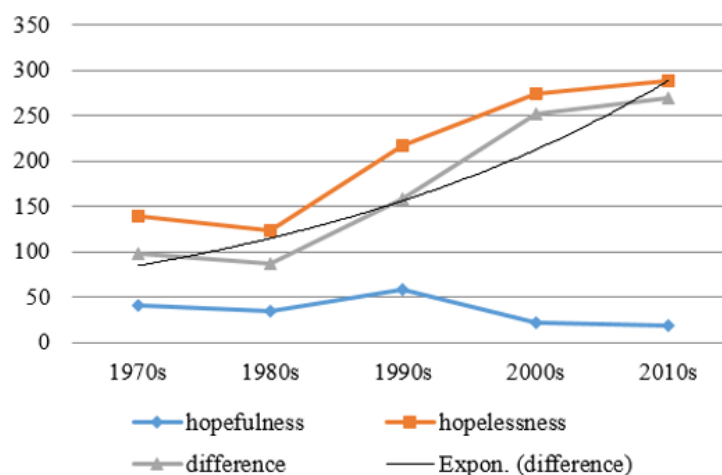
Based on Table 2, constructions encoding the emotion of “hopelessness” are rare. In contrast, similar constructions expressing “hopefulness,” particularly those conveying the meaning ‘God will do something for people,’ are employed throughout the corpus. Notably, the construction “[X] enšālā/enšālā [X]” appears most frequently in this regard. Furthermore, this trend holds true across all decades except for the 1980s. During the 1980s, there was a greater inclination to use constructions indicating the meaning ‘wish for events to occur without an attributed agent,’ such as [del=e ‘heart of’ [X]_{NP} xāstan ‘want’ [X]_{CL}], which exemplifies this use.

Table 3 summarizes the rates of metaphorical and non-metaphorical constructions of hopelessness and hopefulness in the selected films from the 1970s to the 2010s.

Table 3. Frequencies of Hopelessness and Hopefulness Constructions in Films (1970s–2010s)

Decades	Hopelessness	Hopefulness	Difference of frequencies
1970s	140	41	99
1980s	123	35	88
1990s	217	58	159
2000s	275	22	253
2010s	289	19	270
Total	1044	175	869

As illustrated in Table 3, the frequency of hopelessness is consistently higher than that of hopefulness across all decades. Consequently, the difference between these two frequencies effectively indicates the rate of hopelessness over time. Based on Table 3, Figure 3 provides a visual representation of these changing rates of hopelessness and hopefulness.

**Figure 3. The Fluctuating Rates of Hopelessness and Hopefulness in Films (1970s–2010s)**

As shown in Figure 3, there is an increasing trend of hopelessness in Iranian society over time, according to the films, with only a slightly lower level of hopelessness observed during the 1980s.

4.2 Stories

Stories often reflect the social, political, and cultural issues of a society, since artistic works are typically shaped by their surrounding environment. Indeed, works of fiction, particularly novels, are regarded as some of the most significant written sources for examining and understanding the social conditions of a society. Accordingly, within the written corpus of the present study, widely read stories were selected for analysis (see Examples 12–18).

• HOPELESSNESS IS DARKNESS

12. *če zolmat=i dar rāh ast*
 what black=INDF PREP way be.PRS.3SG
 “What darkness awaits?” (Shojai, 1989, p. 39).

• HOPELESSNESS IS BITTERNESS

13. *zendegi be xiyār mi-mān=ad tah=aš talx ast*
 life PREP cucumber IND-like.PRS=3SG bottom=POSS.3SG bitter be.PRS.3SG
 “Life is similar to cucumbers, its bottom is bitter” (Moradi-Kermani, 2014, p. 9).

• HOPELESSNESS IS ANIMAL

14. *nā-omidi bar del=e yek-ā-yek=e=šān čang*
 NEG-hopefulness PREP heart=EZ one-by-one=EZ=POSS.3PL scratch
zad
 beat.PST.3SG
 “Hopelessness scratched their hearts one by one” (Sarshar, 1978, p. 45).

• HOPEFULNESS IS LIGHT

15. *ye lahze nur=e omid=i tu del=am rošan*
 INDF moment light=EZ hopefulness=INDF PREP heart=POSS.1SG shine
šod
 become.PST.3SG
 “For a moment, a light of hopefulness shone in my heart” (Moadabpour, 2004, p. 58).

• HOPEFULNESS IS FREEDOM

16. *in ghafas rā baršekan*
 this cage OM break.IMP.PRS.2SG
 “Break open this cage” (Shahdadi, 1978, p. 5).

• [badbaxtāne ‘unfortunately’ [X]CL] ‘hopelessness’

17. *badbaxtāne dahan=aš lagh ast*
 unfortunately mouth=POSS.3SG loose be.PRS.3SG
 “Unfortunately, he has a loose tongue” (Alavi, 1978, p. 179).

• [xodā ‘God’ [X]NP (na)konad ‘does (not)’/xodā ‘God’ (na)konad ‘does (not)’ [X]CL] ‘hopefulness’

18. *xodā kon=e zud-tar šafā peydā kon=e*
 God do.PRS=3SG soon-COM healing find do.PRS=3SG
 “God willing, may he find healing as soon as possible” (Ahmadzadeh, 2005, p. 164).

Table 4 presents the token frequency of each metaphorical source domain used to codify the emotions of hopelessness and hopefulness in works of fiction over a fifty-year period, from the 1970s to the 2010s.

Table 4. Source Domains for Conceptual Metaphors of Hopelessness and Hopefulness in Stories (1970s–2010s)

Decades	1970s	1980s	1990s	2000s	2010s	Total	Total relative frequency
Source domains							
HOPELESSNESS							
Inability	61	42	100	77	74	354	16.37%
Destruction	17	56	48	67	85	273	12.62%
Lack of possession	15	34	69	47	55	220	10.17%
Death	14	59	71	29	47	220	10.17%
Malaise	22	45	46	39	47	199	9.20%
Stagnation	6	33	55	33	66	193	8.92%
Loneliness	28	21	21	34	44	148	6.84%
Captivity	15	11	23	31	35	115	5.31%
Loss of ownership	4	8	28	6	16	62	2.86%
Object	8	7	10	6	18	49	2.26%
Lack of refuge	8	13	3	2	19	45	2.08%
Burning	3	11	19	5	6	44	2.26%
Tear	4	15	6	4	9	38	1.75%
End	3	5	8	7	10	33	1.52%
Downward	2	3	14	6	7	32	1.48%
Darkness	4	5	5	8	8	30	1.38%
Animal	1	0	2	9	8	20	0.92%
Bitterness	6	2	1	0	8	17	0.78%
Backward	3	2	0	10	1	16	0.74%
Losing	9	0	2	1	1	13	0.60%
Old age	0	9	0	1	1	11	0.50%
Cold	0	4	1	2	4	11	0.50%
Suffocation	5	4	1	0	0	10	0.46%
Proper noun	0	0	3	2	0	5	0.23%
Incurability	1	1	0	1	1	4	0.18%
HOPEFULNESS							
Object	10	23	14	14	25	86	31.04%
Dynamism	15	6	24	3	2	50	18.05%
Non-loneliness	7	7	7	3	0	24	8.66%
Life	7	3	7	1	4	22	7.94%
Possession	4	4	4	4	4	20	7.22%
Refuge	4	9	5	0	0	18	6.49%
Health	6	2	4	0	2	14	5.05%
Light	1	6	4	0	2	13	4.74%
Freedom	5	1	2	1	1	10	3.61%
Upward	1	1	2	1	0	5	1.80%
Capability	2	0	0	1	0	3	1.08%
Warmth	0	0	0	1	1	2	0.72%
Breathing	0	0	1	0	1	2	0.72%
Youthfulness	1	0	1	0	0	2	0.72%
Animal	1	0	0	1	0	2	0.72%
Beginning	0	1	0	1	0	2	0.72%
Forward	0	0	0	1	0	1	0.36%
Sweetness	0	0	1	0	0	1	0.36%

As shown in Table 4, the source domain of ‘inability’ is the most frequently used metaphorical concrete domain for conveying hopelessness in works of fiction, including films, over the fifty-year period. Specifically, during the 1970s, the 1990s, and the 2000s, ‘inability’ played a primary role in the conceptualization of hopelessness. Conversely, during the 1980s and the 2010s, the source domains of ‘death’ and ‘destruction,’ respectively, emerged as the most frequent concrete domains for the conceptualization of hopelessness.

Regarding metaphors for hopefulness, the results revealed that the domain of ‘object’ was the most commonly used metaphorical source domain for expressing the concept of hopefulness in works of fiction over the past fifty years. Notably, this trend held true for all decades except for the 1970s and the 1990s, during which the most frequent metaphorical source domain for encoding hopefulness was ‘dynamism.’

Furthermore, an analysis of constructions employed to encode hopefulness in Persian stories exhibited a substantially higher frequency and variation compared to those used to convey hopelessness (see Table 5).

Table 5. Non-Metaphorical Constructions of Hopelessness and Hopefulness in Stories (1970s–2010s)

Decades	1970s	1980s	1990s	2000s	2010s	Total	Total relative frequency
Non-metaphorical constructions							
HOPELESSNESS							
[heyf ‘alack’ ke ‘that’ [X] _{CL}] _{NP}	0	2	0	3	1	6	66.66%
[badbaxtāne ‘unfortunately’ [X] _{CL}]	3	0	0	0	0	3	33.33%
HOPEFULNESS							
[xodā ‘God’ [X] _{CL} (na)konad ‘may (not) grant it’ / xodā (na)konad [X] _{CL}]	12	10	39	8	5	74	33.18%
[del=e ‘heart of’ [X] _{NP} xāstan ‘want’ [X] _{CL}]	16	16	11	5	4	52	23.31%
[omid(=e) (be) ‘hope of’ [X] _{NP} be / be omid=e [X] _{NP}]	3	5	2	4	13	27	12.10%
[[X] _{CL} enšālā ‘God willing’ / enšālā [X] _{CL}]	5	11	2	3	1	22	9.86%
[elāhi ‘oh God’ [X] _{CL}]	2	3	10	0	7	22	9.86%
[[X] _{NP} ārezu-dāstan (ke) ‘to wish (that)’ [X] _{CL}]	0	3	7	5	3	18	8.07%
[del=e ‘heart of’ [X] _{NP} xoš budan (ke) ‘to be happy (that)’ [X] _{CL}]	0	1	2	0	1	4	1.79%
[kāš [X] _{CL}]	1	1	0	1	0	3	1.34%
[be del=e [X] _{NP} barāt-šodan [X] _{CL}]	1	0	0	0	0	1	0.44%

As shown in Table 5, non-metaphorical constructions chiefly reflect a reliance on the belief that a task will be performed by God on behalf of the individual, as evidenced by the highest frequency of the [xodā ‘God’ [X]_{CL} (na)konad ‘may (not) grant it’/xodā (na)konad [X]_{CL}] construction used to encode hopefulness. Indeed, this belief was most evident from the 1990s to the 2010s. However, during the 1970s and the 1980s, individuals primarily expressed desires without referencing external intervention.

Table 6 provides an overview of the rates of hopelessness and hopefulness in the selected stories from the 1970s to the 2010s.

Table 6. Hopelessness and Hopefulness Frequencies in the Stories (1970s–2010s)

Decades	Hopelessness	Hopefulness	Difference of frequencies
1970s	241	105	136
1980s	390	113	227
1990s	535	149	386
2000s	428	58	370
2010s	571	76	495
Total	2165	501	1614

Based on Table 6, despite fluctuations over time, the token frequency of hopelessness consistently exceeds that of hopefulness, indicating a persistent prevalence of hopelessness. The disparity between the frequencies of hopelessness and hopefulness serves as an effective measure of changes in the rate of hopelessness over time. Figure 4 provides a visual representation of these fluctuations.

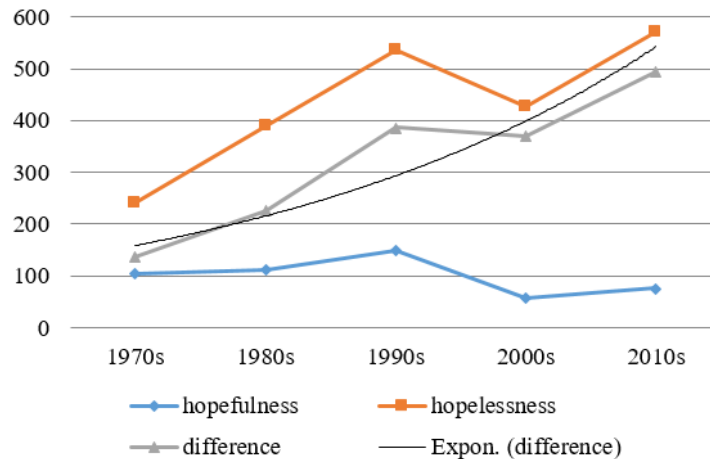


Figure 4. The Fluctuation Rate of Hopelessness and Hopefulness in the Stories (1970s–2010s)

As shown in Figure 4, Iranian society has exhibited a growing sense of hopelessness across the fictional narratives surveyed, spanning from the 1970s to the 2010s. Notably, a slight decrease in the state of hopelessness can be discerned in society during the decade of 2000s.

4.3 Official Speeches and TV News

The final subset of the corpus, comprising official speeches and news broadcasts, was considered a valuable source for this study due to its ability to reflect prevailing societal issues and concerns. Consequently, this section examines the language used in national news and official speeches over time, up to the point of theoretical saturation. Examples (19)–(24) were drawn from this subset.

• HOPELESSNESS IS OLDNESS

19. *kešvar pir xāh=ad šod*
country old want.PRS=3SG be.PST.3SG
“The country will become old.”

• HOPELESSNESS IS BACKWARD

20. *ne-mi=xāh=im dar gozašte be-mān=im*
NEG-IND=want.PRS=1PL PREP past SBJV-stay.PRS=1PL
“We do not want to stay in the past.”

• HOPELESSNESS IS STAGNATION

21. *yek niru=i injā xāb raft-e va ghāfel*
INDF.ART force=INDF here asleep go.PST.3SG-PTCP and unaware
ast
be.PRS.3SG
“A force is sleeping here and unaware.”

• HOPEFULNESS IS FORWARD

22. *irān emruz negāh=e be āyande dār=ad*
Iran today look=EZ PREP future have.PRS=3SG
“Iran is looking towards the future today.”

• HOPEFULNESS IS BEGINNING

23. *fasl=e jadid=i dar ravābet=e irān bā jahān*
chapter=EZ new=INDF PREP relations=EZ Iran PREP world
āghaz šod-eh ast

begin be.PST.3SG-PTCP be.PRS.3SG

“A new chapter has begun in Iran’s relations with the world.”

- [[X]CL enšālā/enšālā [X]CL] ‘hopefulness’

24. *enšāalāh* *dar* *in* *mamlekat* *ra=ye* *aksariyat* *hokm-farmā*
 God-willing PREP this country vote=EZ majority dominant
 be-šav=ad
 SBJV-become.PRS=3GS

“God willing, in this country, the majority's vote will be dominant.”

Table 7 presents the token frequencies of the source domains associated with the hopelessness and hopefulness conceptual metaphors in official speeches and TV news from the 1970s to the 2010s.

Table 7. Source Domains for Conceptual Metaphors of Hopelessness and Hopefulness in Official Speeches and TV News (1970s–2010s)

Decades	1970s	1980s	1990s	2000s	2010s	Total	Total relative Frequency
Source domains							
HOPELESSNESS							
Captivity	5	4	6	6	4	25	18.79%
Destruction	0	6	0	9	8	23	17.29%
Death	0	5	2	1	14	22	16.54%
Malaise	2	3	0	3	4	12	9.02%
Downward	0	1	0	2	7	10	7.51%
Object	2	2	0	1	2	7	5.26%
Bitterness	0	1	0	2	4	7	5.26%
Loss of ownership	0	3	0	3	0	6	4.51%
End	0	5	0	0	0	5	3.75%
Stagnation	0	1	0	0	3	4	3%
Backward	1	1	0	0	2	4	3%
Lack of possession	0	0	0	0	2	2	1.50%
Darkness	1	1	0	0	0	2	1.50%
Inability	0	1	0	0	0	1	0.75%
Burning	0	0	0	1	0	1	0.75%
Old age	0	0	0	0	1	1	0.75%
Cold	0	1	0	0	0	1	0.75%
HOPEFULNESS							
Object	1	6	2	1	3	13	28.26%
Dynamism	6	1	5	0	1	13	28.26%
Light	0	1	1	1	2	5	10.86%
Freedom	1	1	3	0	0	5	10.86%
Upward	2	0	3	0	0	5	10.86%
Wakefulness	0	0	0	1	1	2	4.34%
Forward	0	0	0	0	2	2	4.34%
Beginning	0	0	0	0	1	1	2.17%

As illustrated in Table 7, hopelessness was conceptualized in official speeches and TV news from the 1970s to the 2010s, with the source domain of ‘captivity’ emerging as the most frequently used concrete domain to encode this concept. This tendency was particularly evident during the 1970s and the 1990s. Conversely, in the 1980s and the 2000s, the domain of ‘destruction’ assumed a prominent role in the conceptualization of hopelessness. Notably, in the 2010s, the concrete domain of ‘death’ demonstrated the highest token frequency for conveying a sense of hopelessness.

As shown in Table 7, hopefulness was chiefly conceptualized using the domains of ‘dynamism’ and ‘object.’ This pattern was particularly conspicuous during the 1970s and the 1990s for the domain of ‘dynamism,’ and in the 1980s and the 2010s for the domain of ‘object.’ It was remarkable that during the 2000s era, almost concrete domains encoding hopefulness exhibited an almost equal token frequency.

In news and official speeches, only one instance of non-metaphorical construction of hopefulness “[enšālā [X]_{CL}]” was identified during the 1970s.

Table 8 indicates the fluctuating rate of hopelessness and hopefulness in TV news and official speeches spanning the period from the 1970s to the 2010s.

Table 8. Hopelessness and Hopefulness Frequencies in the Official Speeches and TV News (1970s–2010s)

Decades	Hopelessness	Hopefulness	Difference of frequencies
1970s	10	11	+1
1980s	35	9	26
1990s	8	14	+6
2000s	28	3	25
2010s	51	10	41
Total	132	47	85

As shown in Table 8, unlike the other subsets of the corpus, the token frequency of hopefulness exceeded that of hopelessness in TV news and official speeches during the 1970s and the 1990s. Therefore, the frequency differences presented in the table indicate the rate of hopelessness for each decade, except for these two decades, which are marked with a “+” symbol to indicate the rate of hopefulness in those periods. Conversely, Figure 5 portrays the hopelessness rate as a gray line; notably, these two decades show negative values, indicating the lack of hopelessness and the existence of hopefulness.

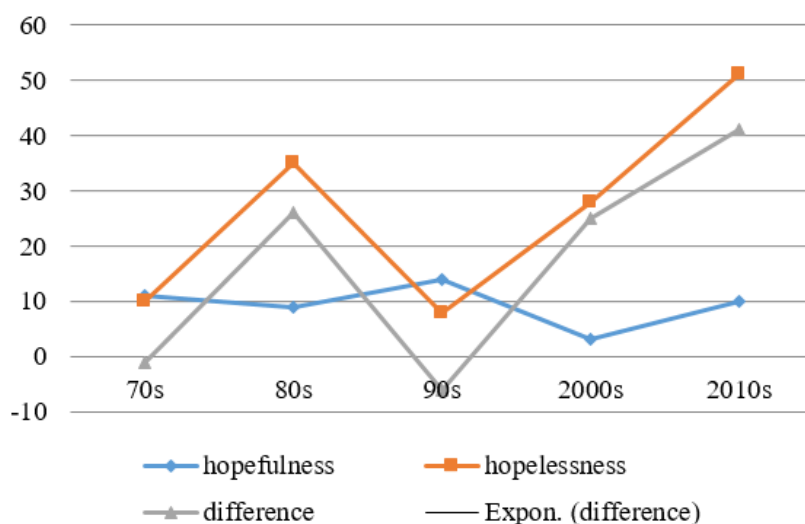


Figure 5. Fluctuation Rate of Hopelessness and Hopefulness in the Official Speeches and TV News (1970s–2010s)

As illustrated in Figure 5, a noticeable degree of hopefulness is evident in society during two decades, namely the 1970s and the 1990s. Conversely, in the remaining decades, a clear increase in hopelessness is observed.

5. Discussion

The preceding section illustrated the fluctuating rates of hopelessness and hopefulness across all subsets of the corpus—including films, stories, official speeches, and TV news. The study’s hypothesis posits that Iranians presently experience significantly higher levels of hopelessness compared to the past; however, the data presented thus far neither convincingly supports nor refutes this claim. Consequently, Figure 6 presents a comprehensive representation of the cumulative token frequencies of hopelessness and hopefulness metaphors, as well as non-metaphorical constructions, within each decade for the three subsets of the corpus. Across all decades, a clear prevalence of hopelessness over hopefulness is evident, as shown by the token frequency analysis. The numerical value depicted by the gray line quantifies the difference between these two concepts, signifying the magnitude of hopelessness.

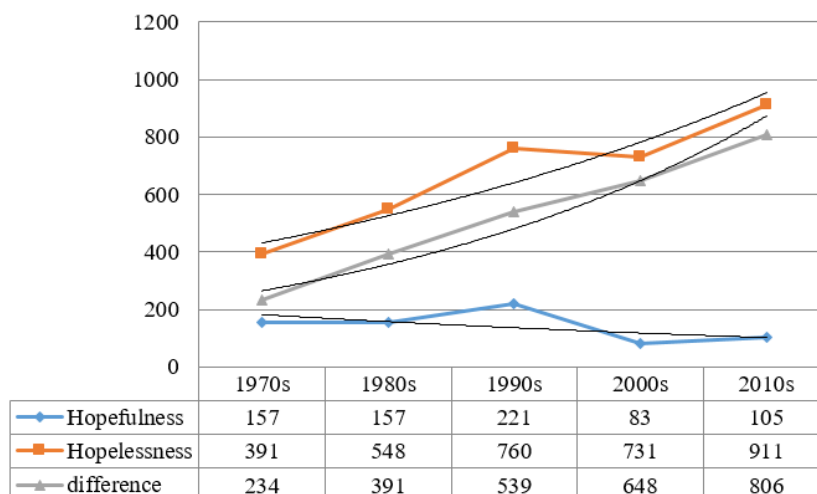


Figure 6. Changing Rates of Hopelessness and Hopefulness in the Iranian Society (1970s–2010s)

According to Figure 6, Iranian society has undergone a highly remarkable and consistent trend of increasing hopelessness over the past five decades, in line with global trends. Therefore, the study's hypothesis is strongly supported. In other words, influenced by global trends of increasing hopelessness, Iranian society is experiencing higher levels of hopelessness than in previous decades.

To develop a comprehensive cognitive model of hopelessness and hopefulness among Iranians, it is imperative to calculate the total token frequencies of the source domains for metaphors and linguistic construction schemas used to encode these concepts across the entire corpus. Such an endeavor will facilitate a deeper understanding of how Iranians conceptualize hope. Building upon the tables presented in the preceding sections, it is evident that Iranians conceptualize hopelessness through the notion of 'inability,' whereas hopefulness is characterized by the metaphors of 'object' and the 'reliance on another entity.'

6. Conclusions

This study provided a comprehensive investigation into the changing rates of hopelessness and hopefulness in Iranian society from the 1970s to the 2010s through a cognitive linguistic perspective. To achieve this objective, an extensive corpus was analyzed, including top-grossing films, best-selling books, TV news broadcasts, and speeches delivered by officials in each decade. By examining the token frequency of metaphors and linguistic constructions associated with hopelessness and hopefulness across different periods, the findings reveal a pervasive and steadily increasing sense of hopelessness within Iranian society during this time frame, consistent with broader global trends. Furthermore, the study sheds light on the cognitive conceptualization of hopelessness among Iranians, where the more concrete source domain of 'inability' is employed to encode hopelessness, representing a perceived lack of capability or competence. In contrast, the conceptual framework underlying the codification of hopefulness is characterized by the cognitive elements of an 'object' and the 'reliance on another entity.' This framework illustrates that hopefulness is conceptualized as a tangible entity—characterized by existence, spatial presence, and possession—while simultaneously relying on external entities for support. It is worth noting that these findings are based on the selected corpus and may be altered by investigating different corpora. Moreover, a notable limitation of this study is that both frequency extraction and cognitive model identification are performed manually, as the corpus is not digitized. This may have impacted the precision of the research findings.

Ethical Considerations

Not applicable

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Conflict of Interest

The author declares no conflicts of interest related to this research.

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Appendix A: The List of Selected Films

Number	1 st Decade	Director	Year	English Title	Original Title
1	1972–1982	A. Naderi	1973	Tangna	tangnā
2	1972–1982	P. Sayad	1977	During the Night	dar emtedād-e šab
3	1972–1982	B. Beyzai	1972	Downpour	ragbār
4	1972–1982	A. Hatami	1978	Broken-Hearted People	suteh-Delān
5	1972–1982	F. Gole	1975	The Beehive	kandu
6	1972–1982	M. Kimiyai	1974	The Deer	gavaznhā
Number	2 nd Decade	Director	Year	English Title	Original Title
1	1982–1992	A. Kiyarostami	1987	Where Is the Friend's House?	xāne=ye dust kojāst
2	1982–1992	K. Ayari	1987	Beyond the Fire	ān su=ye ātash
3	1982–1992	A. Naderi	1984	The Runner	davandeh
4	1982–1992	K. Partovi	1988	Golnar	golnār
5	1982–1992	B. Afkhami	1990	The bride	arus
6	1982–1992	D. Mehrjui	1989	Hamun	hāmūn
Number	3 rd Decade	Director	Year	English Title	Original Title
1	1992–2002	D. Mehrjui	1997	Leila	leylā
2	1992–2002	M. Kimiyai	1999	Protest	eterāz
3	1992–2002	R. Banietemad	1995	The Blue Veiled	rusari ābi
4	1992–2002	M. H. Latifi	1999	Sunglasses	eynak dudi
5	1992–2002	F. Jeyrani	1998	Red	ghermez
6	1992–2002	M. Makhmalbaf	1992	Once Upon a Time, Cinema	nāser al-dīn šah āktor=e sinemā
Number	4 th Decade	Director	Year	English Title	Original Title
1	2002–2012	E. Hatamikiya	2002	Low Heights	ertefa=e past
2	2002–2012	M. Majidi	2005	The Willow Tree	bid=e majnun
3	2002–2012	A. Farhadi	2011	A Separation	jodāi=ye nāder az simin
4	2002–2012	A. Farhadi	2009	About Elly	dar bāre=ye eli
5	2002–2012	D. Mehrjui	2007	Santouri	santuri
6	2002–2012	K. Tabrizi	2004	A Piece of Bread	yek teke nān
Number	5 th Decade	Director	Year	English Title	Original Title
1	2012–2022	A. R. Kahani	2014	Bed Rest	esterāhat motlagh
2	2012–2022	M. Kiyai	2015	Barcode	bārkod
3	2012–2022	N. Abyar	2013	Track 143	šiyār=e 143
4	2012–2022	A. Farhadi	2016	The Salesman	forušandeh
5	2012–2022	B. Nik-Nezhad	2017	Wasp Nest	lune zanbur
6	2012–2022	S. Moghadam	2015	Sperm Whale	nahang=e anbar

Appendix B: The List of Selected Stories

Number	1st Decade	Author	Year	English Title	Original Title	Publisher
1	1972–1982	B. Alavi	1978	Her eyes	čašmhāyaš	Amirkabir
2	1972–1982	H. Shahdadi	1978	The Night of Fear	šab-e hol	Ketab-e Zaman
3	1972–1982	GH. Hashemi-Nezhad,	1979	Elephant in the Dark	fil dar tāriki	Ketab-e Zaman
4	1972–1982	N. Ebrahimi	1973	The Son of Business	ebn-e mašghaleh	Ruzbahan
5	1972–1982	A. Mahmud	1974	Neighbors	hamsāyehā	Amirkabir
6	1972–1982	M. R. Sarshar	1978	Asil Abad	asil ābād	Farhang-e Eslami
Number	2nd Decade	Author	Year	English Title	Original Title	Publisher
1	1982–1992	M. Shojai	1989	The Docked Ship	kašti=ye pahlugerefteh	Javan
2	1982–1992	E. Fasih	1983	Soraya in a Coma	sorayā dar eghmā	Nashr-e Now
3	1982–1992	A. Hojati-Kermani	1989	Fourteen Stories	čāhārdah dāstān	Mashal-e Daneshju
4	1982–1992	A. Marufi	1989	Symphony of the Dead	samfoni=ye mordegān	Ghoghnus
5	1982–1992	SH. Parsi-Pour	1989	Women Without Men	zanān bedun=e mardān	Noghreh
6	1982–1992	J. Modares-Sadeghi,	1983	The marsh Gavkhuni	gāvxuni	Nashr-e Now
Number	3rd Decade	Author	Year	English Title	Original Title	Publisher
1	1992–2002	F. Haj-Seyedjavadi,	1995	Drunkard Morning	bāmdād=e xomār	Alborz
2	1992–2002	M. Mastur	2000	Kiss the Lovely Face of God	ruy=e māh=e xodāvand rā bebus	Nashr-e Markaz
3	1992–2002	R. Amirkhani	1999	His Ego	man=e u	Ofogh
4	1992–2002	B. Najdi	1994	The Leopards Who Have run With Me	yuzpalangāni ke bā man dāvidehand	Nashr-e Markaz
5	1992–2002	M. Moadabpour	2004	Yasmine	yāsamin	Shadan
6	1992–2002	N. Ebrahimi	1995	A Quiet Romance	yek āseghāne=ye ārām	Ruzbahan
Number	4th Decade	Author	Year	English Title	Original Title	Publisher
1	2002–2012	Z. Pirzad	2001	I'll Turn Off the Lights	čerāghhā rā man xāmuš mikonam	Nashr-e Markaz
2	2002–2012	N. Ebrahimi	2010	Once Again, the City I Liked	bār=e digar šahri ke dust midāštam	Ruzbahan
3	2002–2012	M. Mastur	2004	The Bone of a Pig and the Hands of a Leprous	ostexān=e xuk va dasthā=ye jozāmi	Cheshmeh
4	2002–2012	S. Karamyar	2009	Immortal	nāmīrā	Neyestan
5	2002–2012	H. Ahmadzade	2005	Chess With Doomsday Machine	šatranj bā māšin=e ghiyāmat	Sure-ye Mehr
6	2002–2012	F. Jafari	2007	Piano Cafe	kāfe piyāno	Cheshmeh
Number	5th Decade	Author	Year	English Title	Original Title	Publisher
1	2022–present	H. Moradi-Kermani	2014	The End of the Cucumber	tah=e xiyār	Moin
2	2022–present	A. Yusefzadeh	2014	Those Twenty-three People	ān bisto se nafār	Sure-ye Mehr
3	2022–present	B. Zarabizadeh	2011	The Daughter of Shina	doxtar=e šinā	Sure-ye Mehr
4	2022–present	R. Amirkhani	2012	Gheydar	gheydār	Ofogh
5	2022–present	A. Gholami	2014	People	ādamhā	Sales
6	2022–present	M. Shojai	2021	The Sun in the Hijab	āftāb dar hejāb	Neyestan