

## Learning Style Preferences in Male and Female Professional Translators

Elham Akbari <sup>1</sup>, Amin Karimnia <sup>2\*</sup>

*1. Department of English Language, Marvdasht Branch, Islamic Azad University, Marvdasht, Iran*

*2. Department of English Language, Fasa Branch, Islamic Azad University, Fasa, Iran*

\*Corresponding author: aminkarimnia@yahoo.com

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### Abstract

This study investigated learning style preferences among professional translators. The purposes of the study were to (a) find the prevailing learning style among the Iranian professional translators; (b) reveal any significant difference in the translators' learning style preferences in terms of gender; and (c) find any significant difference between individual learning style and translation competence of the male and female translators. To this end, 110 professional translators from 35 translation centers in three Southern Provinces of Iran (Fars, Hormozgan, and Bushehr) were selected through non-probability sampling. The data pertaining to learning style were collected through an adaptation of Honey and Mumford's learning style questionnaire, and translation competence was examined through a text that the participants translated. Findings revealed that the translators' predominant learning style was Reflector, followed by Pragmatist, Activist, and Theorist, although those preferring the Theorist style showed better performance. Furthermore, the findings did not show any significant difference between translators' gender and learning style preferences. Finally, results of one-way ANOVA revealed that there was a statistically significant difference across the groups in terms of learning style preferences and translators' translation competence. Some pedagogical implications were also discussed.

**Keywords:** learning style preferences, Iranian professional translators, translation competence, male and female translators, performance

### **Introduction**

Recent research into education has revealed the significant fact that different people tend to learn in different ways or styles. Incorporating learning styles into educational programs can bring about several benefits. For learners, awareness of learning styles is associated with knowledge about their strengths, potentials, and semiconscious reactions, behaviors, and preferences. This knowledge overall helps learners structure their professional lives more effectively. Learning styles, of course, may be of different types, such as visual, auditory, logical, intuitive, competitive or collaborative.

Similarly, teachers can draw inspirations from the theories of learning style, trying to adapt their methods to their students (Brown, 2000; Karimnia & Mahjubi, 2013; Karimnia & Afshari, 2014). When mismatches occur between learning styles of the students and the methods employed by teachers, students may feel frustrated and less motivated in the learning process, do poorly on tests, in some cases decide to change their major, and even drop out of school or university. To overcome these problems, teachers should try to strike a balance in the structure of methods. If this balance is achieved, students are expected to experience an increased comfort level and willingness to learn (Felder & Spurlin, 2005).

Along with various academic fields, probing into learning style preferences (henceforth LSPs) can bring about specific merits for translation trainees and professional translators. A translator who is aware of his/her learning style is more likely to perform better in professional practice. Trying to investigate this assumption, this research focuses on LSPs in graduate students of translation in a professional context. Despite the importance of LSP awareness, as the translation studies literature suggests, this topic has remained relatively underdeveloped. Contributing to the literature, this study (a) finds the overall LSPs among the Iranian professional translators; (b) reveals any significant difference in the translators' LSPs in terms of gender; and (c) discovers any significant difference between individual learning style and translation competence of the male and female translators. The findings can motivate translator trainers to use their trainees' preferred learning styles as a strategy to promote the student's learning process, thus improving the efficiency of translator education and possibly the quality of translations.

Abdul Nasir (2009) investigated the learning styles of early adult students from different cultural backgrounds in Malaysia. He found that all the multi-ethnic students practiced all the four learning styles (viz. Activist, Reflector, Theorist and Pragmatist). The overall distribution of LSPs showed a pattern of reflector, pragmatist, theorist and activist. The Chinese and Indian exhibited similar a pattern: reflector, pragmatist, theorist and activist. The Malays demonstrated a slightly different distribution, in which the predominant style was reflector, followed by theorist, pragmatist and activist. The research also revealed that the Malays, Chinese and Indians were categorized under moderate activist, reflector, theorist and pragmatist when compared to the norm, with the exception that Indians tended to be stronger activists.

Aziz et al. (2012) tried to determine the LSPs of pharmacy students at the University of Malaya, Malaysia. The Honey and Mumford's Learning Style Questionnaire (LSQ) was administered twice to all undergraduate pharmacy students (n=240). The LSQ subsumed the standard four learning preferences (viz. activist, reflector, theorist and pragmatist). The LSQ employed in the study showed a satisfactory test-retest correlation (0.57 to 0.66) and a moderate internal reliability (0.53-0.61). The reflector learning style was the prevailing (60.4%) one among the students, followed by the theorist (8.8%), pragmatist (8.8%), and activist (6.2%). Another 15.8% of the students did not show any dominant learning styles. The LSPs were statistically independent of the demographic variables examined, such as level of academic year, gender, race and pre-university qualifications. Aziz et al. (2012) finally suggested that a range of teaching methods and learning activities should be provided in pharmacy education to incorporate the variety of learning styles that students in the field may exhibit.

Sopian et al. (2013) probed into the learning styles of Arabic language students at the University Technology Mara (UiTM), Malacca Campus, using the four learning styles proposed in Honey and Mumford's LSQ. The purpose of this study was to determine whether or not a similarity or significant difference existed in the learning styles of respondents in terms of gender and the academic program (e.g., Business or Tourism Studies). Some 175 respondents participated in this survey, which analyzed the data collected from questionnaires through descriptive and inferential statistics. Results revealed

that there was no significant difference in the learning styles between genders. The survey also found that there was no significant difference between students of Business Studies program and those of the Hospitality and Tourism Studies.

Studying accounting education students, Polat et al. (2015) tried to unravel the effect of learning styles on the students' performance. The research included the students of Aksaray University (ASU), Faculty of Economics and Administrative Science. Honey and Mumford's LSQ was used. The predominant learning style shown by the students was the pragmatist, followed by the reflector, theorist, and activist styles. The findings also revealed that there was a relationship between gender and learning styles, as well as a significant difference between male and female students.

As the literature generally shows there are three basic components in studies on LSP: the predominant learning style and the general pattern that a population shows, a specific field of education, and participants' gender. Along with other academic fields, investigating LSPs in professional translators appears to be an interesting topic for research. The purpose of this study is to probe into LSPs in a sample of professional translators in Iran. The study, as it will be explored in further detail, will suggest several important implications for practical translation and learning style.

## **Method**

### **Participants**

The population from which the participants were selected for this study included Iranian EFL translators as native speakers of Persian. To conduct the survey, 110 professional translators from 35 translation centers in Southern Provinces of Iran including Fars, Hormozgan and Bushehr participated in this study. The sample consisted of both female and male translators who were selected through the convenient sampling procedure. The participants were all graduates of English translation, holding MA or BA degrees. They were aged 25-42 years with at least 2 years of experience in professional translation.

### **Instrumentation**

To answer the research questions raised, two data collection instruments were used: (a) a learning style preferences questionnaire designed by Honey and Mumford (2006); and (b) a text to be translated from Daneshvari (2008). In

the following sub-sections, each of these data collection instruments is described.

**Honey and Mumford's (2006) learning style preferences.** The first instrument of this study, which included 60 items, was a questionnaire of cognitive learning styles adapted by Honey and Mumford (2006). Proposing a four-way classification, Honey and Mumford (2006) developed a learning style scale which was inspired by Kolb's (1981) primary work. However, Honey and Mumford's version is simplified for use in a practical training situation. According to LSQ, the Activist, Theorist, Pragmatist and Reflector styles are the learning facets that individuals naturally prefer. Presumably, learners who try to maximize their own personal learning gain should be aware of their learning style and seek out opportunities to foster their learning through the particular style.

In this study, to adapt the instrument to a translation-specific context, the consistency and relevance of the statements in the original questionnaire were scrutinized. The questionnaire was, then, piloted with twenty participants, and its reliability was found to be .88 based on Cronbach's alpha, which showed a good level of conceptual relatedness among the items.

**Text to be translated.** The second instrument of the present study was a text extracted from the book *Essential Words for the TOEFL* by Steven Matthiesen which was translated into Persian by Daneshvari (2008). Daneshvari's collection covered hundreds of words along with many texts and their translations, which provided a good source for testing translation. After the questionnaire and the text were ultimately compiled, they were put into a unified format prepared for the stage of empirical data collection.

### **Procedure**

The data for this study were collected through an adaptation of Honey and Mumford's (2006) original questionnaire. To collect the data in practice, copies of the questionnaire were distributed physically among available participants, and in some cases the copies were sent via e-mail to those who were not readily available. Before administering the questionnaires, a brief instruction was given to the participants informing them of the objective of the self-reporting questionnaire. Within this same section, all of the details about the mechanics

of selecting choices were shared with them. A participant's score on the scale was computed by summing the number of responses the person provided, as a widely used and common calculative method in survey research.

The participants were asked to answer the question within approximately 30 minutes. Next, the text to be translated, on a separate sheet, was administered to the translators to translate and henceforth assess their level of translation competence. The quantitative data gathered through the LSPs questionnaire were analyzed in SPSS 20. Through descriptive statistics, such as frequency and percentage, the overall distribution pattern of the translators' LSPs was found. Inferential statistics, including cross-tabulation and chi-square test, were used to discover any significant difference between male and female translators. Additionally, one-way ANOVA and multiple comparisons were utilized to reveal any significant difference between individual LSPs and translation competence of male and female professional translators under study.

### **Results**

This study was guided by three questions that respectively addressed three central issues pertaining to learning style and professional translators: the prevailing learning style among the professional translators; the possible impact of gender on preferred learning styles; and any significant difference between individual LSPs and translation competence. Each of these issues are addressed in detail in the following sections.

#### **The predominant learning style**

**The first research question:** How are learning style preferences distributed among the Iranian male and female professional translators?

To answer the first question regarding the overall LSPs among the professional translators, descriptive statistics such as frequency and percentage were calculated (see Table 1).

Table 1.  
*Frequency and Percentage of Translators' Preferred Learning Style*

	Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Activist	18	16.36	16.4	16.4
Reflector	51	46.36	46.4	62.7
Valid Theorist	14	12.73	12.7	75.5
Pragmatist	27	24.55	24.5	100.0
Total	110	100.0	100.0	

As demonstrated in Table 1, the majority of translators (46.36%, 51 translators) showed the reflector style, whereas 24.55% of them (27 translators) were characterized by the pragmatist style. Moreover, 16.36% of the translators (18 translators) showed the activist learning style, and only 12.73% (14 translators) revealed the specifications of the theorist style.

In addition to the numerical calculations, Figure 4.1 also provides a graph view of the findings.

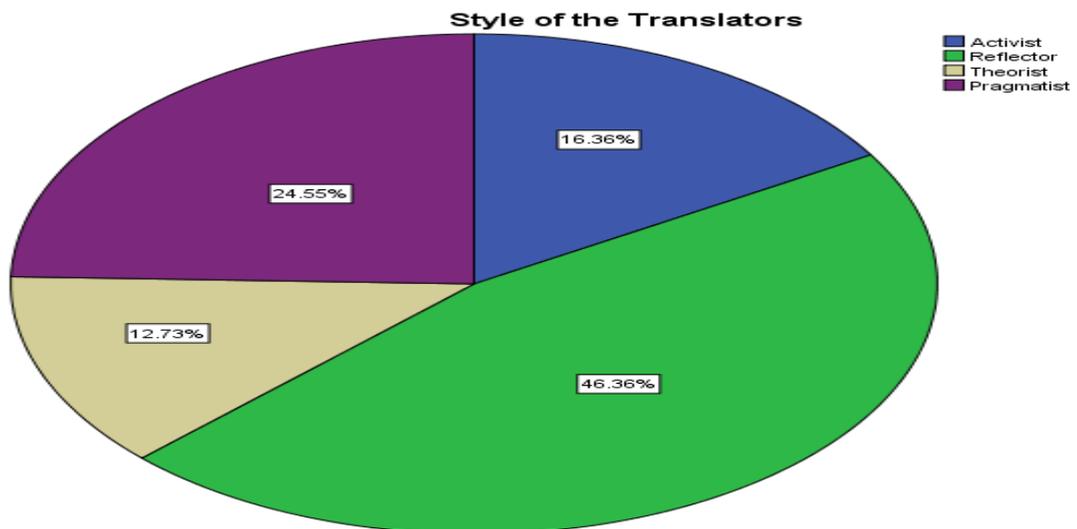


Figure 1. Frequency of Learning Style among Iranian Professional Translators

### Impact of gender on leaning style

**The second research question:** Is there any significant difference among preferred learning style(s) of Iranian male and female professional translators?

To find any significant difference among the LSPs of the Iranian male and female professional translators, cross-tabulation was first obtained for the translators' gender and their LSPs. Next, chi-square test was conducted to analyze and compare the LSPs between the two genders. Table 2 depicts the results of cross-tabulation of the translators' gender and LSPs.

Table 2.  
*Translators' Gender and Their Learning Style Preferences*

		Style of the Translators				Total	
		Activist	Reflector	Theorist	Pragmatist		
<b>Gender of the Translators</b>	Male	Count	8	28	8	11	55
		% within Gender of the Translators	14.5%	50.9%	14.5%	20.0%	100.0%
	Female	Count	10	23	6	16	55
		% within Gender of the Translators	18.2%	41.8%	10.9%	29.1%	100.0%
<b>Total</b>	Count	18	51	14	27	110	
	% within Gender of the Translators	16.4%	46.4%	12.7%	24.5%	100.0%	

As shown in Table 2, more than half of the male translators (50.9%, 28 translators) were identified as reflectors, whereas 41.8% of female translators (23 translators) were recognized as having the reflector learning style. Similarly, 20 % of the male translators (11 translators) were found to be pragmatists, whereas female translators showed a 29.1% preference for the pragmatist learning style. Moreover, 14.5% of males (8 translators) and 18.2% of females (10 translators) preferred the activist style. As far as the theorist learning style is concerned, only a few number of male translators (14.5%, 8 translators) were observed as theorists. Approximately, the females preferring the theorist style also showed a relatively low figure (10.9%). To find whether such differences were significant, a chi-square test of independence was conducted (see Table 3).

Table 3.  
*Chi-Square Test of the Translators' Gender and Their Learning Style Preferences*

	Value	df	Asymp. Sig. (2-sided)
Pearson Chi-Square	1.924	3	.588
Likelihood Ratio	1.932	3	.587
Linear-by-Linear Association	.304	1	.581
N of Valid Cases	110		

As illustrated in Table 3, there was no significant difference between translators' gender and their LSPs.).

#### **Individual learning style and translation competence**

**The third research question:** Is there any significant difference between individual learning style and translation competence of male and female professional translators?

The last research question of this study tried to discover any significant difference between individual learning style and translation competence of male and female professional translators. To do so, group statistics was first obtained for each group and their translation competence. Following that, the one-way ANOVA was run to analyze and compare the mean scores among the four groups of learning styles. Finally, multiple comparisons test was conducted to spot the point of difference (see Table 4).

Table 4.  
*Group Statistics of Translators' Learning Style and Their Scores of Translation Ability*

	N	Mean	Std. Deviation	Std. Error	95% Confidence Interval for Mean		Minimum	Maximum
					Lower Bound	Upper Bound		
Activist	18	18.06	.802	.189	17.66	18.45	17	19
Reflector	51	18.10	.985	.138	17.82	18.38	16	20
Theorist	14	19.07	.829	.221	18.59	19.55	18	20
Pragmatist	27	17.26	1.228	.236	16.77	17.74	16	19
Total	110	18.01	1.129	.108	17.80	18.22	16	20

As Table 4 shows, the translators with the theorist style showed a better performance in translating the text as the mean scores ( $M=19.07$ ) and standard deviation ( $SD=0.82$ ) confirmed. In contrast, the pragmatist translators had the lowest mean scores ( $M=17.26$ ,  $SD=1.22$ ). Moreover, the reflector and activist styles showed approximately the same mean scores. The translators with the reflector style had the mean scores of  $M=18.10$  and  $SD= 0.98$ , while those characterized by the activist style showed the mean scores of  $M=18.06$  and  $SD=.80$ . Therefore, based on the results of Table 4, translators preferring the theorist learning style outperformed other translators in their practical examination.

Furthermore, one-way ANOVA was run to reveal any significant difference between individual LSPs and translation competence of male and female professional translators (see Table 5).

Table 5.  
*One-Way ANOVA between Individual Learning Style and Translators' Translation Ability*

	Sum of Squares	df	Mean Square	F	Sig.
Between Groups	31.423	3	10.474	10.322	.000
Within Groups	107.568	106	1.015		
Total	138.991	109			

The results of Table 5 highlighted that there was a statistically significant difference across the groups in terms of their LSPs and their translation competence ( $F_{3,106}=10.32$ ,  $p=.0001$ ).

Since the observed significant difference among the groups would not conveniently suggest that all the groups were necessarily different from each other, multiple comparisons test was conducted to accurately identify the *point of difference* (see Table 6).

Table 6.  
*Multiple Comparisons of Scores of Translators and Their Learning Style Preferences*

(I) Style of the Translators	(J) Style of the Translators	Mean Difference (I-J)	Std. Error	Sig.
Activist	Reflector	-.042	.276	1.000
	Theorist	-1.016*	.359	.033
	Pragmatist	.796	.307	.064
Reflector	Activist	.042	.276	1.000
	Theorist	-.973*	.304	.011
	Pragmatist	.839*	.240	.004
Theorist	Activist	1.016*	.359	.033
	Reflector	.973*	.304	.011
	Pragmatist	1.812*	.332	.000
Pragmatist	Activist	-.796	.307	.064
	Reflector	-.839*	.240	.004
	Theorist	-1.812*	.332	.000

\*. The mean difference is significant at the 0.05 level.

The results of multiple comparisons in Table 6 revealed that the activist style was significantly different from the theorist ( $p < 0.033$ ), although the former did not differ from the rest of the groups in terms of their mean scores on translation competence (reflector= $p > 1.000$ ; pragmatist= $p > 0.064$ ). In addition, the reflector group was significantly different from the theorist ( $p < 0.011$ ) and pragmatist ( $p < 0.004$ ) groups, whereas the reflectors did not show any

significant difference from the activist group ( $p > 1.000$ ) in terms of their mean scores on translation competence.

Moreover, the theorist group differed significantly from all groups in terms of their mean scores on translation competence as the  $p$ -value was less than 0.05 (differed from Activist group=  $p < 0.033$ ; from Reflector=  $p < 0.011$ ; from Pragmatist  $p < 0.000$ ). Finally, as far as translation competence is concerned, the pragmatist group was significantly different from the theorist ( $p < 0.000$ ) and the reflector ( $p < 0.004$ ) groups, whereas the pragmatist group did not differ significantly from the activist group ( $p > 0.064$ ).

### **Discussion**

The first research question in this present study addressed translators' predominant LSP and the general learning style distribution. The majority of the professional translators under study showed the reflector learning style, followed by pragmatist, activist, and theorist styles. In fact, the Iranian English translators were more adapted to observation and issue analysis, and tended to think carefully before taking action or making conclusion. Moreover, according to Honey and Mumford (2006), reflectors would avoid risk and would feel more comfortable with taking a back seat in meetings or other social situations. They also preferred structured learning experience than active experimentation. Besides, the translators who participated in this study were all Asian students who are usually known to be passive and mostly reflective learners, rather than activist learners (Wong, 2004).

Furthermore, the Iranian English translators exhibited a high degree of pragmatist style, following the prevailing reflector style. Compared with the Honey and Mumford's postulates (2006), the Iranian English translators were essentially practical, down-to-earth people, and mostly open to practical ideas, theories, and techniques, as well as learning activities with immediate practicality or relevance to their jobs or personal life. In other words, they would not welcome vague open-ended or abstract/philosophical discussion or learning situation/activities where they see no concrete/immediate solution, genuine need, relevance or immediate rewards.

The present findings confirmed the observations of Abdul Nasir (2009), who investigated the learning styles of early adult students from different cultural backgrounds in Malaysia. He found that the LSPs, in order of frequency, were reflector, pragmatist, theorist and activist, which appears to be a pattern similar to the overall pattern found in the present study. Moreover, the results of this study were also in line with those of Aziz et al. (2012), who tried

to determine the LSPs of pharmacy students. They found that the reflector style was the most preferred one among the students. However, the results of this study were in contrast with those of Polat et al. (2015), who investigated the impact of accounting students' learning styles on their performance. They found that the prevailing learning style characterizing the students was pragmatist. These observations, of course, emphasize the context-specific variety of individuals and fields of study, as far as LSPs are concerned.

The second research question addressed the possible difference among the translators' LSPs in terms of gender. Through the tests (cross-tabulation and chi-square) conducted, no significant difference was observed between translators' gender and the LSPs. Even though, theories claim that males and females are different, the results were not consistent with the norms. According to Abdul Nasir (2009), this could be due to the learning environment in the respective universities that treat males and females equally. Female students are not discriminated in terms of knowledge accessibility and opportunity to success. Hence, students are free to apply any style that suits them most as long as such a style could guarantee the desired learning outcome. Another possible explanation for this lack of significant difference in terms of gender could be found in Shahbuddin and Rohizani's (2004) research, which suggests that similar learning styles between males and females are governed by the format and requirements of the curriculum practiced at educational institutions.

The findings of this study were in line with the study of Sopian et al. (2013), who investigated learning styles among Arabic language students at university technology Mara, Malacca campus. They found that both male and female students exhibited all learning styles in their learning activities and there was no significant difference between male and female students. However, the results of the present study were found to be in contrast with those of Polat et al. (2015), who observed a relationship between the gender and the learning styles and a significant difference between male and female students.

Polat et al. suggest that several factors, such as culture, family, values of society, environmental factors, education, and so on, could affect the internalization of learning styles. Therefore, "it can be considered as reasonable that the male students adopt the activist learning style in the male dominated society; and female students adopt a logical and systematic learning style which she can share the risk and acts as a group" (Polata et al., 2015, p. 1846).

The third research question tried to reveal any significant difference between individual learning style and translation competence of male and female professional translators. As a result of the tests (one-way ANOVA) conducted, the translators favoring the theorists style had a better performance

in translating the text, followed by reflectors, activists, and pragmatists. According to Reiss (1971), those with the theorist style would be good in translating technical and philosophical texts. On the other hand, such translators would feel frustrated in translating creative and literary works (e.g., poetry), because their theoretical character prevents them from producing artistic works.

Moreover, results of one-way ANOVA revealed that there was a statistically significant difference across the groups in terms of LSPs and translators' competence. In fact, from a general perspective, the translation process varied due to the individual differences of the translators (see Coba, 2007). In other words, each translator possessed his/her own individual traits that uniquely affected his/her behavior in the act of translating. Moreover, Savory (as cited in El-Haddad, 1999) observed a relationship between translation quality, translators'/authors' personality types, and even readers' personality. He believed that translators would come up with the most satisfying translations provided that their personalities were in tune with those of the authors and target recipients.

According to Kolb (1985), no particular learning style is superior over another. Instead, strong preference in all four styles is encouraged. Therefore, the present findings could motivate translators to be aware of their dominant learning style preferences, while reinforcing the others. Practically, translators need to reach a balance in their learning styles, taking a more active role in their learning process. Otherwise, their achievement would be confined to their prevailing learning style.

The results of this study may be of benefit to EFL teachers/educators, students, and syllabus designers, and translator trainers. The findings may encourage trainers who still believe in a teacher-centered environment to change their viewpoints in favor of more learner-centered approaches. In fact, being aware of the LSPs of translation students can help educators to be more effective in the classroom. Trainers with sufficient knowledge of students' learning preferences can facilitate both teaching and learning, while enhancing the efficiency of the learning-teaching cycle.

Meanwhile, students should also be aware of their LSPs. Jaouen (1990) claimed that helping students understand learning styles opens up a new horizon to them and increases their tolerance for each other's differences. Hand (1990) also underscored that knowledge of learning styles is not only a powerful tool to teachers, but also a valuable facet to students. By examining their own and their classmates' learning styles, translation students can learn new strategies for accomplishing diverse tasks. Afterwards, they gain confidence in their strengths and develop diverse strategies for coping with the challenging situations.

As Hand (1990) further explains, students may begin to realize how they learn most effectively and efficiently, developing a sense of responsibility for their own learning. Translation studies syllabus designers and textbook writers will also find the findings helpful. Educational resources with embedded subsections that familiarize translators with the structure and pattern of learning styles can encourage translators to explore their individual learning capacities and reinforce their competence.

In conclusion, the present study investigated learning style preferences among Iranian professional translators, trying to determine the predominant learning style, the impact of gender on learning style, and the impact of individual style on translation competence. Based on the findings, the majority of the translators showed the reflector style, although the translators with a theorist style had a better performance in practical translation. Gender was not found to be a determining factor in learning style. Naturally, every translator had his/her individual traits that uniquely affected his/her behavior in the act of translating, highlighting that the translation process was regulated by individual differences. Considering the result, translators need to reach a balance in their learning styles, taking a more active role in their learning process. Along with professional translators and translator trainers, translation studies syllabus designers and textbook writers can find the findings helpful and inspiring.

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### **Biodata**

**Elham Abkari** is an M.A graduate of Translation Studies at Marvdasht Branch, Islamic Azad University, Iran.

**Amin Karimnia** is an associate professor in Applied Linguistics in the Department of English, Fasa Branch, Islamic Azad University, Iran. His research interests are in the area of Discourse Analysis, Sociolinguistics, Pragmatics, and Translation Studies.