

**The Effect of Gender and Age on Iranian Official Translators' Familiarity with and Commitment to Universally Accepted Ethical Issues in Translation\***

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**Abstract**

Translation encompasses not only conveying the information from a source language to a target language but also observing some ethical issues that many translation organizations are aware of and inform translators about the required Codes of Ethics in translation. Unfortunately, in Iran, most translators are ignorant of the necessity of such issues and perhaps they are faced with the consequences of such ignorance. The present study analyzed the Iranian official translators' familiarity and commitment to the ethical principles based on their gender and age along with considering their experience in translation. The question was how and in what manner age and gender influence the official translators' familiarity and commitment to universally accepted ethics in translation. This study was done on official translators in Iran by means of a questionnaire containing thirty-five questions. The participants' age, gender and experience were recorded. The results of this study showed that age has a significant relation with the translators' familiarity and commitment to ethics although gender showed no significant relationship. This study is helpful for the translators to find a more extensive standpoint about translation area as a profession in order to prepare a safe and sound setting to improve translation progress.

**Key words:** ethical issues, gender, age, familiarity, commitment.

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## 1. Introduction

Translation, written or spoken, enjoys a deep history through centuries although it is a young academic subject established less than a century ago (Munday 2006, p. 5). Roman Jakobson propounds one of the best definitions of translation in his famous article “On Linguistic Aspects of Translation”. Jakobson (2000) defines translation in three categories: “intralingual translation or rewording” which is a paraphrase of verbal signs by using other signs done in the same language; “interlingual translation or translation proper” or what universally known as translation; “intersemiotic translation or transmutation” or conveying verbal signs by means of some other sign systems (p. 113-118). However, the short age of translation studies has not hampered knowing it. Many studies are done to introduce this subject and they have investigated many literary and linguistic areas to see how translation works and how to improve it.

Many research studies are done on translation system in Iran too. But the researchers have overlooked one of the most important foundations of every profession especially translation, i.e. ethics and how to observe the people’s rights. Overlooking the rights and ignoring ethics in translation endangers the profession safety and soundness and hinder the translation progress to reach the ideal destination and to find its real value and position in society.

Ethics is not restricted to translation only and all professions possess some principles whose observance guarantees the profession safety and improvement. Many organizations have distributed some brochures and notices for the professionals involving in that career for instance, National Society of Professional Engineers (2007), Early Childhood Australia (2010), Health and Care Professions Council (2012), College Student Educators International (2006) and etc.

Generally, the main essence of various Codes of Ethics is the professionals’ obligation to conduct their activities in accordance with a professional system and principles congruent with the ideals of the profession, what known as the principle of Professional Conduct. Various Codes obliges the professionals to be responsible and improve their skills, knowledge and competence in that profession and consider their real competency before accepting to do an activity (i.e. Competency). In addition, having no bias or tendency towards a special party or person(s) and being just a translator or interpreter during the delegated mission (i.e. impartiality) as well as being honest and accurate while doing that activity (i.e. Accuracy) are required from all members or professionals by all Codes. Also it is recommended that all practitioners keep the clients’ information confidential and never disclose the confidential information except for justice court (i.e. Confidentiality).

Many translation organizations have published some principles and have informed the professionals about them. These organizations have put such emphasis on the ethical principles that one of their conditions for a translator’s membership in that organization is considered the

translators' commitment to the Code of Ethics and to pass an exam on the ethics principles. Some translation organizations such as NAATI, ATA, ATIA, Language Factory and etc. are the examples in this area. However, a Code of Ethics on translation is missed in Iran and translators, either men or women and with different ages, are ignorant of valuable ethics in translation.

## **2. Review of the Related Literature**

In the area of this study, some cases are pioneers. First, what the translation organizations in other countries have considered as ethics in translation and what they have published as ethical principles in this profession are propounded here. These principles are generally similar and the basic concepts of their codes of ethics are universally in common. Second, the related studies that are done before, which have had similar aims with this study are all presented in the following:

### **2.1. Universally Accepted Ethical Issues in Translation**

In a guidebook by NAATI, National Accreditation Authority for Translators and Interpreters Ltd. (2001), AUSIT Code of Ethics of translation and interpretation are described under eight general principles; "professional conduct", "confidentiality", "competence", "impartiality", "Accuracy", "employment", "professional development" and "professional solidarity". It goes to detail about what the professional behavior is in different situations and how confidential the translators should be. Translators and interpreters should care about their current competence before accepting a translation, they should avoid partiality and convey all the information with all details even non-lingual signs. Translators are responsible for their work quality and should get sure about it. They should consider their job dynamic and try to improve their knowledge and skills. The translators have responsibility for their fellow colleagues and they should support and respect them (NAATI, 2001, p. 7, 8).

Language Factory Code of Ethics for Interpreters and Translators (2007) has adopted the first five principles of AUSIT Code of Ethics, i.e. professional conduct, confidentiality, competence, impartiality, and accuracy. It expresses Code of Ethics of its own in details and more explanations in agree with AUSIT principles; the translators should always be polite and firm as well as unprejudiced and unimpressed by external factors, such as grants and gifts, and also clients should be clarified about their role. They should avoid any conflict of interest or unprofessional behavior, capture their dignity and care about punctuality. In addition, the translators, as a general word for any kind of translation practitioners either written or oral, should be confidential about information mentioned in the documents they deal with. Before accepting an assignment, translators should consider their competence whether they are able to do that and if they found the assignment beyond their competence they should withdraw.

Impartiality is another matter that translators should observe in addition to accuracy. What it means by accuracy is conveying all what is said completely and accurately without any alteration, addition or even omission, if a mistake happened they should acknowledge and rectify it.

New Jersey Court (1994) puts forward Code of Professional Conduct for translators, interpreters and transliterators. It presents the Codes as ten canons: “high standards of conduct” that corresponds with professional conduct, “faithful and accurate conveyance of messages” i.e. accuracy, “impartiality and conflict of interest” that is the previous mentioned impartiality, “unobtrusiveness”, i.e. translators should avoid being obtrusive and attention seeking in an inappropriate way, “limitations of practice” which means that translators are responsible for their job and should not interfere in other realms, “confidentiality” that is avoiding disclosing information without client’s consent or law interference, “abstention from comment” that obliges the translators not to publicly comment about a matter they are engaged with, “representation of qualifications” that asks translators to represent their pertinent qualification and training documents or experiences, “professional standards and development” which means that translators should be on an improve path to enhance their skills and competence, and “impediments to compliance with code” i.e. translators should adhere to these canons and avoid violating them by the court’s support.

Dian Howard (2009) considers ethics of translation more than what is seen in the codes. In this work, ethics (in Canada) is categorized into twelve ideas: qualification, confidentiality, payment and references, non-solicitation, continuing education, conflict of interest, general moral behavior, subcontracting, deadlines, objectivity, responsibility to other translators and disciplinary procedures. In the summary part of this study, faithfulness to meaning, register and form, not translating literally, which being culturally appropriate and having high quality linguistically or stylistically, and finally satisfying needs of end users but not to extent of reinterpreting and no alterations, additions or omissions.

Association of Translators and Interpreters of Alberta (ATIA) (2009), on the title of professional conduct, sees the members’ all work as the reflection of the integrity of association, which should be supported by them. It pays attention to Code of Ethics in the members’ relations in details, for example mutual assistance, encouraging the beginners, taking credits of another member and asks the members to refrain any unfair competition together and besides speaking generally, it never limits the code to the details. The members should be honest in claiming their skills or qualification even in the limitations of their knowledge. In addition to be up to date with new techniques, terminology and the usage, they are urged to translate into their mother tongue and in special circumstances a member certified in the target language should revise the translation. Unless in the case of the client’s authorization or ordered by law, the translators should be confidential about all information obtained. Being objective and faithful, guaranteeing

of the quality and respecting the copyright and generalizing the Code of Ethics to other professions in post of revisers, editors and précis writers are other titles under the title of Code of Ethics in ATIA. In explaining other principles, it considers the appropriate professional conduct in relation with clients as well. It believes that some conducts are required in association with public and classifies them in details too.

American Translators Association (ATA) Code of Ethics brought forward the ethical and professional duty, approved by the ATA Board of Directors (2010), as conveying the words faithfully and attending about accuracy and impartiality, being in confidence any information, honestly representing their qualifications, improving their skills, sharing their experiences with colleagues, creating a mutual agreement among themselves and others in advance, offer their work recognition and finally try to resolve any dispute among themselves in professional setting.

## 2.2. Related Studies

Ruegger and King (1992) run a survey on 2,196 students enrolled in business courses at the University of Southern Mississippi. They studied the role of age and gender in a person's apprehension of proper ethical action. They found gender significant in the person's perception and they concluded that women act more properly than men according to ethics. Their findings revealed that older people's perception of ethics is much better than younger ones.

In another study by [Dalton](#) and [Ortegren](#) (2011) the effect of gender in ethical decision-making was surveyed. They used 30 scenarios from prior studies to know whether gender differences are crucial in facing social desirability. The gathered data suggested that gender effect gets attenuated while ethical decision-making in confronting social desirability is the case.

The present study considers the effect of translators' age and gender on familiarity and commitment to these universally accepted ethical issues in the area of official translation. In order to fulfill the purpose, a questionnaire, consisting thirty-five questions were distributed to official translators in Tehran, Mashhad and Kerman in Iran and forty-five filled questionnaires were received. The questions, which were in translators' mother tongue, in order to prevent any possible misunderstanding, asked them to check their actions while facing a hypothetical situation in professional setting and also requested them to score their familiarity with the right decision from the evaluating number of 0 to 2, i.e. 0 equaled no familiarity, 1 equaled familiarity to some extent and 2 meant absolute familiarity, according to ethics in the suggested situation. In addition, the official translators were asked to mention their gender, age and their record of service in the profession of translation. After gathering the required data, SPSS was utilized to analyze the data.

### 3. Discussion

Ethics in all professions especially translation is considered a sine qua non. Since in Iran there is no organization to supervise the observation of ethics in translation, the present study endeavored to evaluate their familiarity with ethics in translation and also their commitment to ethical issues.

#### 3.1. The degree of official translators' familiarity and commitment

Inasmuch as every official translator could be familiar with each ethical issue in the present situation from the score of 0 to 2, their familiarity could be from zero in the worst-case scenario up to the highest score of seventy in the best-case scenario. There were thirty-five questions in the questionnaire with only one correct answer to measure their degree of commitment, the possible maximum score in commitment was thirty-five. But in reality the results were as found in Table 2.1.

Table 2.1. The Descriptive Statistics of the Variables

	N	Range	Min	Max	Mean	SD	Variance
Commitment	45	15.00	16.00	31.0031.00	22.8444	3.78367	14.316
Familiarity	45	35.00	14.00	49.00	32.0667	8.76823	76.882
Age	45	26.00	25.00	51.00	32.9556	5.79559	33.589
Record of Service	45	17.00	1.00	18.00	5.6222	3.90390	15.240
Valid N (listwise)	45						

#### 3.2. The Effect of Age on Familiarity

The participants were asked to mention their age and also their record of service in practicing the profession of official translation. Evaluating the filled questionnaires revealed that age is in a significant correlation with familiarity. It means that rising age equals rising familiarity with ethical principles in translation (Table 2.2).

Table 2.2. Correlations between Familiarity and Commitment /Record of Service/Age

	Commitment	Familiarity	Record of Service	Age
Commitment	Pearson Correlation	1	.762**	.584**
	Sig. (2-tailed)		.000	.000
	N	45	45	45
Familiarity	Pearson Correlation	.762**	1	.622**
	Sig. (2-tailed)	.000		.000
	N	45	45	45

\*\* . Correlation is significant at the 0.01 level (2-tailed).

### 3.3. The Effect of Age on Commitment

Evaluating age variable in questions assessing commitment showed that official translators who are older possess more commitment to ethics. In fact commitment score and age are in a significant correlation. Participants, who were older, had higher record of service in official translation too.

Table 2.3. Partial Correlation between Commitment and Age Controlling for Record of Service

Control Variables		Commitment	Age
Record of Service	Commitment Correlation	1.000	.373
	Significance (2-tailed)	.	.013
	df	0	42
Age	Correlation	.373	1.000
	Significance (2-tailed)	.013	.
	df	42	0

Partial Correlation test was run on collected data in order to realize if the older translators have also higher record of service. The result confirmed this, i.e. older official translators had also spent more years on practicing official translation (Table 2.3).

### 3.4. The Effect of Gender on Familiarity and Commitment

Participants included 32 men and 13 women. In order to evaluate the role of gender in their familiarity with ethics and their commitment to its issues, a consideration was done on gender's effect. However, no gender's effect was found. In fact, there were no significant relations between official translators' gender and the degree of their familiarity and commitment (Table 2.4).

Table 2.4. T-Test for Commitment and Familiarity in Two Groups of Males/Females

Gender	Males			Females			t	df	Sig.
	N	Mean	SD	N	Mean	SD			
Commitment	32	23.21	4.06	13	21.92	2.92	1.04	43	.303
Familiarity	32	32.65	9.68	13	30.61	6.02	.704	43	.485

#### 4. Conclusion

This study was aimed to evaluate the effect of age and gender on official translators' familiarity with universally accepted ethics in translation and their commitment to ethics principles in Iran. From official translators in three cities of Tehran, Mashhad and Kerman about forty-five questionnaires, including thirty-five questions evaluating translators' familiarity and commitment in suggested situations, were gathered. Since participants were asked to mention their age, gender and record of service in official translation this study became possible.

The study revealed that older official translators who are practicing official translation for a longer time enjoy more opportunity to find the required ethical issues in their profession by themselves since in Iran no book is published or no awareness is informed on ethics in translation and no organization supervises their commitment to ethics.

Although age has a significant effect on translators' familiarity and commitment, the translators' gender has no roll in this area. In fact, people, either male or female, have the same degree of chance to get familiar with required ethical issues in this profession and then to commit to them.

In many other countries such as America, Canada and Australia there are some translation organizations whose duty is to inform about the translation requirements and to enhance translation as a profession. That is inevitably what the translation society lacks in Iran.



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