# An Investigation into Language Identity of Iranian EFL Teachers

**Shahin Ahmadishad[1]**
*sh_ahmadi_sh@yahoo.com*
*Department of English, Sanandaj Branch, Islamic Azad University, Sanandaj, Iran*


**Sayed Anvar Asadi**
*Department of English, Sanandaj Branch, Islamic Azad University, Sanandaj, Iran*


**Hooshiar Rashidi**
*Department of English, Sanandaj Branch, Islamic Azad University, Sanandaj, Iran*

*Abstract*
*This study presents a survey of Iranian English teachers and their language identity. The participants who completed the survey in this research included 60 English language teachers who belonged to different genders, age groups and English language teaching experiences. To investigate and collect the data, we used a validated questionnaire which included 19 items and was administered online and by hand. The results of the analyses showed that firstly participants possessed a moderate degree of language identity. The results also exhibited that there were no significant differences between the male and female participants regarding their language identity. However, there was a significant relationship between age and language identity. On the other hand, it was found that there were no differences between teaching experiences and language identity. Finally, we can come to conclusion that the results of this survey were very informative about how Iranian language teachers think of Persian language in comparison to English.*
*Keywords: Language identity, EFL teachers,Farsi*

---

[1] Corresponding author

## 1. INTRODUCTION

Identity is a very complicated construct which is defined differently based on theoretical frameworks. There are also different types of identities which are usually hyphenated with an adjective including language, cultural, social, gender, ethnic, national, intercultural identity. Joseph (2004) in his interesting book *language and identity* clearly discusses the relation between language and identity. He discusses how through the language people speak, identity can be defined.

According to Block (2007) language identity can be understood as the assumed and/or attributed relationship between one's sense of self and a means of communication which might be known as a language, a dialect or a sociolect (p.40). He posits that language identity is about the interrelationship of three main factors namely language expertise, language affiliation, and language inheritance. Expertise refers to how proficient the individual is in one language (e.g. English), dialect (e.g.Geordie) or sociolect (e.g. football speak) and if he can be accepted by the native speakers of that language, dialect or sociolect. Affiliation refers to the effective feel an individual has toward a specific language. Finally inheritance refers to the language, dialect and sociolect you are born into. This symbiotic relation among these three factors maintains that language identity cannot be static for all life time but can go through changes depending on the expertise you have in a new language. (p.40)

On the other hand, language identity is an important element in the integrity, solidarity and independence of countries. According to Rajagopalan (2001), the idea of nationhood and language was given due recognition based on the favorite slogan of one nation, one people, one language. History shows how language has often been the main instrument for political independence and national identity for newly developed countries such as Bangladesh when separated from Pakistan in 1971. To fulfill such a purpose, language became one of the main means to distinguish Bangladesh from Pakistan. Bengali became the language of the country and hence the tool for identity of that nation since 1971 and henceforth language identity became a decisive point for the people in Bangladesh. (S. Rezaei et al. 2014)

"In Iran, in spite of other minority languages such as Turkish and Kurdish among many other distinct languages and dialects, Persian is still the national language uniting the whole country. In fact, Persian is the language that the majority of Iranians affiliate themselves with in order to be recognized as Iranian. Although sociolinguistic issues in Iran have been investigated from various aspects including the sociolinguistics of Persian and identity in diaspora (e.g. Modarresi 2001; Mostofi, 2003; Namei 2008), English in post-revolutionary Iran (Borjian 2013), language planning in Iran (Hayati and Mashhadi 2010), forms of address in post-revolutionary Iran (Keshavarz 1988) and Iranian women gender identity in diaspora (Jamarani 2012a, 2012b), there has been little research within Iran on language identity." (S. Rezaei et al. 2014)

## 2. THEORETICAL BACKGROUND

### 2.1 Cultural Identity

The definition of culture has changed substantially from its early definition from an essentialism perspective as stable and non-changing (Geertz, 1973) to a system with symbolic meanings that people live in and act upon Cultural identity is notoriously difficult to define but Norton(1997) describes cultural identity as the relationship between individuals and members of a group who share a common history , a common language and similar ways of understanding the world.(p.420).

Cultural identity is closely related to the academic literacy success of our students. According to Ferdman(1990.p195) when a child perceives a writing task or a text and its symbolic contents as belonging to and reaffirming his or her cultural identity, it is more likely that he or she will become engaged and individual meaning will be transmitted or derived. From this anecdote we can conclude that in order for the students to be successful in their literacy we should provide an atmosphere where our learners can communicate with the target language culture.

### 2.2 Social Identity

Social identity has been the center of research within several fields of study including psychology, sociology and linguistics. Oches (1993,p.288) defines social identity as a cover term for a range of social personae, including social statuses, roles, positions, relationships, and institutional and other relevant community identities one may attempt to claim or assign in the course of social life. Norton (2008), on the other hand, explicates that with the rise of interest on identity in second language education, researchers and theoreticians started to draw a distinction between social identity as a broad concept and cultural identity as a narrower concepts in sociolinguistic studies.

All in all, heritage and cultural identity are so closely intertwined with social identity and we cannot easily make a clear demarcation between these two types of identity and social identity. However, social identity can be generally regarded as encompassing a broader aspect of identity with cultural and ethnic identity falling within social identity.

### 2.3 Gender and Identity

Recent research on gender and language learning witnesses a new understanding of gender and its relationship with power, identity, multiculturalism and multilingualism. (see e.g. Norton 1995). Here also identity is multiple because a woman for instance can be a wife, a sister, daughter, aunt, worker all at the same time. According to Cameron( 1995), there are four main approaches to the study of language and gender: the deficit model, cultural differences model, dominance model, and poststructuralist model.

The deficit model frames women as weak, disadvantaged and inept individuals in the society. According to this model, women are at the disadvantaged position in comparison to men and in order to establish their voice and identity, they need to

imitate men. The cultural model is different from the deficit model in that it considers men and women as different and emphasizes that the difference originates from their being from different social cultural groups. The dominance model is prevalent in socialist communities against the capitalist power. In this model women are positioned in patriarchal society and they try to perform their femininity and their relative powerlessness this way. Moreover, the post structuralism model as the last model advocates a more hybrid and dynamic view of language, gender, and sexual identity.

## 3. RESEARCH QUESTIONS

In order to reach the goals of this study, we have taken 2 questions into consideration as follows:

1. What is the degree of Iranian language teachers` language identity measured through the language identity questionnaire? Is that low, moderate or high?
2. Are there any relationships between Iranian English language teachers` language identity and their demographic characteristics including their
   - Gender
   - Age, and
   - English language teaching experiences?

### 3.1 Null Hypotheses

We transformed the second research question into three null hypothesis:

1. There is no relationship between Iranian EFL teachers` language identity and their gender?
2. There is no relationship between Iranian EFL teachers` language identity and their age?
3. There is no relationship between Iranian EFL teachers` language identity and their teaching experiences?

## 4. RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

In order to develop the model for the purpose of this study, we used a validated language identity questionnaire. The questionnaire in this study included 19 items and was taken from Khatib and Rezaei (2013b). The questionnaire was validated through exploratory and confirmatory factor analysis and its reliability was estimated to be 0.73 which is an acceptable degree (for a complete description of the procedure to develop and validate this questionnaire see Khatib and Rezaei 2013b).

Having reviewed the literature on language and identity, Khatib and Rezaei (2013) drafted out six main components for language identity illustrated in table 1:

Table 1. The hypothesized model with its components and definitions

| Components | Definitions |
|---|---|
| 1. Attachment to the Persian Language | How people in Iran think and feel about their language in comparison to English language |
| 2. Pronunciation attitude | Iranians` attitudes toward their pronunciation patterns in Persian an English and its desirability |
| 3. Language and social status | How individual associate their social status with the language in which they speak |
| 4. L1 use/exposure in the society | It refers to the extent Iranians use Persian in their daily life in comparison to English |
| 5. Language knowledge | How much information Iranian have about their own language |
| 6. Script/alphabet | How Iranians feel about the alphabet and writing system in their language |

### 4.1 Participants

In this study, a mixed random sampling was employed. The participants who completed the survey in this research included 60 English language teachers who belonged to different genders, age groups and English language teaching experiences. The descriptive statistics (frequency and percentage) for age and teaching experiences are shown in table 2 and 3.

The related bar chart gives us some information about the teaching experiences of the participants. Different years are plotted on horizontal axis while the percentages are in vertical axis. As it is totally clear, 33.3 % of participants that is to say approximately on third had more than 8 years experiences in teaching English. On the other hand, about 11.7 % of participants had roughly 1-2 years of teaching experiences.
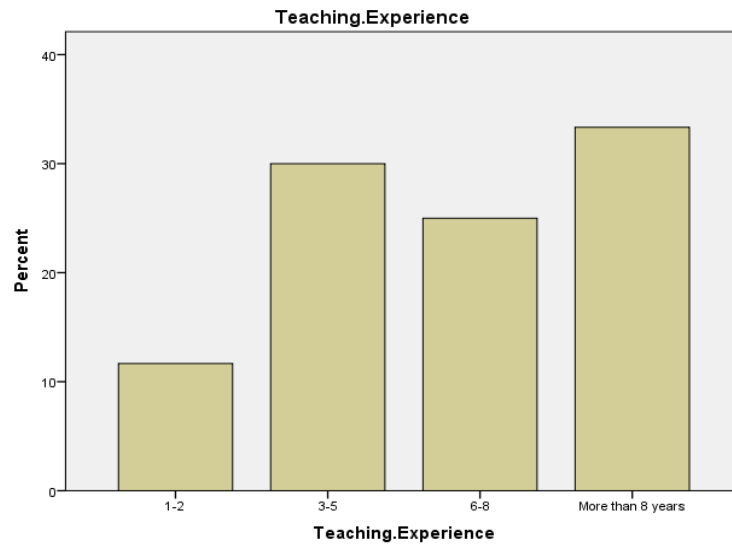
Figure of Bar chart 1 : *Teaching Experiences Frequencies of Participants*

As the bar chart 2 displays, more than 12.5 % of participants were 26 years old while almost half of participants were 1.7 % of participants' ages. More than one tenth of participants were 30 years old as well.
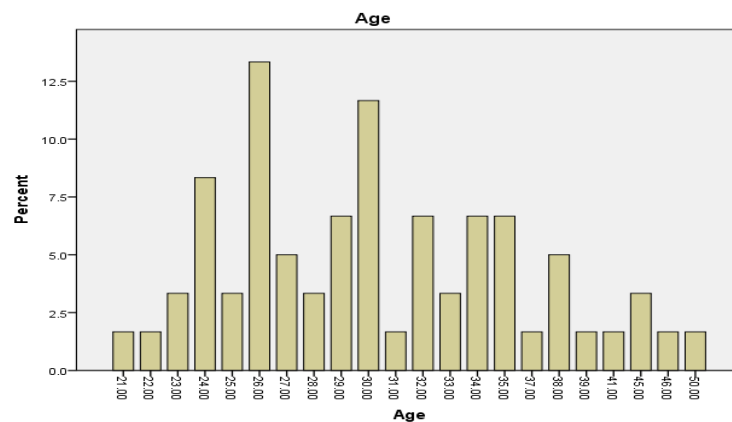


Figure Bar chart 2: *Age Frequencies of Participants*

Rating scale utilized in the current study was based on Likert scal as the most popular and widely used named after its inventor, Renis likert. Six- option rating scale was opted for this study as follows:

| Strongly agree | Agree | Slightly Agree | Slightly Disagree | Disagree | Strongly Disagree |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|

## 5. DATA ANALYSIS

For the final administration of the questionnaire, different statistical methods were used depending on the research questions. The main statistical methods were descriptive statistics, t-test, ANOVA, among some others.

## 6. RESULT AND DISCUSSION

In this part the research questions posed for this study are dealt with. In order to do so, initially the descriptive statistics of the participants and their related demographic information are presented. Then, each research question is answered one by one followed by the discussion. In order to administer the questionnaire, the respondents were asked to fill out the questionnaire online. The descriptive statistics for, gender, and English language teaching experiences are tabulated in Table 6.1 and 6.2.

Table 6.1: Frequency of Gender

|  |  | Frequency | Percent | Valid Percent | Cumulative Percent |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|
|  | male | 20 | 33.3 | 33.3 | 33.3 |
| Valid | female | 40 | 66.7 | 66.7 | 100.0 |
|  | Total | 60 | 100.0 | 100.0 |  |

Table 6.1 shows the descriptive statistics for the gender of participants. As it can be seen, the male participants were 33.3 % while the female ones were 66.7%. Out of 60 participants, 20 were male and 4 were female respectively. Consequently, there are more female participants than male ones.

Table 6.2: Teaching Experiences

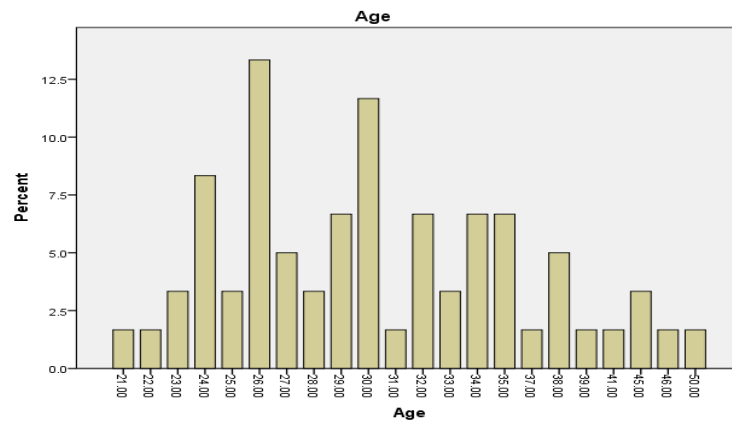|  |  | Frequency | Percent | Valid Percent | Cumulative Percent |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|
|  | 1-2 | 7 | 11.7 | 11.7 | 11.7 |
|  | 3-5 | 18 | 30.0 | 30.0 | 41.7 |
| Valid | 6-8 | 15 | 25.0 | 25.0 | 66.7 |
|  | More than 8 years | 20 | 33.3 | 33.3 | 100.0 |
|  | Total | 60 | 100.0 | 100.0 |  |

Figure Bar chart 6.3: *Age Frequencies of Participants*

As the bar chart displays, more than 12.5 % of participants were 26 years old while almost half of participants were 1.7 % of participants' ages. More than one tenth of participants were 30 years old as well.

The result of the questionnaire administration to 60 Iranian English language teachers indicated that the mean score and the standard deviation obtained were 64.4 and 8.1 respectively based on SPSS output. The minimum and maximum scores were 45 and 86 respectively and the score range was 41 (i.e. 86-45= 41)

Hence, in response to the first research question, the result of the survey from 60 Iranian language teachers showed that this group exhibited a moderate level of language identity. Table 6.4 below clearly highlights the percentages of language identity for the participants. As this table shows almost all participants are in the moderate level of language identity.

Table 6.4: The Percentage of Language Identity for the Participants

|          | Percent |
|----------|---------|
| Moderate | 98.3%   |
| High     | 1.7%    |

The reasons why Iranian language teachers exhibited a moderate level of language identity can have several reasons. Lot of studies in depth are needed to concentrate on the reasons of this issue in Iranian context. It is said there are times when the attitudes differ from the practice.

The finding here is comparable with Rezaei et al. (2014) and also with Davari-Ardakani and Mostafa`s (2011). The former found that 7.9% of 1851 participants belonged to the high level of language identity group and 23.8% and 68.3% belonged to the low and moderate language identity group respectively. The later, on the other hand, indicated

that among the Kurd participants of their study, 5.7% had a positive attitude towards Farsi, 65.3% had an average attitude although their study was a comparison between Kurdish and Farsi language while the majority of participants were Kurds. However, the results of our study here is likely similar to what Rezaei et al. found as the same study on EFL learners.

Another research question comprises of three sub- question. As it was mentioned in the introduction, in order to answer this question 3 null hypothesis are needed. In addition, in order to test each of null hypotheses, suitable statistical tests were run on SPSS. In order to answer the first null hypothesis, a t-test was run to compare the score obtained from the male and female groups. Table 6.6 shows descriptive statistics including the frequency of the participants and the mean and std. deviation.

Table 6.5: Male and Female Participants` scores on Language

| Gender | N | Mean | Std. Deviation | Std. Error Mean |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| male | 20 | 3.6000 | .50262 | .11239 |
| female | 40 | 3.7000 | .51640 | .08165 |

As it can be understood, the mean for female group is higher than male group. However, a t-test was run to make sure if this difference is significant between this two groups. As table 6.6 shows there were no significant differences between the language identity of male and female English language teachers. They both exhibit similar level of language identity in Iran.

Table 6.6: One sample t-test for language Identity and Gender

| | N | Mean | Std. Deviation | Std. Error Mean |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| Gender | 60 | 1.6667 | .47538 | .06137 |

| One-Sample Test | | | | | | |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| | t | df | Sig. (2-tailed) | Mean Difference | 95% Confidence Interval of the Difference | |
| | | | | | Lower | Upper |
| Gender | 27.157 | 59 | .000 | 1.66667 | 1.5439 | 1.7895 |

Different reasons could be accounted for the result of the first null hypothesis. The reason why Iranian male and female English teachers did not differ in this study could be due to their being equally effected by English language.

Rezaei et al.(2014) concluded that that the mean for the female group was higher than the male group; nevertheless, an independent t-test was run and the result was t(1851) = 0.36, p > 0.05 showing that there was no significant difference between the language

identity of male and female participants in this study. Therefore, it can be concluded that Iranian male and female English language learners do not differ in their language identity. They exhibit similar levels of language identity in Iran in spite of their exposure to English language in their lives.

In order to test the second null hypothesis, a one-way ANOVA was run to compare the means of age groups. Consequently, the results of ANOVA are presented in table 6.7 below. As this table shows, $F(55,4) = 2.558$, $p = 0.49$ which shows that the null hypothesis is rejected and it can be concluded that there are slight differences between the language identity and the age groups.

The result here in our survey is probably similar to what S.Rezaei et al. concluded in 2014. They have come to conclusion that $t(1851) = 0.84$, $p = 0.00$ showing that the null hypothesis is rejected and it can be concluded that there are significant differences between the language identity of the participants from these two age groups.

Table 6.7: Table ANOVA Results for Identity and Age groups

|  | Sum of Squares | df | Mean Square | F | Sig. |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| Between Groups | 2.405 | 4 | .601 | 2.558 | .049 |
| Within Groups | 12.928 | 55 | .235 |  |  |
| Total | 15.333 | 59 |  |  |  |

In order to ascertain which age group is significantly different from other age groups, a Scheffe test as a post hoc test was run. The results are shown in table 6.8. As below table mentions, the older the teachers are, the more critical and reflective they become with regard to their own self and identity, in other words, older teachers are more aware of their identity.

Table 6.8: Scheffe Test Results for Multiple Comparisons of Identity and Age Group

| (I) m.Age | (J) m.Age | Sig. | 95% Confidence Interval | |
|---|---|---|---|---|
|  |  |  | Lower Bound | Upper Bound |
| 20-25 | 26-30 | .655 | -.2861 | .8392 |
|  | 31-35 | .999 | -.6619 | .5649 |
|  | 36-40 | 1.000 | -.8153 | .8516 |
|  | 41-50 | .247 | -.2153 | 1.4516 |
| 26-30 | 20-25 | .655 | -.8392 | .2861 |
|  | 31-35 | .397 | -.8336 | .1836 |
|  | 36-40 | .881 | -1.0180 | .5013 |
|  | 41-50 | .726 | -.4180 | 1.1013 |
| 31-35 | 20-25 | .999 | -.5649 | .6619 |
|  | 26-30 | .397 | -.1836 | .8336 |

|  | | | | |
|---|---|---|---|---|
|  | 36-40 | .999 | -.7313 | .8646 |
|  | 41-50 | .148 | -.1313 | 1.4646 |
|  | 20-25 | 1.000 | -.8516 | .8153 |
| 36-40 | 26-30 | .881 | -.5013 | 1.0180 |
|  | 31-35 | .999 | -.8646 | .7313 |
|  | 41-50 | .438 | -.3773 | 1.5773 |
|  | 20-25 | .247 | -1.4516 | .2153 |
| 41-50 | 26-30 | .726 | -1.1013 | .4180 |
|  | 31-35 | .148 | -1.4646 | .1313 |
|  | 36-40 | .438 | -1.5773 | .3773 |

Finally to test the third null hypothesis, Iranian English language teachers` experiences were divided into different categories shown in table 6.8. In addition, an ANOVA test was run to test the effects. Consequently, it shows, $F(15.059, .275) = .340$, $p = 00$ which shows that there is no relationship between teaching experiences and language identity.

Table 6.10: ANOVA for Language Identity and Teaching Experiences

|  | Sum of Squares | df | Mean Square | F | Sig. |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| Between Groups | .275 | 3 | .092 | .340 | .796 |
| Within Groups | 15.059 | 56 | .269 | | |
| Total | 15.333 | 59 | | | |

## 7. CONCLUSION

The results of the analysis showed that firstly the 60 Iranian language teachers who participated in this article possessed a moderate degree of language identity. The result also exhibited that there was no significant differences between the male and female participants regarding their language identity. However, age was important in the language identity of the participants. On the other hand, it was found that there we no remarkable differences between teaching experiences and language identity. Finally, we can come to conclusion that the results of this survey were very informative about how Iranian language teachers are thinking of Persian language in comparison to English.

The results of this study can be helpful on a number of grounds; first and foremost to shed light on a number of issues related to language identity of Iranian English language teachers. In addition, the results can show whether English language has affected Iranian English language learners' perception of their own first language. The attitudes of English language learners can inform us about the status of Persian in Iran, and Iranians' level of language awareness.

Finally, an understanding of our language teachers' identity can help our language materials developers, teacher trainers and others involved in language education to make judicious decisions for the betterment of the language education system.

**References**

Block, D. (2006a). Multilingual Identities in a Global City: London Stories. London: Palgrave.

Block, D. (2006b). Identity in applied linguistics: Where are we?. In T. Omoniyi and G. White (eds.), The Sociolinguistics of Identity (pp. 34-49). London: Continuum.

Block, D. (2007). *Second Language Identities*. London: Continuum.

Block, D. (2009). *Second language identities*. London: Continuum.

Davari-Ardakani, N., and T. Mostafa. 2011. "Barresi-e negareš-hāye zabāni va jāygāh-e do zabān- e

Fārsi va Kurdi dar hoviat-e meli." [Investigating Language Attitudes and the Place of Persian

and Kurdish Language in National Identity]. Iran Nameh 26 (1, 2): 209–222.

Geertz, C. (1973). The interpretation of cultures. New York: Basic Books.

Joseph, J. (2004). Language and Identity: National, Ethnic, Religious. Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmil-lan.

Keshavarz, M. H. (1988). "Forms of Address in Post-Revolutionary Iranian Persian: A Sociolinguistic Analysis." Language in Society 17 (4): 565–575.

Khatib, M., and Rezaei.S. 2013a. "The Portrait of an Iranian as an English Language Learner: A Case of Identity Reconstruction." International Journal of Research Studies in Language Learning 2 (3): 81–93.

Khatib, M., and S. Rezaei. 2013b. "A Model and Questionnaire of Language Identity in Iran: A Structural Equation Modeling Approach." Journal of Multilingual and Multicultural Development 34 (7): 690–708.

Lee, S. K. 2003. "Multiple Identities in a Multicultural World: A Malaysian Perspective." Journal of Language, Identity, and Education 2 (3): 137–158.

Norton, B. (1997). Language, identity, and the ownership of English. TESOL Quarterly, 31(3), 409- 429.

Norton, B. (2000). Identity and Language Learning. London: Longman.

Norton, B. (2008). Identity, language learning, and critical pedagogies. In J. Cenoz & N. H. Hornberger (eds.) Encyclopedia of Language and Education, 2nd Edition, Volume 6, Springer Science Business Media LLC.

Modarresi, Y. 2001. "The Iranian Community in the United States and the Maintenance of Persian." International Journal of the Sociology of Language 148: 93–116.

Ochs, E. (1993) "Constructing social identity: a language socialization perspective." Research on Language and Social Interaction. vol 26 no.3: 287-306.

Rajagopalan, K. (2001). "The Politics of Language and the Concept of Linguistic Identity." Revista de Filologia y su Didactica 24: 17–28.

Rezaei, S. 2012. "Researching Identity in Applied Linguistics." Journal of Language, Culture and Society 35: 45–51.

Rezaei, Khatib & Baleghizadeh (2014). Language identity among Iranian English language learners: a nationwide survey, Journal of Multilingual and Multicultural Development, DOI: 10.1080/01434632.2014.889140

Author(s)

**Shahin Ahmadishad** is a Ph.D. Candidate of Linguistics at Azad University, Sanandaj, Iran. His research interests are syntax, argument straucture, sociolinguistics and IELTS studies.

**Sayed Anvar Asadi** is a Ph.D. Candidate of Linguistics at Azad University, Sanandaj, Iran. He is also an EFL/ESL teacher at Farhangyan university of Sanandaj.His main areas of interest are sociolinguistics and English Language teaching.

**Hooshiar Rashidi** is a Ph.D. Candidate of Linguistics at Azad University, Sanandaj, Iran.He is also an EFL/ESL teacher at Mariwan Azad university. His main areas of interest are Morphology and discourse.