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Examining the Effect of Sight Translation Exercises on the Speaking Ability of Iranian Undergraduate EFL Learners

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ABSTRACT

Teaching speaking in the classroom is an important component of second language development, but spoken skills have not been continuously dominant in second language teaching approaches. On the other hand, in recent years, there has been an increasing interest in the domain of translation, its characteristics, and influential factors on it. The present study seeks to examine the effect of sight translation exercises on undergraduate Iranian EFL learners' speaking ability. To do so, at least 60 undergraduate Iranian EFL learners were selected as the sample of the study. To assess the speaking ability of the participants, nine sets of interview questions were administered as the pretest in all of the classes during 2 successive weeks. After the pretest, the control group received the ordinary instruction of conversation including the techniques and tasks of the communicative approach, while the experimental group was exposed simultaneously to both communicative approach and sight translation exercises as the treatment. The speaking test (posttest) was administered to both groups and scores were analyzed by Mann-Whitney U test, since they were not normally distributed. It was found that sight translation exercises (from L1 to L2) do not have any significant effect on the English speaking ability of EFL learners as no significant difference was found between the control group and the experimental group. In addition, after practicing sight translation, male and female learners did not show different English speaking ability, while the advanced learners outperformed the intermediate students on the posttest. Implications of the study are concerned with language researchers in that it can extend the body of research on language skills especially speaking. It can also bear results for EFL teachers in terms that it might provide them with suitable instructional supports for teaching speaking.

Key terms: sight translation, speaking ability, gender, language proficiency