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ELICITED IMITATION AS A MEASURE OF ESL LEARNERS’ GRAMMATICAL KNOWLEDGE*

ABSTRACT: This paper shows that the Elicited Imitation task is comparable to the well-established Grammaticality Judgment task, and is in fact more nuanced in capturing aspects of inter language development. The knowledge of valid and invalid long distance dependencies in *wh*-questions was examined in two groups of learners – 10-12 year old learners (Grade 6) and 13-15 year old learners (Grade 8) – using Imitation and Judgment tasks. Imitation, like Judgment, captured differences in learners’ interlanguage development: Grade 8 learners were consistently better than Grade 6 learners in judging and imitating targets with valid and invalid *wh*-questions, and in recasting ungrammatical targets. Imitation data also brought to light specific points of difference between the groups, which Judgment could not have revealed. Grade 6 learners used many more mono clausal constructions and medial *wh*-constructions, and omitted more grammatical structures in their imitation than Grade 8 learners. The groups were also different in the number and pattern of recasts of ungrammatical targets. The paper ends with the implications of the study for the understanding of second language learning and assessment.

KEYWORDS: elicited imitation, judgment, second language learners, inter language development, *wh*-questions, recasts.

0. INTRODUCTION

Second language acquisition research has always been interested in finding out what learners know about the second language and how that knowledge comes about. Recently, researchers have begun to show interest in methods to tap this implicit knowledge through tests and tasks. A key issue in second language research is identifying ways to measure

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implicit knowledge. Such knowledge is reflected in samples of learners’ speech or writing; however, these samples conflate factors of ‘performance’ (such as learner stress, articulatory ease, and other contextual conditions) with their internalized knowledge (‘competence’). Moreover, our knowledge of language may far exceed what is seen in language production (Krashen 1981).

To get a better picture of the internalized knowledge systems, two measures are generally used in acquisition research. The first, judgment of grammaticality (henceforth Judgment) is widely accepted and used by linguists, acquisition researchers and language teachers. The second, the Elicited Imitation (henceforth Imitation) has been used for nearly half a century by acquisition researchers looking into normal, atypical and impaired language development (Slobin & Welsh 1973; Bloom, Hood & Lightbown 1974; Lust, Flynn & Foley 1998; Santelmann et al. 2002; Fujiki & Brinton 1987), but has failed to gain favour with second language research except in a few cases (Naiman 1974; Vinther 2002; Ellis 2005).

The intent of this paper is to show that Imitation is a good measure of the grammatical knowledge of second language learners. I compare the results of Imitation and Judgment tasks administered to two second language learner groups: 10-12 year olds (Grade 6) and 13-15 year olds (Grade 8). Imitation, like Judgment, captures the differences between these two groups. It also sheds light on learners’ interlanguage development in a way that Judgment cannot.

I begin by briefly discussing the two task types (section 1) and then describe the study (section 2) and discuss its implications (section 3).

1. JUDGMENT AND IMITATION AS MEASURES OF LEARNERS’ KNOWLEDGE

Grammaticality judgment tasks are one of the most widespread data collection methods in applied linguistics. The task allows the assessment of speakers’ reactions to linguistic structures that rarely occur in spontaneous speech, and to assess speakers’ knowledge without the
interference of performance factors like slips, pauses, and unfinished utterances (Schütze 1996). In these tasks, speakers of a language are presented with a set of linguistic stimuli whose grammaticality they must determine. The task may require a dichotomous response (yes-no); or (in the face of criticism that grammaticality is a gradient concept, with intermediate levels of inter-speaker and intra-speaker variations) elicit responses on a preference scale (3-, 5- or 7-point).

In Elicited Imitation, the subject is required to listen to a sentence and repeat it. The test has its roots in cognitive psychology, which shows that the capacity to imitate is innate and is seen in newborns. However, not everything can be imitated at any point of time. What can be imitated depends on the motor abilities and the cognitive structure required for the imitation (Lust & Foley 1994). For instance, a child can understand and repeat a conditional clause, if and only if the child has some idea of a conditional clause both conceptually and in terms of language. He cannot repeat a sentence with a structure that far exceeds his knowledge of it. Structures that are not part of the child’s competence will be repeated less accurately than structures that are. Therefore, the child’s ability to repeat a sentence can reveal the underlying system of language that the child is using.

Given below is an example of a target sentence for repetition, and the imitation elicited from a child (the age of the child is given in square brackets):

(1) Adult: The owl eats candy and ______ runs fast.
    Child: *Owl eat candy and he run fast* [2;4]
    (Slobin & Welsh 1973)

Notice that the sentence to be repeated has a ‘gap;’ the subject is elided. The child repeats the sentence without a deleted constituent, suggesting knowledge of ellipsis is absent.

The Imitation task is deceptively simple. Test sentences are in fact carefully constructed to contain target grammatical features and to impose a range of processing loads so that the learner’s mastery of the features can be assessed. Usually there is no time pressure imposed, and usually
Elicited Imitation has been used for nearly half a century to measure first language knowledge and also, in some cases, the knowledge of language of second language learners. Not much work has been done in second language acquisition with items of differing length and syntactic complexity, and with subjects of varying language background and proficiency levels, so as to empirically test whether Imitation can ultimately discriminate between learners whose proficiency levels in the language have been verified by other well-established measures like Judgment. A study by Henning (1983) where three oral language assessment techniques—elicited imitation, oral interview, and sentence completion—were evaluated, found elicited imitation outperforming other techniques on measures of validity and reliability.

2. THE STUDY

2.1 Participants
The participants of the study were twenty children (11 girls; 9 boys) from a private CBSE school in Hyderabad. Most children who study in the school are from middle-income groups, with parents who have very basic knowledge of English, and some amount of literacy.

10 Grade 6 learners between 10 to 12 years (mean=11;3) and 10 Grade 8 between 13 and 15 years (mean=14;6) were tested in the study. They were speakers of either Dakkani Hindi or Telugu or both. The learners had had a minimum of five years of exposure to English. All instruction in the school was officially in English, though some amount of Telugu/Hindi was used to explain content subjects. English was also taught as a compulsory subject.

1 In an unpublished Imitation study with 4-year old children, for a picture illustrating ‘a monkey working on a laptop’ when asked to repeat the question ‘What is the monkey working on?’ children consistently answered ‘Laptop,’ in spite of repeatedly being asked to repeat the question. Picture support was thus found to interfere with task instruction.
2.2 Target structure
Long distance dependencies in *wh*-questions was chosen as the target structure. An interesting property of this construction is that it contains a dependency between a *wh* word in the matrix clause and a gap in the embedded clause, as shown in examples (2). The *wh* in (2b) is extracted from the embedded object position and in (2c) from the embedded subject position.

(2) a. The woman thinks the plumber stole the bicycle.
   b. What does the woman think the plumber stole____?
   \[\uparrow\]
   c. Who does the woman think _____ stole the bicycle?
   \[\uparrow\]

In principle, there can be any number of clauses intervening between the *wh*-word and the gap, and such dependencies are often referred to as ‘unbounded’; however in spontaneous speech it is difficult to find more than one intervening finite clause.

Although movement is unbounded, there are a number of constraints on *wh*-movement. These constraints have been traditionally called *island constraints* (Ross 1967; Rizzi 1982). The *wh* cannot be moved out of a complex Noun Phrase (NP) as in (3b), a relative clause as in (4b), or out of adjunct clause (5b). The blank shows the gap from where the *wh* has been extracted.

(3) a. Your sister believes \[NP the story that Naveen married Maya last year].
   b. *Who does your sister believe[\[NP the story that Naveen married _____last year?]*

(4) a. Raghu speaks to the man \[RC who built the house for the president].
   b. *What does Raghu speak to the man [\[RC who built_____ for the president]*?

(5) a. Jill laughed \[\textit{ADJUNCT} when Peter lost his umbrella in the house.]*
   b. *What did Jill laugh \[\textit{ADJUNCT} when Peter lost _____ in the house]*?
2.3 Task and procedure
Twenty target sentences each were presented to the children for judgment and imitation. They consisted of four tokens each of wh questions of the types illustrated in (2b) and (2c) (grammatical targets), as well as (3b), (4b) and (5b) (ungrammatical targets). In each task therefore 8 target sentences were grammatical and 12 ungrammatical.

The sentences were of comparable length, 13 to 16 syllables with a mean length of 14.5. For parity, all embedded clauses had a transitive verb with an animate subject and inanimate object. All questions had a prepositional phrase (e.g., from the house) primarily to add length to the sentence, and to avoid any form of rote repetition. Tense was kept constant in the sentences, with the main clause in the present tense and the embedded clause in simple past, except for one set of target sentences (5b) type, where verbs in both clauses where in the simple past. Sentences in the tests were randomized and presented to learners. The complete set of sentences is shown in the Appendix.

A session with a child lasted approximately 30-45 minutes. For both groups, the Imitation task was presented first and the Judgment task later to avoid any kind of practice effect from Judgment to Imitation. In the Imitation task, the sentences were read aloud once and learners were asked to repeat the sentences. Two declarative sentences were used as training items to ensure that learners understood the instructions for the task. In the Judgment task, learners were asked to read the sentences and rate them, by putting ticks and crosses against sentences. None of the tests were timed.

3. RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

I compare the responses of learners on Imitation and Judgment tasks, to examine whether they are able to capture differences between the two groups of learners in the knowledge of syntactic constraints that allow or forbid wh-extraction. We are particularly interested in three comparisons: the imitations and judgments of Grade 6 as against Grade 8 learners; learners’ ability to recast ungrammatical sentences in Imitation;
and the nature of errors in imitations. Before we proceed to the analysis of each of these, we discuss how learner responses were coded and scored.

3.1 Coding and Scoring
For the Judgment task, all correct judgments were scored ‘1’ and all incorrect judgments were scored ‘0’. In the Imitation task, all verbatim repetitions (of grammatical and ungrammatical sentences) were scored 1 and all other responses were scored 0. The grammaticality or otherwise of the learner repetition was not taken into account in this part of the analysis.

Learners produced many errors (for instance, omission of the prepositional phrase, substitution of a pronoun for a name, or of one object with another) that were clearly uninformative with regard to their knowledge of question formation and complementation. Therefore, a more focused scoring method was used in which the learners were given credit for a sentence if the structure in question, i.e. the *wh* construction, was successfully repeated. Under the scoring system, all the responses given in (6) were coded as correct imitations of the target sentences. The points of departure from the target are indicated in bold.

(6)  

a. What does Peter believe the girl ate ____ at the party?

b. *What does he say the girl ate at the party?*  
   [noun and verb substitution]

c. *What does Peter say girl ate at party?*  
   [verb substitution and omission of the determiner]

d. *What does Peter believe the girl ate?*  
   [omission of prepositional phrase]

e. *What did Peter think the girl ate at the party?*  
   [verb and auxiliary substitution]

Table 1 presents the mean percent accuracy of the five *wh*-structures in the two tests.

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2 The ungrammatical targets were recast when recoded; we look at this in sections 3.5.
Table 1: Mean percent accuracy in the Judgment and the Imitation tasks

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Type of wh-structure</th>
<th>Grade 6</th>
<th>Grade 8</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Judgment</td>
<td>Imitation</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1. Embedded object</td>
<td>75%</td>
<td>62.5%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2. Embedded subject</td>
<td>70%</td>
<td>55%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3. Relative clause</td>
<td>52.5%</td>
<td>10%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4. Complex NP</td>
<td>30%</td>
<td>17.5%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5. Adjunct Clause</td>
<td>45%</td>
<td>17.5%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Sentence types at serial numbers 3, 4, 5 were ungrammatical

3.2 A comparison of Judgment and Imitation

Considering first the judgment task, Grade 8 learners’ mean accuracy of judgment of valid and invalid wh-movement was consistently higher than that of Grade 6 learners (compare the scores on the third and first columns above, for each sentence category: 92.5% vs. 75.5%, 90% vs. 70%, 75% vs. 52.5%, 65% vs. 30%, and 90% vs. 45%).

Grade 6 learners were not as good as Grade 8 learners in rejecting sentences with ungrammatical wh-extraction (types 3, 4 and 5 above). The Judgment task therefore was able to differentiate between the two groups of learners w.r.t. their knowledge of wh-movement.

On the Imitation task, Grade 8 learners were again found to repeat grammatical sentences better than Grade 6 learners (compare the fourth and the second columns for the first two sentence types). This suggests that like Judgment, Imitation is able to capture the difference between the two sets of learners: repetition of sentences during elicited imitation does reflect underlying knowledge of the wh-structure.\(^3\)

Overall, both groups were better at judging sentences than at repeating sentences and the difference between judgment and repetition was more

\(^3\) Grade 8 learners also repeated ungrammatical sentences better than Grade 6 learners. This finding needs to be handled with caution, since repeating an ungrammatical sentence may reflect a better memory span rather than an underlying knowledge system. We revisit this point when we discuss the nature of errors made by the two groups.
pronounced for ungrammatical sentences, and in Grade 6 learners. To find out whether sentence-type affects judgment and imitation, we ran a Pearson Product Moment Correlation Test on the scores on Judgment and Imitation for grammatical and ungrammatical constructions. A significant and high positive correlation was found between the two tests on grammatical sentences put together (r = 0.75) and a low correlation for ungrammatical sentences (r = 0.30). This was quite like the findings in Ellis (2004), where the Imitation and the Judgment tasks showed a good correlation for grammatical but not ungrammatical items.

Having established that Imitation, like the Judgment, captures underlying knowledge of the wh-construction and the inter language differences between the groups, I now turn to data from the Imitation task, which reveal many important aspects of the learners’ knowledge system. I discuss in turn the repetition of grammatical sentences and ungrammatical sentences.

3.3 The Imitation of grammatical sentences
To repeat a complex sentence correctly, learners must be able to reconstruct its grammatical structure. The errors they make on the task often provide useful clues about their processing of the sentence. Here we discuss the errors made in repeating grammatical sentences.

The learners made a variety of errors, mostly omissions or substitutions of lexical material. While most of the errors were unsystematic, two types of incorrect response recurred in a number of children. These provide some clues to the source of their difficulties with the constructions under investigation.

(i) Monoclusal questions. The children sometimes produced a simple clause instead of a complex one. These errors can be divided into three types: repeating only the main clause only (7a); the embedded clause only (7b); or a combination of elements from the two clauses (7c).

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4 Correlation coefficient for the ungrammatical items were as follows: Complex NP r=-0.11; Relative clause r=0.08; and r=0.32 for Adjunct clause).
What does the police think the man threw from the terrace? (target)

- What does the police think?
- What did the man throw from the terrace?
- What does the policeman throw from the terrace?

The frequencies of types of errors in sentence repetition for the two groups are given in Table 2. Note that these sentence repetition errors do not include those coded as recasts, which we discuss in the next section.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Mono clausal errors</th>
<th>Grade 6</th>
<th>Grade 8</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Main clause only</td>
<td>16</td>
<td>9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Embedded clause only</td>
<td>14</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Combination of main &amp; embedded clause</td>
<td>29</td>
<td>9</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 2: Frequency of monoclausal responses in grammatical targets

As the table shows, Grade 6 learners used more monoclausal structures than Grade 8 learners in the imitation of grammatical complex sentences.

(ii) Medial wh question: Learners inserted an additional *wh* word at the beginning of the embedded clause; for instance, a learner produced (8a) in response to the prompt in (8).

(8) Who does the woman think stole the bicycle from the house?

- What does the woman think who stole the bicycle from the house? [KAV: Grade 6]

A total of eight errors (7 in Grade 6 and 1 in Grade 8) of this kind were made. Note that these are not recasts of ungrammatical sentences. Therefore, the insertion of a medial *wh* is interesting evidence of the cyclic application of *wh*-movement, as in (9).

(9) \( \text{[cp} \text{What does she say [cp <what> the woman donated to the library<what>]?]}

\[ \uparrow \text{________________________} \text{________________________} \]

These medial *wh* are argued to be a reflection of competence (Thornton & Crain 1994), namely, a reflex of successive cyclic movement, rather than performance. If they were performance errors resulting from memory...
overload, elements would be more likely to be omitted than added. Also, most performance errors are found with object extraction, whereas in this study seven medial wh were with subject extraction and one with object extraction. This use of medial wh is interesting since it is found in child English as well as cross-linguistically, in Dutch (van Kampen 1997) and Basque and Spanish (Gutiérres Mangado 2006). In none of these languages are the sentences grammatical and part of the input to the children who produced them.

(iii) 

Verb Substitution: A common error was to replace the main verb with think or say. There were 11 such substitutions in Grade 6 learners and 3 in Grade 8 learners. These were not treated as wrong, as we have mentioned earlier. For instance,

(10) a. Who does the police think hit the lamppost on the road? (for see) [AFR, Grade 6]
    b. Who does the police think killed the passengers on the train? (for know) [GUN, Grade 6]
    c. *What does John say after Mary said in the evening? (forgo home) [RAV, Grade 6]

Most substitutions were with frequent and familiar verbs like think and say.

(iv) Omission of prepositional adjuncts: Recall that the prepositional phrases in the experiment sentences were added for length, and were adjuncts except in two cases: ‘Who did Alison go to work after she took

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5 However, medial wh is grammatical in Hindi. Hindi lacks overt wh-movement. For an embedded wh to take matrix scope, the matrix clause must contain a kyaa particle (1a), without which it is ungrammatical as a matrix question (1b).

(1) a. raam-ne kyaai kahaa [ki kaun aaya he]i Ram-Erg what say Comp who-Acc has come ‘Who did Ram say that has come? [lit. ‘what did Ram say that who has come?’] [CP [CP kyaa [Ram-ne t kahaa]] [CP kikaun [t has come]]]
    b. *raam-ne kahaa [ki kaun aaya he] Ram-Erg say Comp who has come ‘Who did Ram say that has come? (Mahajan 1990:128-9)
to school?’ and ‘What does the teacher say the woman donated to the library?’

Grade 6 learners dropped prepositional phrases that were adjuncts in 47 cases, Grade 8 learners dropped 11 prepositional adjuncts. The two argument prepositional phrases were never dropped.

3.5 The imitation of ungrammatical sentences: Recasts

When learners try to repeat ungrammatical sentences, they may recast them to make the sentence grammatical. For this analysis, we only included recasts which were grammatical and had a main clause–embedded clause structure. As in the case of grammatical targets, learners sometimes produced a grammatical simple clause instead of a complex one when they imitated ungrammatical targets. Though well formed, these were not indicative of the knowledge of island constraints in long distance dependencies.

The following examples of learner repetitions will clearly illustrate the coding criteria used in this part.

(11) Questions that violate the complex NP constraint

*Who does your sister believe the story that Naveen married? (target)

a. Who does your sister believe that Naveen married?
b. Why does your sister tell the story that Naveen married?
c. Who does Naveen marry?
d. What does your sister believe?

In (11a) the learner has removed ‘the story,’ which is a barrier for _wh_-movement, thus recasting the ungrammatical sentence. In (11b) the _wh_-word is changed, so that _wh_ is no longer extracted from within the complex noun phrase.

Our interest was to see if the imitation task showed any difference between Grade 6 and Grade 8 learners in terms of the type of recast. The frequency of recasts in the two groups for the three ungrammatical constructions is given in Table 3. (Recall that the maximum for each construction is 40.)
Learners found it easiest to recast sentences that violated the complex NP constraint, followed by those that violated the Adjunct island constraint. We briefly discuss how the three constructions were recast.

Recasts of Questions violating the Complex NP constraint: Most learners dropped the offending noun phrase (as in 8b above). Here are a few more examples of such recasts. 12 out of 14 (86%) of Grade 6 recasts and 19 out of 21 (90%) of Grade 8 recasts were of this type.

(12) a. *Who does John believe Alison saw at work?* [for *Who does John believe the fact that Alison saw at work?*]

    b. *What does Freda hear Jane bought at the store?* [for *What does Freda hear the news that Jane bought at the store?*

The remaining recasts were like (11b), where the *wh* word was changed, thus creating a new gap and dependency that avoided the Complex NP Constraint.

Recasts of Questions violating the Adjunct island constraint: 4 out of 11 Grade 6 recasts (36%) and 7 out of 15 Grade 8 recasts (47%) made the sentences grammatical by changing the *wh*-word (e.g., 13a-c), adding an object (e.g., 13a, 13c) or passivizing as in (13d).

(13) a. *Where did John go after Mary said ‘Bye’ in the evening?* [PRA, Grade 8]

    b. *Why did Alice go to work after she took her to school?* [AFR, Grade 6]

    c. *Why did people clap after the police released him yesterday?* [MUB, Grade 8]

    d. *Why did Jill laugh when Peter got lost in the house?* [SUN, Grade 6]
Four Grade 6 recasts and eight Grade 8 recasts created a gap in the main clause rather than the embedded clause, by substituting the lexical verb (e.g., 14a,c) or by creating a gap for a prepositional object (14b). (The changed element in imitation is given in bold.)

(14)  

a. What did John **do** after Mary came home in the evening?  
[PRA, Grade 8]  
b. What did Jill laugh **at** when Peter was lost in the house?  
[MOU, Grade 8]  
c. What did Alison **do** after she took her to school?  
[GAN, Grade 8]

Recasts like (14b) were found only in Grade 8 learners.

Recasts of Questions violating the relative clause constraint: These sentences were the most difficult to recast. Almost all Grade 8 learner recasts changed the lexical verb and added the object in the embedded clause like in (15).

(15) What does Raghu say to the man who built the building for the president?  
[GAN, Grade 8]

Thus, Grade 8 learners recast ungrammatical sentences more often, and they were able to recast questions that violated the relative clause constraint, while younger learners could not. The elicited imitation task was able to show differences between the two groups in terms of the number and nature of recasts.

A comparison between learners’ ability to recast ungrammatical sentences in the imitation task with their ability to reject them in the judgment task would be pertinent here. Both groups of learners were better at rejecting ungrammatical sentences than recasting them: an ability quite often witnessed in language learners who can detect ungrammaticality but cannot correct it.
4. WHAT THIS TELLS US ABOUT INTERLANGUAGE DEVELOPMENT

This study investigates both what learners know and how we can find out what they know. What does the study tell us about the learners’ interlanguage development? (a) Grade 8 learners have a better knowledge of constraints on \textit{wh}-movement than Grade 6, as reflected in their judgment and imitation. (b) Learners are better at imitating and judging grammatical targets than ungrammatical targets: the difference between these two sentence types becomes more pronounced in imitation and in Grade 6 learners. (c) The ability to repair and recast ungrammatical constructions increases with interlanguage development. (d) Younger learners try to escape the syntactic complexity of questions with long distance \textit{wh}-movement by replacing them with alternative shorter monoclausal questions with lower derivational complexity, whereas older learners are better at producing complex questions with long-distance \textit{wh}-movement. (e) Some of the younger learners recoded sentences with a medial \textit{wh} suggesting a partial movement of the \textit{wh}-phrase, a phenomenon also witnessed in child English (Thornton & Crain 1994).

The last point is of particular interest. Medial \textit{wh}-constructions are not known to occur in Telugu or Dakkani Hindi, the first languages of the participating learners, nor are they permitted in the language being learnt (English). Therefore, learners had produced a construction which was neither available in their first language nor in the second language. However, as I have pointed out in footnote 5, medial \textit{wh} is permitted in languages like Hindi, suggesting that it is a UG option. The use of medial \textit{wh}-construction is therefore evidence of UG full access to second language learning.
A second point of interest is why learners use medial *wh* when it is not in the input. *Wh*-movement occurs in a successive-cyclic manner and the *wh*-word generated in the embedded clause must pass through the intermediate Spec, CP on its way up to the matrix clause. In the adult grammar, both the lower copy and the intermediate copy are deleted and only the copy at the top is pronounced as in (9). However, younger second language learners produce the intermediate copy of the *wh*-word, suggesting that they might not know that pronouncing copies is a violation. The almost negligible use of medial *wh* constructions in Grade 8 shows that the problem is not pervasive and might be overcome with increase in proficiency.

*What does the study tell us about Elicited Imitation?* The correspondences between our elicited imitation data and judgment data suggest that elicited imitation is an important technique providing converging evidence for learners’ knowledge of language. Both tasks show that learners respond to sentences in a manner consistent with their grammatical capacities. However, Imitation goes beyond Judgment in identifying specific points of difference between the groups’ grammatical capacities: reflected in the number of recasts and Elicited imitation also allows us to examine aspects of interlanguage representation that Judgment cannot straightforwardly reveal. For example, the fact that learners find it difficult to reject questions with complex NP islands is clearly suggested by the Judgment data, whereas the fact that these are most easily reparable by removing the offending NP would not be revealed if it were not for the Imitation task.

Elicited Imitation, we know, requires learners to listen to and repeat, to the best of their ability, utterances of varying lengths and complexities in the language being acquired. By forcing learners to repeat, Elicited Imitation appears to bridge the gap between comprehension and production.
6. CONCLUSION

The results of this study indicate that Elicited Imitation can be used to obtain deeper insights into learners’ interlanguage representation of a grammatical rule/construction in an efficient, time saving fashion. Second language researchers and teachers can also use this procedure to differentiate between second language populations of different proficiency levels. In light of the growing body of studies indicating that performance on this task converges with data from spontaneous speech and other well-known measures, this task type warrants serious consideration in assessments of second language proficiency.

APPENDIX

The Imitation task

Object extraction
What does the police think the man threw from the terrace?  
What does the referee say the player broke on the field?  
What does the teacher say the woman donated to the library?  
What does Peter believe the girl ate at the party?

Subject extraction
Who does the woman think stole the bicycle in the house?  
Who does the doctor think ate the stale food in the canteen?  
Who does the police see hit the lamppost on the road?  
Who does the police know killed the passengers on the train?

Complex NP extraction
*Who does James believe the fact that Alison saw at work?  
*What does Freda hear the news that Janice bought at the store?  
*Who does your sister believe the story that Naveen married last year?  
*Who does your father know the story that John beat up yesterday?

Relative clause extraction
*What does Jane visit the architect who designed for her friend?  
*What does Sita meet the writer who wrote for the students?  
*What does Raghu spoke to the man who built for the president?  
*What does the storekeeper meet the boy who created for the shop?
Adjunct Clause extraction
*Who did Alison go to work after she took to school?
*What did John go home after Mary said in the evening?
*Who did the people clap after the police released yesterday?
*What did Jill laugh when Peter lost in the house?

The Judgment task
Object extraction
What does the woman think the plumber stole from the house?
What does the police see the man hit on the road?
What does the doctor think the child ate in the canteen?
What does the manager know the worker repaired in the building?

Subject extraction
Who does the police think threw the gun from the terrace?
Who does the referee say broke the bat on the field?
Who does the teacher say donated books to the library?
Who does Peter say that Mary invited to the party?

Complex NP extraction
*What does Rama like the idea that she might get for Holi?
*What does you hear the claim that Fred solved last week?
*What does Yuni hear the news that Jenny stole from the store?
*Who does John believe the claim that Bill killed last night?

Relative Clause extraction
*What does Ramya give to the girl who brought for the old lady?
*What does Kushi give the teacher who wrote for little children?
*What does Prema call the plumber who repaired for her friend?
*What does Nani tell the girl who made for her parents?

Adjunct Clause extraction
*Who did John eat before Bill saw at night?
*Who did Mary scream because John kissed yesterday?
*Who did they leave before speaking to last night?
*Who was Bill upset because John hired last week?
REFERENCES


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