

## The roles of working memory and oral language abilities in elicited imitation performance

### What this research was about and why it is important

Although an elicited imitation test (EIT) has been widely used as an oral proficiency test in second language acquisition research, it is still unclear whether the test primarily examines learners' language ability or their memory capacity. To uncover the nature of this test, the present study examined to what extent learners' language ability and memory capacity are related to their EIT scores. Second language learners of Spanish participated in a series of tasks including a Spanish EIT, an oral narrative task, and a memory test. The study showed that learners' EIT performance primarily reflected language abilities measured by the oral narrative task rather than memory capacity. The study further suggested that learners with low Spanish experience level tended to rely on their memory capacity to perform in the EIT while learners with high Spanish experience level did not.

### What the researchers did

- Participants were 78 college students of Spanish as a second language. Their experience with the Spanish language varied from low to high.
- Learners met with a researcher individually and completed a series of tasks, including [the Spanish EIT](#), a Spanish oral narrative task, and a memory test.
- Learners' scores on the Spanish EIT, the oral narrative task, and the memory test were calculated for further analyses. Their performance on the oral narrative task was evaluated in terms of how complex, accurate, and fluent their speech was.

### What the researchers found

- Learners' EIT performance primarily reflected their language abilities measured by the oral narrative task rather than their memory capacity.
- Learners with lower experience level relied on their memory capacity when taking the Spanish EIT while learners with higher experience level did not.

### Things to consider

- Because learners' performance on the Spanish EIT primarily reflected learners' language abilities rather than memory capacity, it is safe to conclude that this EIT is a reliable oral proficiency test, not a memory test.
- Although the EIT did not primarily test learners' memory capacity, the study showed that memory capacity marginally played a role in how learners performed in the EIT. More specifically, the impact of memory capacity on EIT seemed to decrease as learners' experience with Spanish increased. This suggests that learners with lower experience level relied on their memory capacity when taking the Spanish EIT while learners with higher experience level did not. More research is needed to make conclusive statements about how memory capacity differentially affects EIT performance.

Materials available from <https://www.iris-database.org/>

**How to cite this summary:** Park, H. I., Solon, M., Henderson, C., & Dehghan-Chaleshtori, M. (2020). The roles of working memory and oral language abilities in elicited imitation performance. *OASIS Summary* of Park et al. (2020) in *The Modern Language Journal* <https://oasis-database.org>

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