Effects of repeated elicited imitation on explicit knowledge of relative clauses

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We gave learners a set of oral practice sentences which we believed would facilitate access to explicit knowledge through use of repeated elicited imitation (EI). EI requires learners to listen, process and then repeat a presented sentence. As it has been suggested that automatized explicit knowledge is deployed in performing EI tasks (Suzuki & DeKeyser, 2015), we tested whether practice with EI benefits not only the fluency of L2 speaking but also access to explicit knowledge. The target structure was the English relative clause (RC).

In pre- and post-tests, sentences containing an RC were elicited orally with a picture displayed on a computer screen. Participants also took two paper tests, one focusing on RCs (RC test) and the other on general grammatical knowledge (grammar test). 72 novice level Japanese learners of English participated in the study, 60 of whom successfully recorded RC sentences, while 47 completed the two paper tests. In this presentation, we report the results of the paper tests carried out before and after the sessions in order to examine the progress of explicit knowledge among the participants. We also report the results of temporal measures as well as the accuracy of recorded RCs.

Results of the pre- and post-RC tests showed significant improvement in the explicit knowledge of RCs: $t(46)=-4.083$, $p=.000$; $t(47)=-1.750$, $p=.000$. We also found that the speech rate and accuracy of the recorded RCs significantly improved: $F(1,59)=44.6$, $p=.00$; $F(1,59)=5.48$, $p=.02$. The reaction time decreased by .2 seconds on average, which reached statistical significance: $F(1,20)=5.6$, $p=.03$. These results suggest that EI practice not only enhances the fluency and accuracy of oral output, but also promotes explicit knowledge about RCs. We discuss further our interpretation of these results.

Keywords: repetition, Elicited imitation, explicit knowledge.