

The stability of individual differences in phonetic imitation across features and tasks
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Phonetic imitation is fundamental to language acquisition and change, and there has been considerable interest in examining predictors of individual variability in this domain. However, it is unclear whether individual differences are stable across different tasks and across different phonetic features, making generalization and cross-study comparison difficult. This work examines the systematicity of these individual differences through a set of experiments targeting imitation of several phonetic features (stop aspiration, stop voicing, and vowel quality) in explicit imitation and implicit shadowing tasks. We examine whether individual tendencies are consistent across different features (e.g. do individuals who show greater-than-average imitation of stops also show greater-than-average imitation of vowels?), and whether this holds for both explicit and implicit tasks. We find that individual variability in explicit imitation tasks is relatively stable across disparate features, but that this relationship does not hold in implicit, albeit still highly controlled, imitation tasks. These findings underscore the problem of using imitation of a single feature as a metric of an individual's overall tendency to imitate. At the same time, performance on the implicit tasks is not completely random: individuals are consistent in their extent of imitation of closely related differences (e.g. fronting of two different vowels), inviting further study into whether and why individuals might differ systematically in imitation of different types of features.

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