

The effects of motivational dispositions on oral task performance

What this research was about and why it is important

The study examined the link between English as a second language (ESL) learners' motivational dispositions and the complexity, accuracy, fluency in oral second language task performance as well as their overall English proficiency. This study was important because it could reveal some of the differences that learners have in terms of their oral task performance. We measured the learners' motivational dispositions via a questionnaire, their oral task performance through a picture description task, and English proficiency with an oral interview task. The motivational dispositions included Assessment (the tendency to habitually analyze, evaluate and compare everything), Locomotion (the tendency to move from one state to another without much deliberation), Promotion (concerned with growth, accomplishments and advancement) and Prevention (concerned with safety, security and calmness). The results showed that motivational dispositions influence the complexity, accuracy and fluency of the learners' oral performance as well as their overall English proficiency.

What the researchers did

- Recruited 81 international students from a major public university in the US.
- Had participants complete a motivational dispositions questionnaire, a picture-description task, and an oral interview in English.
- Coded oral performance data from the picture-description task in terms of syntactic complexity, lexical complexity, speed of speaking, dysfluencies in speech, and accuracy.
- Used data from the oral interview to assess the participants' overall English proficiency.
- Ran statistical analyses to examine the relationship between the motivational and linguistic factors.

What the researchers found

- Learners who were strong in the Assessment disposition used more complex syntax and more diverse vocabulary, made fewer speech dysfluencies, and showed higher English proficiency.
- Learners who were strong in the Locomotion disposition spoke English faster but with more errors.
- Learners who were strong in the Prevention disposition used simpler vocabulary.
- Learners who were strong in the Promotion disposition showed higher English proficiency.

Things to consider

- Assessors are more successful language learners/users than others because they engage in paying attention to, reflecting on, and analyzing their language use more often than others.
- Locomotors are speedy in their speaking but make more errors they tend to do one thing after another without much forethought, deliberation, or analysis.
- Prevention-oriented learners use simpler vocabulary because they are worried that using complex vocabulary may lead to errors.
- Promotion-oriented learners improved their English proficiency because they are motivated to reach their ideal English self, which represents the vision of the kind of English user they desire to be in future.
- These results show that individual differences in oral English performance and proficiency could be due to the learner's motivational dispositions.
- Using appropriate instructional strategies that match these dispositions could help improve student engagement, task performance and learning.

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How to cite this summary: Papi, M., Eom, M., Zhang, Y., Zhou, Y., & Whiteside, Z. (2023). The effects of motivational dispositions on oral task performance. *OASIS Summary* of Papi et al. (2023) in *Studies in Second Language Acquisition*. <https://oasis-database.org>

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