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Yeji Han\* and Kim McDonough

# Korean L2 speakers' regulatory focus and oral task performance

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**Abstract:** The L2 motivation self system posits that motivation emerges from the dynamic interactions among a learner's ideal L2 self, ought-to L2 self, and situated learning experience. Only a few studies to date have investigated the individual and combined impact of trait-based and task-induced motivation (i. e., situational motivation related to the immediate learning environment) on L2 performance. Therefore, the current study explored whether Korean L2 speakers' trait-based and task-induced regulatory focus impacted their oral task performance. Vietnamese university students ( $N=62$ ) studying Korean as a foreign language completed a questionnaire to assess their L2 instrumentality as being oriented toward prevention or promotion. They were randomly assigned to promotion or prevention task-induced conditions, and then carried out an oral task. The results indicated that whereas the participants' general motivational tendencies did not impact their task performance, the task-induced prevention condition facilitated faster speech rate (i. e., fluency) and lower error rate (i. e., accuracy) than the promotion condition. Implications for further studies are discussed.

**Keywords:** Regulatory focus, L2 motivational self system, less-commonly-taught language

## 1 Introduction

In the field of second language (L2) learning, a number of studies have shown that L2 performance is not a pure reflection of language proficiency. Rather, language production is a complex process that reflects individual learners'

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**Correction note:** Correction added after online publication 17 May 2017: Mistakenly some nouns were dropped in the text and were infixed. Also the caption of table 1 was changed and the first sentence of section 7 showed wrong values of  $n$  so and were replaced.

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**\*Corresponding author: Yeji Han**, Concordia University, Department of Education, 1455 De Maisonneuve Blvd. W. Montreal, Quebec H3G 1M8, Canada, E-mail: yeji.han@concordia.ca  
**Kim McDonough**, Concordia University, Department of Education, 1455 De Maisonneuve Blvd. W. Montreal, Quebec H3G 1M8, Canada

cognitive and affective profiles (Aida 1994; Grigorenko et al. 2000; Horwitz 1986; Hummel 2009; Kitano 2001; Roehr 2008; Skehan 2014). Within the category of affective factors, research has shown that motivation plays a role in diverse aspects of L2 performance and learning, including pragmatic competence (Takahashi 2015; Wyner and Cohen 2015), oral task performance (Dembovskaya 2009; Masrom et al. 2015; Mozgalina 2015; Poupore 2015), oral interaction (Ma 2009), and writing (Kim and Kim 2016). While these studies showed that motivation and L2 performance are interrelated, due to their theoretical and methodological diversity, a clear understanding of the relationship between motivation types and L2 performance remains elusive.

In light of this complexity, many recent L2 motivation studies have been inspired in part by Dörnyei's L2 motivational self system (Dörnyei 2005; Dörnyei 2009) to consider multiple aspects of motivation by using a mixed methods approach (for a review, see Boo et al. 2015). This model conceptualizes L2 motivation as a combination of a learner's future self, which represents his or her long-term L2 goals, and L2 experience, which is situated and temporary. With regard to motivational processes involving future L2 selves, the regulatory focus theory posits two distinguishable, but not exclusive, motivational inclinations: promotion and prevention focus (Higgins 1997; Higgins 1998). Promotion focus is an approach inclination that leads learners toward their positive ideal selves, while prevention focus is an avoidance inclination to stay away from failure to fulfill their ought selves. Based on the conceptual link between temporary process-based motivational tendencies and future selves, this study examines whether regulatory focus, both as a general disposition and as a task-induced condition, accounts for variation in L2 speakers' task performance.

## 2 The influence of L2 self and vision on L2 learning

The L2 motivational self system model proposed that L2 learning could be described as effort to fulfill two types of future selves: the ideal and ought-to L2 selves. The ideal L2 self refers to the attributes that a person would like to possess (e. g., hopes, dreams, wishes). In contrast, the ought-to L2 self represents the attributes that a person believes should be possessed (e. g., duties, obligations, responsibilities). Motivation arises from learners' efforts to reduce the gap between their current L2 self and their ideal and ought-to L2 selves (Dörnyei 2005; Dörnyei 2009) and temporary L2 experiences. Since the model was initially proposed, a number of

studies have validated it by demonstrating positive associations between the ideal L2 self and motivated behavior (e. g., Csizér and Kormos 2009; Dörnyei and Chan 2013; Hsieh 2009; Kim and Kim 2014; Kormos et al. 2011; Lamb 2011; Papi 2010; Ryan 2009; Taguchi et al. 2009).

However, the direct influence of the ideal L2 self on learning remains unclear because the results of intervention studies that investigated the ideal L2 self have been inconsistent. In these studies, the ideal L2 self was operationalized as the capacity to imagine oneself as a proficient L2 user. Intervention studies have been conducted to explore the effects of improving motivation through visualization and self-enhancement activities, through listening to L2 self scripts (e. g., Magid 2014; Magid and Chan 2012) or writing essays about their future L2 self (e. g., Cho 2015; Sampson 2012). While some studies have shown that visualization-based interventions resulted in increased strength of the ideal L2 self (Chan 2014; Magid 2014) and perceived motivation (Sampson 2012), other studies have reported that they did not lead to improved motivation or other factors associated with L2 learning. For example, Munezane (2015) found that visualization alone did not impact Japanese EFL learners' willingness to communicate, but visualization plus goal setting was effective. These findings had important implications for interpreting the previous visualization intervention studies. It is worth noting that the long-term intervention studies often involved concrete goal-setting activities along with visualization of the L2 self; thus, visualization effects cannot be teased apart from specific action plans. For example, Mackay (2014) showed the ideal L2 self intervention group showed improved willingness to communicate, while the control group did not. The treatment condition included goal-setting activities, so the improvement could be attributed to goal-setting activities rather than visualization.

Aside from the intervention studies, a few studies have explored the effects of visualization of the L2 self, either triggered by intervention or measured by questionnaires, on directly observable motivated behavior. These studies did not include goal-setting activities and found that a strong sense of the future L2 self was not associated with motivated behavior or L2 performance. For example, Cho (2015) found no immediate effects for prompting the L2 self on time spent revising writing (i. e., persistence) or finding spelling errors in reading text (i. e., focused attention). In a classroom-based setting, Papi and Abdollahzadeh (2012) adopted a classroom observation instrument developed by Guilloteaux and Dörnyei (2008) and found no association between observation of Iranian EFL learners' motivated behavior and self-report ideal L2 self scores. Unlike the motivation intervention studies, which involved goal setting, these two studies showed that neither invoking vivid images of the L2 self nor a general tendency toward the strong ideal L2 self was sufficient to result in

motivated behavior. Dörnyei (2009) claimed that having specific goals is one of the prerequisite conditions for the L2 self to exert motivation. Therefore, the action power of the self may be exercised in relation to goal setting and relevant motivational strategies.

The lack of association between the L2 self and observable L2 learning behavior was also found in L2 oral performance. Al Khalil (2011) explored the association of different types of L2 motivation with L2 Arabic speech quality and noticing of feedback from the interlocutor. She compared the effects of three distinct motivational constructs: the socio-educational model of SLA (Gardner 1985; Gardner et al. 1997), situated state motivation (Gardner and Tremblay 1998; Julkunen 1989; Julkunen 2001; Jeff and Gardner 2004; Tremblay et al. 1995), and the L2 motivational self system (Dörnyei 2005; Dörnyei 2009). No motivational variables predicted accuracy, fluency and complexity, but integrative motivation predicted noticing of recasts. The measures of the ideal and ought-to L2 selves were adopted from the existing studies based on the framework of the L2 motivational self system (Csizér and Kormos 2009; Ryan 2009; Taguchi et al. 2009); the key component of the ideal L2 self was the capacity to visualize a desired future L2 self. The vision component of the ideal L2 self, as well as the ought-to L2 self, was not directly related to immediate L2 production or noticing of recasts, although many previous studies have confirmed the relationship between the L2 selves and global L2 learning outcomes such as final grades (e. g., Kim and Kim 2016).

To summarize, while many studies have supported the positive relationship between the L2 selves and motivated behavior or learning outcomes (Csizér and Dörnyei 2005; Dörnyei and Clément 2001; Dörnyei and Csizér 2002; Dörnyei et al. 2006; Kim and Kim 2016), a few studies based on directly observable motivated behavior (Cho 2015; Papi and Abdollahzadeh 2012) and L2 performance (Al Khalil 2011) have not found the connection between the L2 selves and behavioral or linguistic observation. The adoption of observable behavior might have led to different results from the previous studies which relied on self-report questionnaires. Also, the findings imply that having and activating the ideal and ought-to L2 self may be involved in the process of motivational regulation, rather than a direct regulator of behavior (Hoyle and Sherrill 2006). In order to convert the selves into action, relevant motivation and behavioral strategies should be followed, and regulatory focus may be a prospective theory to fill the gap by linking behavioral and linguistic strategies to the ideal and ought-to L2 selves. In particular, the positive association between the L2 selves and self-reported motivation might be mediated by motivational regulation, and the mediating function of regulatory focus may further explain the effects of the L2 selves on observable motivational or linguistic behavior.

### 3 Regulatory focus as motivational tendency

The role of regulatory focus in L2 motivation can be understood in terms of its relationship to the ideal and ought-to L2 selves (Higgins 1987; Higgins 1997; Higgins 1998). The different types of L2 selves function as different goals, but more importantly, the ideal and ought-to L2 selves are associated with different types of goal-pursuit behavior and motivational regulation. As a consequence of having an ideal self- or ought self-orientation, people may adopt distinctive motivational strategies, either promotion or prevention focus, respectively.

Within this framework, a general goal for L2 learning, such as being a proficient L2 speaker, may lead to different motivational consequences depending on how an L2 learner views the goal. Whereas a person directed toward the ideal L2 self may adopt promotion focus, i. e., orienting toward positive outcomes, such as getting good grades or becoming a competent speaker in their L2, a person directed toward the ought-to L2 self may have prevention focus, i. e., orienting toward the avoidance of negative outcomes, such as failing a course or not being understood in their L2. In the L2 classroom context, teachers may notice that students have different motivational strategies for learning. While some students maximize opportunities for learning by asking questions and searching for extra information (i. e., promotion focus), others try to minimize their chances of missing important information by listening carefully and studying hard (i. e., prevention focus). However, it should be noted that promotion and prevention are not exclusive binary concepts, as highly motivated learners may exhibit both high-promotion and high-prevention focus simultaneously (Papi and Teimouri 2014).

In past L2 motivation research, the concept of promotion and prevention has been considered in terms of instrumentality. For example, Taguchi et al. (2009) carried out a large-scale, cross-cultural questionnaire study that included promotion-instrumentality and prevention-instrumentality. Whereas promotion-instrumentality is the regulation of personal goals in order to become successful, such as working in the target language community and having high income, prevention-instrumentality is the regulation of duties and obligations, such as passing exams or avoiding bad grades in L2 class. Through correlation and structural equation modeling (SEM), they found strong associations between promotion-instrumentality and the ideal L2 self, as well as between prevention-instrumentality and the ought-to L2 self.

In a subsequent reanalysis of their earlier dataset (Taguchi et al. 2009), Papi and Teimouri (2014) compared Iranian learners of English who had either promotion or prevention orientation in terms of several motivational and

attitudinal variables and motivated behavior. Learners were considered having a prevention orientation if their ought-to L2 self scores were higher than their ideal L2 self scores. Conversely, learners had a promotion orientation if their ideal L2 self scores were higher than their ought-to L2 self scores. The results revealed that learners with a promotion orientation had significantly higher motivated-behavior scores than those with a prevention orientation. However, the questionnaire items for motivated behavior reflected the promotion orientation only, for instance, “If an English course was offered in the future, I would like to take it”, and “If my teacher would give the class an optional assignment, I would certainly volunteer to do it”. Consequently, it is possible that the questionnaire underrepresented the types of motivated behavior that are more likely to be undertaken by prevention-oriented learners. As the authors pointed out, the inconsistent findings from the previous studies about the relationship between the ought-to L2 self and motivated behavior may be attributed to lack of prevention-focused motivated behavior (Kim 2009; Lamb 2009; Lyons 2009; Magid and Chan 2012; Papi 2010). Past studies have been consistent in finding that the ideal L2 self is interrelated to intended effort or motivated behavior by multiple statistic analyses: correlation, multiple regression, stepwise regression or SEM analysis. Unlike the strong effects of the ideal L2 self on intended effort or motivated behavior, no conclusive findings were found in statistical associations between the ought-to L2 self and intended effort or motivated behavior. However, because the questionnaire items for intended effort and motivated behavior were highly promotion focused, thus, already structured around the ideal L2 self, motivational behavioral strategies triggered by the ought-to L2 self might not have been represented. Therefore, questionnaire items should be carefully constructed to ensure that motivated behavior items reflect the type of action likely to be undertaken by both promotion- and prevention-oriented learners.

## 4 Regulatory focus as task condition

L2 motivation research to date has operationalized regulatory focus as a general disposition. In addition to the traditional trait-based approach, promotion and prevention orientations can influence L2 performance on a more momentary basis. Inspired by regulatory focus research in psychology (e. g., Shah et al. 1998), Papi’s (2016) experimental research on incidental vocabulary learning conceptualized regulatory focus as task conditions that can be temporally induced through a reward point system. In the promotion

condition, the initial point started from zero, thereby structured the activity around a gain frame. However, in the prevention condition, an initial 100 points were assigned, from which points were deducted, reflecting a loss frame. In both conditions, 70 out of 100 points was the cut-off for being entered into a drawing to win a \$100 gift card. In addition to the temporally-induced task conditions, trait-based regulatory focus was measured by a questionnaire. The findings showed that prevention-oriented participants performed better in the loss frame task condition, while promotion-oriented participants did not show a significant difference in the gain and loss task conditions. The lack of interaction between the promotion trait and the task conditions may have been attributed to the nature of the monetary reward. Entering to win the gift card is inherently promotion focused, regardless of the point systems; therefore, the gain-framed point system might not have had as strong effects as the loss-framed point system. Nevertheless, the findings and the design of the study had important methodological implications. Although the effect of incentives and punishment on L2 learning was not an uncommon theme in early L2 motivation research (e. g., Dörnyei 1994; Gardner and MacIntyre 1991; Skehan 1991), application of prevention-oriented incentive to L2 learning and comparison of gain- and loss-framed incentives were novel. Also, the interaction effects between the prevention trait and the task conditions suggested individual motivational tendencies should be taken into account when exploring task-induced motivation.

Promotion and prevention focus can be embedded in a task on two different levels: task-independent and task-integral levels. For example, in Papi (2016), regulatory focus was contextualized as incentives on the given task, adopting a task-independent approach to regulatory focus. In other words, the participants conducted the same L2 task with different but paralleled incentive systems. On the other hand, a task-integral approach to regulatory focus is also possible, in which the task itself is manipulated in order to induce promotion- or prevention-focus motivation. For example, Semin et al. (2005) investigated whether regulatory focus affected English L1 speakers' use of abstract and concrete words. Across two experiments, participants were given either promotion- or prevention-focus writing task. The promotion-focus task was to describe strategies for being a good friend, while the prevention-focus task was to describe strategies on how to avoid being a bad friend. The results indicated that the promotion task elicited more abstract words, and the prevention task elicited more concrete words. Though the findings from the L1 study may not be directly applicable to L2 research, they raise interesting questions about whether manipulating regulatory focus through task instructions would affect L2 users' task performance.

## 5 Dimensions of L2 performance

In applied linguistics, L2 performance is the most clearly observable L2 behavior; thus, it has been the center of scholarly attention in the field. With respect to L2 production, Skehan (1996) proposed three linguistic dimensions of performance: accuracy, complexity and fluency. According to his definitions, accuracy is related to the capacity to deal with interlanguage complexity, therefore conservatism and use of better controlled and restricted language (Dembovskaya 2009); complexity is concerned with elaboration of the underlying interlanguage system; fluency relates to the capacity to utilize the interlanguage system for process-based real time communication. These three linguistic dimensions of L2 performance have been investigated through the lenses of task characteristics and task implementation factors, such as pre-task planning (e. g., Foster and Skehan 1996; Mehnert 1998; Ortega 1999; Sangarun 2001; Skehan and Foster 1997; Wigglesworth 1997; Yuan and Ellis 2003) and task repetition (e. g., Bygate 2009; Kim and Tracy-Ventura 2013). These studies have confirmed that different task conditions influence L2 speech performance. In terms of motivational effects on L2 speech performance, Kormos and Dörnyei (2004) found that a motivational disposition is related to learners' task performance, in particular, the number of words and turns as well as the linguistic measures of accuracy, lexical richness and complexity. The association with complexity was found only for participants with highly positive task attitudes. Although this subset of participants did not represent the entire sample, the high correlation ( $r = .80, p < .05$ ) suggests that motivational influence may have a strong effect on linguistic complexity. Previous studies using the same dataset found an association between motivation and the quantity of speech as measured by the number of words and turns (Dörnyei 2002; Dörnyei and Kormos 2000). With the measures of quantity and quality of speech, the results of these studies highly encouraged further studies because L2 linguistic signature of motivation was confirmed.

With respect to targeting a less-commonly-taught language, linguistic features specific to the target language should be considered when selecting measures of accuracy, fluency, and complexity. For example, traditional measures of syntactic complexity might not be relevant to Korean, which is a highly inflected language. Morphological complexity may be an alternative measure of complexity, but such indices need to be validated. However, accuracy and fluency indices might be less sensitive to the target language. In some of the previous English L2 studies, accuracy has been operationalized as correct usage of certain linguistic features such as regular and irregular past tense, copula, definite and indefinite articles, plural form and subject-verb agreement (Ortega 1999). Such operationalizations, however, cannot be applied to Korean as it does not have obligatory articles or

plural forms. However, accuracy as error rate based on linguistic units (i. e., T-unit, c-unit, word, clause) has been widely adopted in past L2 studies (Pallotti 2009) and may be more applicable to L2 Korean. Compared to accuracy, L2 fluency is multi-dimensional, conceptualized as pausing or repairing speech performance (i. e., dysfluency) and speed of delivery of speech. Among L2 fluency indices, speed rate based on the syllable unit has been consistently validated, whereas the measures of dysfluency such as pausing rate and self-repair have shown mixed results (Kormos and Dénes 2004; Pallotti 2009). Since Korean sound system is syllable-based, following consonant-vowel or consonant-vowel-consonant phonological structure, speech rate based on the syllable unit is an appropriate L2 Korean fluency measure.

In conclusion, current approaches to L2 motivation posit important roles for learners' general motivational dispositions and L2 experience triggered by environmental and temporal conditions. Although L2 learners' general dispositions toward the ideal and ought-to L2 selves have been related to learning outcomes (e. g., Kim and Kim 2016) and motivated behavior (e. g., Csizér and Dörnyei 2005; Dörnyei and Clément 2001; Dörnyei and Csizér 2002; Dörnyei et al. 2006; Kim and Kim 2016), it was also found that the L2 selves are not directly associated with observable motivated behavior (Cho 2015; Papi and Abdollahzadeh 2012) or L2 learning performance (Al Khalil 2011). Based on theoretical and empirical support, L2 regulatory focus at both trait and task levels can be a potential mediating factor linking the L2 selves and motivational strategies.

The purpose of this study is to identify whether L2 learners' regulatory focus, as a general disposition and a task-induced condition, is related to their L2 oral task performance. Past studies have shown the interrelationship between L2 motivation and L2 oral performance during task-based interaction (e. g., Dörnyei and Kormos 2000; Kormos and Dörnyei 2004). However, it was beyond the scope of these studies to investigate whether task-induced motivational conditions also affected L2 speakers' linguistic task performance, either alone or in combination with measures of motivation as individual differences. This study aims to explore the main as well as interaction effects of trait-based and task-induced regulatory focus on L2 oral performance, specifically fluency (speech rate) and accuracy (error rate). Due to the lack of sufficient research findings on motivational and linguistic associations, no directional predictions are made. In order to control the interlocutor and context effects, this study adopts an experimental between-groups design. This study explores the following research questions.

1. Are trait-based and/or task-induced regulatory focus (promotion and prevention) related to L2 speech performance?
2. Are there interaction effects between trait-based and task-induced regulatory focus on L2 speech performance?

## 6 Method

### 6.1 Participants

The participants were 79 university students (7 men, 72 women) with a mean age of 19.9 years ( $SD = 0.32$ ) in two universities in Hanoi, Vietnam. However, 17 participants were excluded from the data analysis because their questionnaire responses revealed that they could not be classified as having a general disposition to either promotion or prevention focus. All of the participants spoke Vietnamese as their first language, and were in the second year of bachelor's degree programs in Korean studies. For the first two years of the programs, students take language courses such as speaking, writing, listening, reading, and grammar courses for 16 to 20 hours per week. In the third year, they take content courses and more advanced language courses such as Korean culture, translation, and reading and writing. In the fourth year, students take internship programs along with translation and Korean linguistic courses. After graduating from the programs, almost all students work at Korean companies in Vietnam as translators, and some students pursue graduate studies in Korea or Vietnam. In order to successfully complete the programs, they are required to take a standardized Test of Proficiency in Korean (TOPIK) and pass the advanced level of proficiency. The context of learning Korean in Vietnam has unique components, for instance, the influence of mass media called *Korean Wave* (Shim 2008), economic cooperation between the two countries (Teo et al. 2013), modern economic surge in Vietnam (Malesky and London 2014), and instrumental values of learning Korean.

### 6.2 Materials

The materials included a L2 regulatory focus questionnaire and an oral reasoning task. The questionnaire consisted of 10 items adapted from Taguchi et al. (2009) motivation questionnaire, with minor modifications to make the statements more specific to students studying Korean in Vietnam. An equal number of items targeted promotion and prevention orientations. Each statement was paired with a six-point Likert scale, anchored by the descriptors strongly disagree (1) and strongly agree (6). The questionnaire items were translated to Korean and pilot tested with two students studying Korean in Vietnam to ensure that the participants would be able to understand the items. The pilot test indicated that the Korean language level was appropriate, and no items needed to be revised. The English version of the Korean questionnaire items is provided in the Appendix (for promotion items, Cronbach's  $\alpha = 0.26$ ; for prevention

items, Cronbach's  $\alpha = 0.62$ ). The questionnaire was written in Korean. Since the participants' L2 proficiency was sufficient to understand the items, translation to L1 Vietnamese was not necessary.

The oral task was an expository monologue in which the participants were asked to describe places in Vietnam that the students and faculty could visit as a department field trip. After viewing six pictures of popular local attractions, the participants were instructed to select two places, describe them, and explain why they had selected them. To manipulate regulatory focus, two versions of the instructions were created. To encourage promotion focus, the participants in the promotion condition were told to describe and explain two places that the Korean department could visit on a field trip. To encourage prevention focus, the participants were told to describe and explain two places that should be avoided during the field trip. The oral task was pilot tested with five intermediate-level Korean language students at language schools in Canada and South Korea. Based on the pilot test, two pictures were modified to make them comparable to other pictures, and the task instructions were clarified.

### 6.3 Design

To investigate whether regulatory focus is related to Korean L2 learners' task performance, a between-groups design was used. The participants' general disposition toward regulatory focus was operationalized as questionnaire responses to items that targeted promotion and prevention focus. Task-induced regulatory focus was operationalized as the instructions given before the oral task. Whereas the promotion-focus task was explaining the reasons for visiting two locations, the prevention-focus task was explaining why two locations should be avoided. The participants were randomly assigned to either promotion or prevention condition. Task performance was operationalized in terms of the quantity of speech (total words), error rates per c-unit, and speech rate (syllables per second).

### 6.4 Procedure

The data was collected during the participants' Korean class. The first researcher distributed the consent form and the questionnaire, reviewed all questionnaire items, and answered any questions from the students and the course instructors. After completing the questionnaire, individual participants met the first researcher in a separate classroom to carry out the oral task. Before carrying

out the task according to either promotion- or prevention-focus condition, the researcher asked the participants several warm-up questions in Korean, such as “How do you plan to use Korean language skills?” and “What helps you improving your language skills?” After reviewing the pictures, the participants had two minutes of planning time, after which they explained which locations they selected and gave their reasons. The individual session ranged from five to 10 minutes per participant, and their interaction with the researcher was audio-recorded using a Sony digital recorder. The participation was voluntary and no reward was given to the participants.

## 6.5 Data analysis

The questionnaire items were assigned numeric values so that “strongly disagree” corresponded with one and “strongly agree” was scored as six. The values for the five promotion and five prevention items were summed separately, and the participants were classified as having a disposition toward promotion or prevention focus based on their highest subscore for  $2 \times 2$  factorial ANOVA. The participants who had equal subscores on the promotion and prevention scales were excluded from the analysis. The audio-recordings were transcribed by the first researcher. The transcripts were analyzed in terms of the total number of words, error rate (errors per c-unit), and speech rate (syllables per second). A subset of the data (24%) was coded by an independent coder. Interrater reliability, assessed using a two-way mixed average-measures intraclass correlation coefficient, was 0.99 for total words, 0.77 for error rate, and 0.93 for speech rate.

## 7 Results

Based on the questionnaire results, nearly an equal number of participants could be classified as having a trait disposition toward promotion ( $n=30$ ) or prevention focus ( $n=32$ ). The random assignment of students prior to task performance resulted in 32 participants in the task-induced promotion condition and 30 participants in the prevention condition. As shown in Table 1, in terms of the number of words produced, the participants in the non-matching conditions (i. e., prevention trait/promotion task or promotion trait/prevention task) produced more words than those in the matching conditions. For speech rate, the participants in the task-induced prevention condition produced more fluent speech (i. e., more syllables per minute), regardless of their

**Table 1:** Descriptive statistics of L2 speech performance by regulatory focus.

Task-induced regulatory focus	Trait-based regulatory focus	Words	Speech rate	Error rate
		<i>M</i>	<i>M</i>	<i>M</i>
Promotion condition	Promotion ( <i>n</i> = 18)	56.06	1.78	3.49
	Prevention ( <i>n</i> = 14)	63.71	2.06	3.41
Total promotion condition ( <i>n</i> = 32)		58.75	1.91	3.46
Prevention condition	Promotion ( <i>n</i> = 12)	63.67	2.47	2.55
	Prevention ( <i>n</i> = 18)	54.94	2.27	1.35
Total prevention condition ( <i>n</i> = 30)		58.43	2.35	1.83

trait-based regulatory focus. Furthermore, they also had lower error rates (errors per c-unit).

To address the research questions about the main and interaction effects of trait-based and task-induced regulatory focus, three separate  $2 \times 2$  ANOVAs were carried out for the total number of words, speech rate, and error rate.<sup>1</sup> The overall results showed that the prevention task had significant associations with the speech performance measures, while main effects of regulatory focus trait and its interaction with task were not confirmed. The results for the total number of words indicated that there were no significant main effects for trait [ $F(1, 58) = 0.008, p = 0.930, \eta_p^2 = 0.000$ ] or task-induced regulatory focus [ $F(1, 58) = 0.009, p = 0.923, \eta_p^2 = 0.000$ ] and no interaction effect [ $F(1, 58) = 1.862, p = 0.178, \eta_p^2 = 0.031$ ]. For speech rate, the main effect for task was found in favor of the prevention task condition [ $F(1, 58) = 7.627, p = 0.008, \eta_p^2 = 0.116$ ]; however, no significant results were found from trait-based regulatory focus [ $F(1, 58) = 0.066, p = 0.798, \eta_p^2 = 0.001$ ], or interaction between trait-based and task-induced regulatory focus [ $F(1, 58) = 2.164, p = 0.147, \eta_p^2 = 0.036$ ]. For error rate, main effect for task-induced regulatory focus was found [ $F(1, 58) = 6.351, p = 0.015, \eta_p^2 = 0.099$ ], while no significant effect was found from trait-based regulatory focus [ $F(1, 58) = 1.154, p = 0.287, \eta_p^2 = 0.020$ ], or the interaction between regulatory focus trait and the task conditions [ $F(1, 58) = 0.878, p = 0.353, \eta_p^2 = 0.015$ ].

<sup>1</sup> Multiple regression analysis was conducted by using dummy coding, but the results were not different from the ANOVAs.

## 8 Discussion

The results indicated that Korean L2 learners' task performance was affected by task-induced regulatory focus. More specifically, the learners in the prevention condition were more accurate and fluent than the learners in the promotion condition. The findings confirm that situation-specific motivation can help account for variation in L2 task performance, as has been shown in previous studies (Dörnyei 2002; Dörnyei and Kormos 2000; Kormos and Dörnyei 2004). The findings also suggest that L2 task conditions may be manipulated in ways that can positively impact L2 speech performance. In other words, orienting learners to prevention regulatory focus by task conditions may positively affect their linguistic performance. Previous L2 motivation studies have shown that task conditions affect L2 speakers' task enjoyment, effort, perceived difficulty, anxiety, and success expectancy (Poupore 2013). Similarly, the current study indicates that task conditions related to regulatory focus may also affect task performance.

On the other hand, regulatory focus as individual traits was not associated with the linguistics measures of L2 speech. The lack of relationship may be attributed to the low internal consistency of the promotion focus scale ( $\alpha = 0.26$ ), which suggests that the items adopted from Taguchi et al. (2009) may not have been relevant for the L2 Korean learners in Vietnam. For instance, according to Taguchi et al. (2009), there are few native speakers of English in Iran; thereby Iranian students do not have much access to L2 native speakers. In contrast, the Korean industry in Vietnam has grown dramatically over the past two decades, and all students have contact or working experience with Korean native speakers during their studies. The access to the Korean community may have lessened the desire to live abroad; therefore, one of the promotion items, "Studying Korean is important because I would like to live in Korea for a while" might not be applicable. Also, due to the influence of mass media as well as direct contact with the Korean community, the learners have been heavily exposed to Korean culture, and as a result, cultural interest might not be a motivator to spend more time and put effort toward L2 learning because of the familiarity with the L2 culture. Therefore, the promotion item might not be applicable to the L2 Korean learners in Vietnam.

As for task-induced regulatory focus, the findings raise interesting questions about why the task-induced prevention condition resulted in more fluent and accurate speech. Broadly defined, prevention orientation is associated with the desire to avoid negative outcomes. If the learners in this study perceived making speech errors as negative outcomes, then their desire to avoid making errors may have resulted in more accurate speech. Another possible explanation for the superior performance of the prevention group is different attentional

allocation to ideas and language forms. Due to the task-induced desire to avoid negative outcomes (i. e., taking the department to undesirable locations), students in the prevention condition may have assigned attentional resources to language forms and rehearsed their speech performance during the planning time. In contrast, students in the promotion condition may have been concerned more about brainstorming reasons why the locations were attractive, and spent less time considering their speech performance during the planning and speaking time. This explanation should be interpreted with caution because the participants' thought processes were not verbalized or available for analysis. To illustrate the findings, two excerpts from participants in the promotion- and prevention-task conditions are provided below, although the two examples cannot be generalizable to the entire data set. The examples below give reasons for selecting two places to go (promotion condition) and two to avoid (prevention condition), and they clearly show different patterns of idea development. The original transcript was transcribed to English.

#### Example 1 Promotion condition

[I would like to go to Hue. The reason is Hue has old palace ... Vietnamese old palace. Oh, this is historical attraction. Uh ... if we go to Hue, we can visit many palaces. Here ... very, so beautiful. There is the sea as well as the place in Hue. We can hang around the city, relax and swim. So I want to go to Hue. I just. Hmm, I would like to go to Nha Trang. Like Hue, Nha Trang has beautiful scenery. Air is very fresh. Nha Trang is the best for relaxing. So, actually, because I have an uncle in Nha Trang, I want to go there.]

#### Example 2 Prevention condition

[The reasons why I didn't want to go Saigon is there are too many people and weather is too hot because they don't have four seasons, they have only two seasons. The temperature is very high, and it's hot. I don't like hot weather, so I don't like to go to Saigon. Yeah, and I think Sapa is actually not beautiful compared to other places. And I don't know well what is available, what kind of activities we can do in Sapa. That's why I didn't select Sapa.]

The ideas in the example of the promotion condition are divergent and choppy; the participant seems to have come up with as many reasons as she could think. The words *beautiful* and *relax* occurred repetitively. In the prevention condition, however, the ideas are convergent and more structured. The first idea, *hot weather*, was developed further after she first mentioned it, which contrasts with the promotion condition example. Regulatory focus is different modes of reasoning, which may have led to divergent and convergent thinking processes as suggested by the

examples. The presence of more idea units in the promotion condition suggests that participants may have spent the available planning time and their cognitive resources to generate many reasons, whereas the fewer idea units and more structured speech found in the prevention condition may indicate that participants were focused more on how to express their ideas rather than what to say.

One major challenge for task-induced regulatory focus was to maintain comparability across the task conditions. In the current study, the task instructions were manipulated so that the participants oriented toward either promotion focus (a desirable outcome) or prevention focus (an undesirable outcome). However, this manipulation may have inadvertently affected other aspects of the task, such as task difficulty or complexity. Additional data elicitation measures, such as asking participants to think aloud while planning or to complete post-performance ratings of task features (e.g., difficulty, interest, background knowledge), could provide insight into whether the experimental task conditions created additional task differences or complexities.

Concerning measurement of the participants' general disposition toward promotion or prevention focus, we adopted promotion-instrumentality and prevention-instrumentality from Taguchi et al. (2009) and modified them for the context of L2 Korean in Vietnam. The internal consistency of the questionnaire was low, especially for the promotion items, possibly due to the different cultural contexts in Vietnam. The low internal consistency suggests that the instrument may not have been appropriate for these learners. The original study targeted L2 English learners in China, Iran and Japan, and the cross-cultural differences in those countries and Vietnam may have led to different findings.

## 9 Limitations and implications

As a first step to explore the potential effects of task-induced regulatory focus on L2 oral task performance, the current study only administered a monologic expository task, which was selected to control for possible interlocutor effects. However, given the participants' L2 proficiency level, the oral task may not have been sufficiently challenging to engage the participants' intended efforts or activate their trait-based motivational self system. Because the participants spoke about a familiar topic for only a few minutes, they may have been able to retrieve familiar information without having to elaborate. Future research should include a wider variety of monologic tasks, such as narrative tasks, in order to obtain longer and more lexically-rich language samples. In order to provide insight into collaborative task performance, future studies should investigate the interaction between L2 learners with different regulatory focus traits. Research in this vein

would have pedagogical value and shed light on effective task design and implementation for L2 learners with diverse motivational profiles.

Another limitation lies in the distribution of data across gender. Due to the fact that male students are rare in foreign language departments in Vietnam, the ratio of the participants in this study was skewed toward female. Gender difference in L2 motivation has often been reported (e. g., Henry and Cliffordson 2013; Kim and Kim 2011; You et al. 2016), so the skewed distribution of data limits the generalizability of the findings.

Despite the limitations, the findings have potentially important implications for L2 teaching and research. The finding that task-induced regulatory focus impacts L2 oral performance indicates an important role for task-integral conditions, regardless of learners' general disposition. In other words, a teacher's role in setting task conditions may override learners' motivational disposition. The prevention condition, which was found to promote speech rate and prevent error rate, gives a new perspective on task-based learning and focus-on-form instruction. In the context of L2 teaching, promotion-focused tasks are often favored over prevention-focused tasks. However, prevention-focused tasks may elicit more accurate and more fluent speech than promotion-focused tasks. In terms of focus-on-form instruction, the general goal is to direct L2 learners' attention to target form, often to avoid the negative consequences of using that form incorrectly or inappropriately. Since prevention focus is associated with avoidance strategies, it may be compatible with focus-on-form approaches that emphasize accuracy.

## 10 Conclusion and future research

In conclusion, the current exploratory study found that task-induced regulatory focus affected Korean L2 learners' task performance, with the prevention condition eliciting more fluent and accurate speech than the promotion condition. Conceptualized within contemporary approaches to L2 motivation that posit dynamic interactions among L2 learners' general dispositions and environmental conditions, the findings imply that externally manipulated task conditions can potentially affect L2 learners' linguistic performance. The lack of association between the trait-based regulatory focus and the speech measures, however, does not necessarily indicate that promotion and prevention traits are not related to L2 speech performance given the low reliability of the questionnaire. In the future research, we aim to develop a more reliable measure of L2 regulatory focus that is appropriate for the context of L2 learning in Vietnam.

For this study, we chose a lab-based setting in order to control interlocutor effects and maximize regulatory focus effects on speech performance.

However, our future research aims to further clarify the interaction among task-based and trait-based components of L2 learners' motivational profiles, and document how these factors interact in ways that account for variation in their language use across diverse L2 learning settings. In particular, we aim to further explore how L2 teachers' choices about task design and instructions affect task-induced promotion and prevention focus, and its impact on L2 learners' task performance and linguistic development. In addition to L2 performance, another important area to explore would be language processing data such as think-aloud protocol or stimulated recall interview. The process-oriented data would be able to give us fruitful information as to whether and how task-induced and/or trait-based regulatory focus contributes to attentional allocation of certain aspects of L2 task. Regulatory focus is relatively new in applied linguistics; however, the available L2 research in this line showed different levels of situating regulatory focus from general traits to task conditions. The trait-based and task-induced regulatory focus have potential to elucidate the interaction among learners' motivational trait, task-independent reward and task-integral content. It would also be interesting to explore pair interaction in congruent and incongruent conditions of trait-based regulatory focus (promotion vs. prevention) or high and low motivation.

Lastly, in light of the considerable body of motivation research that has identified the important role of social and cultural context in L2 speakers' motivation (Gardner 2010; Lamb 2009; Taguchi et al. 2009), future studies should target a wider range of L2 learning environments. Furthermore, due to the linguistic characteristics of Korean, such as its rich inflectional systems and incorporation of function words onto lexical items, comparisons with studies of English speakers may be irrelevant. Task-based research would benefit from future studies that expand its empirical basis to reflect greater consideration of less-commonly taught languages.

## Appendix

Questionnaire items with Cronbach's alpha and corrected item-total correlation (English version)

*Promotion-orientation* (Cronbach's alpha = 0.26,  $N = 62$ )

1. Studying Korean is important because I will be able to make a lot of money if I have a high level of Korean proficiency. [0.01]
2. Studying Korean is important because I would like to live in Korea for a while. [0.34]

3. Studying Korean is important because it will give me more opportunities to get the kind of job I want. [0.35]
4. Studying Korean is important to me because it offers a new challenge in my life. [-0.03]
5. Studying Korean is important for learning more about Korean culture. [0.04]

*Prevention-orientation* (Cronbach's  $\alpha = 0.62$ ,  $N = 62$ )

1. Studying Korean is important; otherwise my parents will be disappointed. [0.22]
2. Studying Korean is necessary for me because I don't want to get a poor score on a Korean proficiency test. [0.51]
3. I have to study Korean because I cannot graduate without passing the Korean test. [0.28]
4. Studying Korean is important; otherwise, I will not be able to have a good income. [0.49]
5. I have to study Korean; otherwise, I think I will not be successful in my future career. [42]

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