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Research Article

# Goal Orientation as a Mediator with Intercultural Sensitivity in Language Learners' Speaking Performance

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**ABSTRACT**

**Introduction:** Although research on intercultural awareness in language learning studies has generated substantial literature, particularly on individual differences such as motivation and willingness to communicate, no comparable attention has been equally directed at achievement-related constructs such as goal orientations in relation to intercultural sensitivity and learning outcomes. In this vein, this study aimed to explore this under-researched area through its focus on goal orientation as the main source of learner variance. Not only did it seek to examine the correlation between goal orientation and one's intercultural disposition, but also to verify whether such association might well have a significant bearing on one's learning outcomes.

**Methodology**: The experimental process began by administering psychometric tests to 212 intermediate-level learners of English of whom 19 participants took part in two rounds of a speaking performance task. The selection of the latter, being the best scorers on the two goal profiles, was justified by the testing nature of the empirical course. The main participants were clustered into low-Mastery/high-Performance and high-Mastery/low-Performance groups and their intercultural sensitivity level was determined based on a validated 15-item scale. The experimental procedure drew on interview tasks, led with native and non-native interlocutors, considered repeated measures of fluency and complexity to account for how both goal and intercultural variables jointly shaped oral performance.

**Results**: The findings attested to the systematic relationship between one's goal orientation and their level of intercultural sensitivity. Moreover, there was a significant effect of such association on participants' processing biases.

**Conclusion:** Building on these results, it is suggested to consider individual differences in any future research and curricular effort when it comes to intercultural awareness.

## 1. Introduction

Modern foreign language learning and teaching research has grown in consonance with the needs of the historical era since its inception in the mid-twentieth century. Almost all its resultant literature revolves around the organizing construct of competency following the Chomskyan revolution in the field of linguistics. Its path of development has followed an incremental process, so much so that from the 1980s onward the communicative approach garnered a substantial share of attention among stakeholders building on the seminal works of Canale and Swain (1980). Even more, the hegemony of the competency-based paradigm did not cease to evolve in light of the emergence of new necessities reflecting the rapid changes in a more globalized world. Immigration and advances in communication technology have urged the issue of intercultural diversity into the mainstream discourse of the language education community. Research-wise, Byram (1997) and Kramsch (2001) have foregrounded the concept of intercultural competence (being one of the demonstrations of the all-

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encompassing construct of intercultural awareness) as a crucial learning target, thereby judging an efficient language learner as primarily a competent intercultural speaker who compromises individuals from different cultural and language backgrounds.

With all the literature documenting the intercultural dimension in language learning and teaching, it was as if this research area has obscured the role of individual differences in determining the development and quality of intercultural awareness in the language learning experience. In this regard, the present study attempts to contribute to the extant literature by highlighting the eclipsed side of individual differences represented by the variable of goal orientation. Two reasons may justify the choice of this variable as the main research unit. Not only does it integrate behavioral, affective, and cognitive properties (Chiocca, 2019; He, 2005; Pintrich, 2000), but it has also been a well-researched construct whose attendant findings may serve as a base for analyzing and validating the experimental outcome provided here. At this juncture, its rationale underlies two considerations: (i) to verify whether goal orientation may serve as a solid unit of analysis to account for variance in individuals' intercultural awareness, and (ii) to examine whether such purported variance may have a direct effect on their language learning course.

## 2. Literature review

### 2.1. The intercultural dimension

Defined by Borelli, Acero, and Perez (2020) as the "process or phenomenon by which people from a given culture integrate and interact with people from other cultures, customs and traditions" (p. 102), intercultural awareness gained currency in communication studies in the wake of the need to establish efficient communicative modes responsive to the ever-growing cultural diversity in the post-colonial era. In this purview, Hall (1959) introduced the concept of *intercultural communication,* attesting to a then-novel message that there is more to learning foreign languages than the command of their systemic properties. Later, interest in this intercultural dimension was such that considerable research across several disciplines, as in business studies and education, has been documented (see Perry & Southwell, 2011) under a variety of appellations, such as *international organization communication* (Lauring, 2011), *global communication* (Fortner, 1993), *cross-cultural communication* (Hofstede & Hofstede, 2005), and *cross-cultural adaptation* (Gudykunst, 2003). Despite the effort to broaden the scope of their operationalization, all the resultant models show more overlaps than differences. Yet, each discipline adapts this concept according to its theoretical premises, as with second language acquisition (SLA).

Irrespective of the importance attached to intercultural awareness in SLA research, attendant literature has not documented almost any noteworthy effort on its direct implication(s) for the dynamics of language learning. Dombi (2021) is perhaps one of those exceptional attempts to scrutinize how intercultural sensitivity (ICS) might be subject to variation yielded by the sum of individual differences. In this purview, Perry and Southwell (2011) referred succinctly to such influence on the rate of ICS development, yet their claim did not go beyond conjecture. Making the case for her model, Dombi (2021) asserts that differentials such as "experiences, fears, expectations, motifs, beliefs, and attitudes [that] learners bring to intercultural interactions play a role as important and conducive to their success" (p. 45). Among the individual differences that may constitute sources of variation regarding intercultural competence development, Dombi's (2021) model opts for a systematic account of the relationship between intercultural sensitivity and individual differences (e.g., motivation, anxiety, apprehension, willingness to communicate), hence treating these variables as parallel and discrete predictors. The present study, instead, views such differentials as interrelated components of higher-order cognitive-motivational construct, namely goal orientation. Therefore, framing these variables within a goal spectrum would offer an integrated account of learner variance. Moreover, treating these variables individually may not yield an incisive comprehensive image of what happens in an intercultural encounter. Instead, it appears that these individual characteristics can be consistently represented as integral elements of one entity, elsewhere referred to in the literature as a goal-orientation variable.

### 2.2. Goal orientation: An outline

He (2001) offers an incisive understanding of goal orientations being stratified along a continuum rather than looking at them as mutually exclusive categories. As such, language learners would position themselves somewhere between the goal poles (i.e., identified with a high-Mastery goal and a low-Performance goal and vice versa). Mastery goal orientation is generally identified with those who view the learning experience as an opportunity to grow and less regard is given to the learning outcomes. They feel more motivated to engage in and benefit from challenging tasks. They are prone to taking risks and tolerate ambiguity in the face of difficulties using deep-level strategies. On the other side of the goal spectrum, Performance goal orientation is associated with subjects particularly interested in the outcomes of any achievement experience. Always motivated by a constant fear of failure and losing face, they are likely to resort to avoidance reflexes as a function of their maladaptive behavior. They, therefore, adopt surface-level strategies during task engagement. Overall, goal orientation literature abounds with the definitional

effort to operationalize the two goal-orientation levels (Alamer & Alrabai, 2025; Arasaratnam, 2007; Elliot, 1999; He, 2005; Skaalvik, 1997).

It is also worth mentioning that the goal orientation is multidimensional in essence, so much so that each goal area constitutes several individual differences that, altogether, shape the goal identity of the individual. References to an interface with intercultural awareness are not lacking across several disciplines. For instance, interculturally sensitive/competent individuals – and their opposite counterparts were found to be associated with one of those differences, such as motivation (Ting-Toomey and Kurogi, 1998), risk-taking (Elliot, 1999), fear of losing face (Deardorff, 2006; Chiocca, 2019), and tolerance to ambiguity (Alamer & Alrabai, 2025). Nonetheless, Dombi (2021) provides the most comprehensive account of the relationship between intercultural awareness and a set of individual differences (e.g., motivation, apprehension, willingness to communicate, perceived competence). A closer look at these variables yields the assumption that they formulate coherent components of a given goal-orientation area.

One of the few studies that established goal orientation as a primary source of variation in one's intercultural awareness is Chiocca (2019). She case-studied the relationship between ICC development and learning critical languages, yet her findings were not conclusive about the strength of that interconnection. In this purview, the study reported presently aims to extend this research line and explore the extent of the interconnection. Building in part on Dombi's (2021) assertion that individual differences intersect with one's intercultural awareness level, the present study not only frames these individual differences under a coherent entity of goal orientation, but also hypothesizes that goals and ICS level jointly determine the shape of language learning patterns and results. To shed some empirical light on this ICS issue, the following research questions are proposed:

1. Which goal orientation best differentiates high/low ICS levels?

2. How can they jointly influence the language learning process?

## 3. Methodology

### *3.1. Setting and Sampling*

The study took place at the English Language Institute (ELI), an affiliate of the University of Jeddah. With a yearly intake of around one thousand male students often accepted to a two-semester curriculum upon computer-delivered placement tests, the ELI offers more than 220 hours of English-focused tuition with 18 hours each week. Enrolled students are expected to improve both their four skills in and knowledge of English language and culture, while being subjected to regular evaluation in partial fulfillment of a foundation program that comprises other academic subjects. They are evenly distributed according to their proficiency levels (pre-intermediate or intermediate) into groups, each under the academic responsibility of an instructor, all along a fourteen-week term with an exclusive reference to the *Life* textbook series. As with the other skills, the speaking class involves tasks associated with the weekly thematic unit added to some training on a project-based presentation. In view of that, the students are expected to enhance their speaking skills from posture to phonetics which in turn undergo regular rounds of evaluation.

The initial participant pool included 212 students (Males N = 138; Females N = 74), all enrolled in intermediate-level classes and spread over two gender-based campuses. As a result, a female research assistant was engaged to help with the procedure of data collection. All these students responded to a psychometric test, and 19 individuals (Males $N$ = 9; Females $N$ = 10) participated in the experimental course. The subjects came from the urban area of Jeddah and their age ranged from eighteen to twenty-three years. Being native speakers of Arabic, almost all the participants had approximately nine years of learning English in public schools or international schools based in the same city. Yet, a few of them spent variable learning periods in English-speaking countries on government-sponsored scholarships. The sampling process considered these students – irrespective of their achievement levels in their classes– based on their willingness to participate in the study and consent to be audio-recorded during off-class sessions. In this respect, it is noteworthy to state that although the decision to use a small experimental sample was dictated by the time constraints of the two-week timeframe, it stands to reason that the choice would yield important implications for statistical inference. More explicitly, the restricted sample size may have compromised the statistical power and the robustness of multivariate and repeated measures analyses, thus increasing sensitivity to the violation of some assumptions (e.g., homogeneity and multivariate normality) and requiring cautious interpretation of the effect sizes and interaction effect patterns. Besides, with reference to small samples, statistically significant effects, particularly those associated with large effect sizes, should be reasonably interpreted as explanatory and provisional rather than conclusive unless replicated with larger and assorted samples.

### *3.2. Design of the study*

As an empirical effort to address the hypothesized connection between one's goal orientation and ICS and its role in determining the shape of speaking performance, the study opted for a stepwise strategy

of data source triangulation. It drew on a mixed-methods design to define the main variables and foreground them aside from others. In its first phase, it drew on between-subjects analysis to operationalize the two independent variables of goal orientation (the prime individual difference factor) and intercultural sensitivity (response patterns to culture(s)) through the application of a psychometric tool. Based on the outcomes of the psychometric undertaking, the study subsequently adopted a within-subjects scheme to capture whether the variance, occasioned by the above independent variables, was echoed in the informants' speaking performance. In response to two interview-based speaking tasks, the study carried out a 2X2 (*goal orientation* [HMLP goal orientation vs. LMHP goal orientation] x *Task* [NS episode vs. NNS episode]) design with repeated measures over fluency and complexity. The resultant performance collected in line with a set of measures, was treated and presented for statistical analysis.

The Goal-Orientation variable was operationalized into two levels which are purported to represent to which goal area the students are affiliated. Based on the data collected from a scale designed to identify informants' goal affiliations, the results served to cluster them into two main poles, and the best 25 scorers in each group were chosen to participate in the experimental phase and the pool narrowed down to 19 participants who agreed to continue the experience). It is important to note that the present study drew on He's (2005) operationalization of this independent variable which, contrary to the common on-off categorization in mainstream goal literature (e.g., Skaalvik, 1997; Pintrich, 2000), views one's goal orientations as opposite sides of a spectrum. At one end, there is the high-Mastery/low-Performance (HMLP) group whose members score the highest in terms of the Mastery Goal -orientation scale responses and the lowest Performance Goal-orientation Scale responses. At the other end, there is the low-Mastery/high-Performance (LMHP) group whose lowest scale responses fall in the Mastery goal orientation side and the highest one with the Performance goal orientation side. Such categorization is believed more representative of how these orientations co-exist and the manifestation of one goal area does not distinctly obviate the other one.

The ICS variable constituted the second main independent variable of the study. Its empirical configuration would help in the effort of verifying the level of its rapport with goal orientation. To determine the participants' degree of sensitivity toward intercultural ICS cues, the study opted for a psychometric test. Yet, unlike the Goal-Orientation variable, attendant positive responses collected from the target scale were expected to peak among highly sensitive informants and to tail off among those bearing little sensitivity to intercultural input. As for the criterion variable of speaking performance, the study focused on two areas: fluency and complexity. Each of these levels was represented by two discourse analytic measures. On the one hand, fluency was identified by the measures of Speech Rate/Minute and Dysfluency Marker/Minute. Whereas the latter measure counts the various instances of fluency breakdowns (e.g., false starts, long pauses, repetitions, etc.), the former measure is concerned with the tally of speech velocity of the participants. On the other hand, complexity was interpreted in its structural and lexical sides. Its structural aspect consists in the tally of subordination through the Subordination/T-unit measure whereas its lexical side is the count of the amount of lexical word use through the Lexical Density/Minute measure.

### *3.3. Instruments*

The study opted for two data-elicitation tools: (i) a two-scale instrument to gauge data attendant to participants' goal orientation and intercultural sensitivity and (ii) face-to-face interview tasks which they performed on two occasions. In the beginning, the questionnaire was administered to yield results that helped in the screening process of selecting a few students thought reasonably eligible for the subsequent experimental phase. Out of the highest 20 scorers on either side of the goal-orientation spectrum, only nine students volunteered to engage in the two interview tasks which, though similar in design (i.e., difficulty level, number of questions, and personal interest), differed in terms of the task administrator. That is, whereas the first task was carried out by a non-native speaker interviewer (NNS Task), the second task was by a native speaker interviewer (NS Task). The informants' responses were audio-recorded. Then, the data were transcribed and submitted for subsequent analysis.

The first part of this tool is the Goal-orientation Scale, a psychometric instrument validated by Ben Maad (2012). Designed to identify the goal affiliations of respondents, the scale comprised two 5-point Likert subscales, each referring to a goal area represented in 10 items that detect, through the agreement levels of the respondents, how affiliated they would be with a given orientation. The design of this scale was informed by well-documented tools (e.g., Midgley et al., 1998; Skaalvik, 1997) and its items were representative of a set of antecedents. Each of the items was conceived to represent one goal concept such as risk management. Whereas in the HMLP sub-scale, this concept is associated with 'risk-taking' as for Item 1, it stands out in the form of 'risk avoidance' for Item 11 in the LMHP goal sub-scale. Following the administration of the scale, raw data were tallied and a cut-off screening procedure was carried out to retain around the 10 % best scorers on each subscale presumed to participate in the subsequent experimental phase. Only 19 participants from the

chosen pool agreed to continue the experience after being informed about its objectives and requirements.

The second part of the questionnaire is the ICS scale based on the well-cited instrument of Chen and Starosta (2000). This tool has garnered considerable attention in the literature attesting to its psychometric assumptions of validity and reliability (e.g., Liu & Ren, 2019; Petrovic, Starčević, Chen & Komnenic, 2015). For expediency and usefulness in administration together with the Goal-orientation Scale, the present study drew on an abbreviated version verified by Wang & Zhou (2016), reducing the scale items from 24 to 15. Also, as confirmed by Jia (2021), the 15-item scale retained reliability and validity results as significant as in the original version. Only minor modifications at the level of wording were made following the piloting effort. As in its original version, the scale of the 15-item instrument constitutes five dimensions: interaction engagement, respect for cultural differences, interaction confidence, interaction enjoyment, and interaction attentiveness. Yet, it narrows the number of items in each aspect down to three. Each of these items represents a statement to be rated on a 5-point Likert response scheme based on the respondent's degree of agreement (from *strongly agree* = 5 points to *strongly disagree* = 1 point). It is to be noted here that Items 3, 4, 5, 6, 10, 11, and 12 should be reverse scored. After verification, it follows that the reverse scoring procedure satisfied the reliability requirements where none of those items proved problematic. Overall, the highest scorers are judged to have high intercultural sensitivity.

### *3.4. Procedure*

In its experimental phase, the study opted for a face-to-face interview task to engage the 19 volunteer participants and collect their oral responses accordingly. The interview task was carried out in two episodes one week apart. While keeping the same format of eight questions each, different topics were chosen (i.e., traveling and interracial marriage) and different interviewers previously unacquainted with the respondents. While the interviewer in the first episode was a non-native speaker of English who shared the same mother tongue as the task takers, the other research assistant was a native speaker. The rationale for this choice stems from the need to detect any variance in the output of the task takers vis-à-vis this procedural distinction. In this respect, the informants –when in direct contact with interlocutors from linguistically/culturally different backgrounds– were purported to respond somehow differently compared to their interaction with conversers sharing the same culture. Their degree of intercultural sensitivity –already identified through the ICS scale results– would be accentuated by this task sequencing alteration (NNS Task vs. NS Task), hence affecting their processing choices and ultimately their speaking output.

The four interviewers were asked to audio-record the oral responses which were subsequently converted to transcripts using a transcription guide from Mackey and Gass (2005, p 224). One of them assisted with coding the data according to a template conceived by Ellis and Barkhuizen (2005). The coding scheme specified definitions and instructions to address both fluency (i.e., temporal measures to calculate speech velocity and marking instances of dysfluency to evaluate speech breakdowns) and complexity (i.e., structural complexity through subordination and lexical density through word diversity). To observe the quality of the coding procedure, it was decided to conduct an inter-rater reliability calculation. A randomly chosen sample of around 10 % of the total body of transcripts (i.e., 4 out of 38 units) was re-considered and code-checked against the first attempt. The intra-coder reliability test yielded acceptable results (i.e. according to estimates of Mackey and Gass, 2005) along the four performance measures. Whereas the Speech Rate/Minute measure showed the highest level of consistency as high as 90 %, the lowest consistency was observed with the Dysfluency Marker/Minute measure reaching 78 % coding consistency. Following the coding and scoring of the transcripts, the processed data were submitted to descriptive and inferential analyses.

## 4. Results

### *4.1. Goal-orientation scale results*

In the first phase of data collection, the Goal-orientation Scale was administered. It yielded results that helped in the subsequent procedure of assigning two goal-orientation groups that would undergo the experimental course. The descriptive analysis displayed in Table 1 points to the consistency of the mean responses along the two subscales, although the LMHP subscale's mean average ($M$ = 3.41) is slightly larger than that of the mean average in the HMLP subscale ($M$ = 3.05). Yet, the mean range of the latter ($M$ = 3.33 for Item 13 and M = 3.46 for Item 11) is narrower than the former one ($M$ = 2.94 for Item 2 and M = 3.14 for Item 9). Consistency is also verified at the level of data variation through the scores of standard deviation, a measure purported essential to make sure that such variation is empirically approachable. In this respect, the attendant deviation scores are evenly distributed along the two subscales and revolve around the 1.00 value in a range between $SD$ = 1.39 and $SD$ = 1.51

***Table 1.***
*Distributional, Reliability, and Factorial Results for the Goals Scale*

| Goal Orientation Items | Distributional Assumptions | | | Reliability | | Component Loadings | |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| | *M* | *SD* | Skewness | Item *r* | $\alpha$ if Item Deleted | 1 | 2 |
| 1. Risk-taking | 3.09 | 1.39 | 0.15 | 0.81 | 0.96 | -0.84 | 0.05 |
| 2.Self-achievement | 2.94 | 1.41 | 0.15 | 0.83 | 0.96 | -0.85 | 0.03 |
| 3.Disinterest in grades | 2.98 | 1.42 | 0.15 | 0.84 | 0.95 | -0.86 | 0.28 |
| 4.Personal value | 3.02 | 1.41 | 0.21 | 0.83 | 0.95 | -0.86 | -0.28 |
| 5. Deep strategy | 3 | 1.39 | 0.2 | 0.82 | 0.96 | -0.85 | -0.19 |
| 6. Relaxed attitude | 3.01 | 1.43 | 0.19 | 0.85 | 0.96 | -0.87 | 0.11 |
| 7. Process-based | 3.1 | 1.39 | 0.17 | 0.85 | 0.96 | -0.87 | 0.12 |
| 8. Task-driven | 3.13 | 1.35 | 0.12 | 0.82 | 0.96 | -0.84 | 0.18 |
| 9. Analyzing | 3.14 | 1.45 | 0.02 | 0.85 | 0.96 | -0.87 | 0.04 |
| 10. Self-satisfaction | 3.08 | 1.45 | 0.06 | 0.81 | 0.96 | -0.84 | -0.2 |
| 11. Risk-avoiding | 3.46 | 1.45 | -0.31 | 0.87 | 0.97 | 0.17 | 0.89 |
| 12. Outperforming | 3.34 | 1.61 | -0.26 | 0.88 | 0.97 | -0.21 | 0.89 |
| 13. Concern for grades | 3.33 | 1.51 | -0.24 | 0.87 | 0.97 | 0.02 | 0.9 |
| 14. Performance value | 3.39 | 1.46 | -0.26 | 0.87 | 0.97 | 0.02 | 0.88 |
| 15. Surface strategy | 3.43 | 1.45 | -0.37 | 0.89 | 0.97 | 0.08 | 0.89 |
| 16. Conservative | 3.37 | 1.5 | -0.3 | 0.9 | 0.97 | 0.04 | 0.92 |
| 17. Product-focused | 3.44 | 1.45 | -0.29 | 0.89 | 0.97 | 0 | 0.9 |
| 18. Fear-driven | 3.44 | 1.45 | -0.3 | 0.88 | 0.97 | -0.02 | 0.9 |
| 19. Memorizing | 3.39 | 1.5 | -0.32 | 0.87 | 0.97 | -0.14 | 0.89 |
| 20. External feedback | 3.46 | 1.51 | -0.37 | 0.85 | 0.97 | 0.18 | 0.88 |

Table 2 displays results attendant to the construct validity of goal orientation, allowing for an operational consolidation of the number of levels defining it as an independent variable in the experimental episode of the study. To determine how the goal properties (discussed in the previous section) cluster around some given goal area(s), a Principal Component was performed on the 20 items constituting the goal scale. It is noteworthy to mention that a Pearson-product correlation was carried out on the data to corroborate its factorability. As the resultant correlations score above the base $r = .30$ value (i.e., the lowest is $r = .67$ for Item 10), the correlation matrix is judged as factorable. The subsequent factor analysis yields a two-component solution that accounts for 78.90 % of the overall item variance with 40.18 % being associated with Component 1 and 38.73 % with Component 2. Given the degree of commonality within the Goal-orientation Scale, the first 10 items sort on the first component whereas the last 10 items cluster around the second component. The first component — identified as the HMLP subscale— comprises significant negative internal loadings ranging between -.84 (Items 1, 8, and 10) and -.87 (Items 6, 7, and 9). Equally, the second component —defined as the LMHP subscale— embraces slightly more significant yet positive loading values ranging between .88 (Items 14 and 20) and .92 (Items 16). Also to be noted is the absence of cross-loadings between the two components. The two reverse loading patterns consolidate the two-fold dimensionality of the Goal-Orientation variable.

### *4.2. Goal Orientation vs. ICS*

The following results are meant to define the relationship between goal orientation and intercultural sensitivity based on the information collected by the ICS scale. As a measure of determining whether the ICS variable may correlate with other factors other than goal orientation, a multivariate analysis was carried out. A three-way MANOVA procedure was added to the Goal-Orientation variable, namely Gender and Education, which were purported to have the factorial power to intervene with the outcomes of the ICS variable. The findings in Table 2 confirm that the Goal-Orientation variable has the exclusive significant $F$ value ($F = 19.14$, $p < .05$) among the rest of the variables — tested individually or combined. The goal-orientation factor accounts for 60 % of the overall variance in the outcome variable, as indicated by the effect size where the next biggest eta squared estimate is only $\eta^2 = .10$ for Gender. These results indicate that the rapport between Goal Orientation and ICS is statistically significant irrespective of the other direct individual participant variables.

***Table 2.***
*Multivariate Goal-Orientation Results Based on the ICS Scale*

| Effect | Mean square | *F* | Hypothesis df | *P* | Partial $\eta^2$ |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| GoalOrientation | 0.398 | 19.14 | 15 | 0.00 | 0.6 |
| Gender | 0.1 | 1.42 | 15 | 0.15 | 0.1 |
| Education | 0.085 | 1.18 | 15 | 0.29 | 0.09 |

| | | | | | |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| GoalOrientation * Gender | 0.923 | 1.06 | 15 | 0.4 | 0.08 |
| GoalOrientation * Education | 0.963 | 0.48 | 15 | 0.95 | 0.04 |
| Gender * Education | 0.951 | 0.65 | 15 | 0.83 | 0.05 |

After verifying both the distributional and the reliability properties (homogeneity and normality) of the ICS scale data (Table 3), ANOVA tests were individually applied. The aim of the univariate analysis was not only to account for the statistical significance of Goal Orientation, which is the between-subjects factor with its already validated levels of HMLP and LMHP– but also to demonstrate how such an effect was distributed across the five ICS subscale components. In so doing, the ANOVA procedure helped calculate the *F* ratios for the differences between the two Goal Orientation levels –i.e., defining how much such variation could be systematic and/or could be due to chance, where the chance for error was set at a .05 alpha level. It follows from Table 3 that all the *F* ratios are statistically significant at the five ICS subscale measures. Also noticeable is the proportionate effect distribution, where the range of difference is not that obvious. In this purview, the lowest variance is for Item 27 (i.e., $F = 53.85$, $p < .05$, $\eta^2 = .20$) whereas the highest variance corresponds to Item (i.e., $F = 83.85$, $p < .05$, $\eta^2 = .34$). This means that all the 15 ICS items are almost evenly responsive to the effect/interaction with Goal Orientation and none of the items seems to outweigh the other ones. Equally, evenness is also conspicuous among the five ICS measures and the largest variance is at the *Interaction Confidence* component, which is the most responsive.

***Table 3.***
*Univariate Goal-Orientation Results Based on the ICS Scale*

| | Means | | Levene's | Skewness | Item Total correlation | Cronbach's Alphas | *F* | *P* | $\eta^2$ |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| | LMHP | HMLP | | | | | | | |
| ***Interaction*** | | | | | | | | | |
| Item21 | 1.98 | 3.75 | 0.31 | 0.39 | 0.76 | 0.72 | 84.74 | 0 | 0.32 |
| Item22 | 2.11 | 3.7 | 0.16 | 0.2 | 0.73 | 0.68 | 75.38 | 0 | 0.28 |
| Item23 | 1.99 | 3.7 | 0.09 | 0.17 | 0.77 | 0.73 | 106.1 | 0 | 0.33 |
| ***Respect for cultural differences*** | | | | | | | | | |
| Item24 | 2.06 | 3.65 | 0.25 | 0.36 | 0.73 | 0.68 | 65.2 | 0 | 0.24 |
| Item25 | 1.94 | 3.73 | 0.22 | 0.28 | 0.75 | 0.71 | 86.24 | 0 | 0.28 |
| Item26 | 1.95 | 3.62 | 0.18 | 0.23 | 0.74 | 0.69 | 82.89 | 0 | 0.29 |
| ***Interaction confidence*** | | | | | | | | | |
| Item27 | 2.09 | 3.6 | 0.19 | 0.25 | 0.72 | 0.67 | 53.85 | 0 | 0.2 |
| Item28 | 1.97 | 3.57 | 0.49 | 0.29 | 0.73 | 0.69 | 89.32 | 0 | 0.31 |
| Item29 | 1.94 | 3.73 | 0.36 | 0.15 | 0.75 | 0.71 | 83.85 | 0 | 0.34 |
| ***Interaction enjoyment*** | | | | | | | | | |
| Item30 | 2 | 3.75 | 0.35 | 0.3 | 0.76 | 0.72 | 63.05 | 0 | 0.24 |
| Item31 | 2 | 3.66 | 0.09 | 0.35 | 0.77 | 0.73 | 83.51 | 0 | 0.3 |
| Item32 | 1.84 | 3.48 | 0.31 | 0.47 | 0.75 | 0.7 | 68.11 | 0 | 0.23 |
| ***Interaction attentiveness*** | | | | | | | | | |
| Item33 | 1.98 | 3.43 | 0.09 | 0.56 | 0.73 | 0.68 | 58.06 | 0 | 0.22 |
| Item34 | 1.93 | 3.58 | 0.33 | 0.44 | 0.72 | 0.67 | 87.7 | 0 | 0.32 |
| Item35 | 1.98 | 3.64 | 0.35 | 0.22 | 0.71 | 0.67 | 80.33 | 0 | 0.27 |

Although the ANOVAs outlined the size of the between-groups variance (HMLP vs. LMHP) across the ICS measures in terms of effect size, they provided no information as to the source of such variance. A post hoc procedure was needed to determine which of the two Goal Orientation levels would outscore the other. A pair-wise comparison test was considered as an alternative for the commonplace Bonferroni and/or Tukey due to the two-fold nature of the Goal Orientation variable. It demonstrated overall and individual mean differences for all the ICS measures and yielded clear differentials with a clear advantage for the HMLP group (average total marginal mean $M = 3.64$) over the LMHP group (average total mean $M = 1.98$). Such systematic variance is echoed across all the ICS subscale data with a definite consistency as evidenced in Table 3. By way of illustration, LMHP mean scores range between $M = 1.84$ (Item 32) and $M = 2.11$ (Item 22) whereas the HMLP level's lowest mean score is $M = 3.43$ (Item 33) and the highest is $M = 3.75$ (Items 20 and 30). Building on the present results, it is reasonable to interpret these mean differentials as evidence for the advantage of the HMLP group over its LMHP counterpart in their responsiveness to the ICS variable. Therefore, the hypothesized effect of goal orientation on one's intercultural sensitivity is substantiated.

### *4.3. Speaking performance results*

To observe the research feasibility of the performance data collected from the two tasks, two procedures were taken. On the one hand, a basic descriptive analysis was performed to detect outliers (i.e., extreme cases inconsistent with typical data ranges) and determine whether they would have some weight on the subsequent analysis. In so doing, I opted for standardized z-scores where any values higher than ±3 standard deviations from the grand mean

would be flagged for further scrutiny. It follows that only three instances of outliers emerged from the findings across the four discourse analytic measures – two from Speech Rate per Minute and one from Dysfluency/Minute. After their examination, it follows that they would not constitute a systematic outlier and that they were not extremely distant from the typical response ranges, as well as being on the positive side (i.e., negative cases would echo breakdowns in performance). Therefore, they were not discounted from the rest of the data. On the other hand, examining the data distribution properties of skewness and homogeneity, the normality assumption was found to be satisfied across the four performance measures, where the highest value is *X* =.89 for the Dysfluency/Minute, far from the 2.00 index of abnormality. Equally satisfied was the assumption of homogeneity, seeing that Levene's test on data corresponding to the four measures is not statistically significant (e.g., between *P* = .14 for Lexical Density/Minute and *P* = .45 for Speech Rate/Minute).

A subsequent multivariate analysis was performed on the four speaking measures to single out which of the independent variables of Goal Orientation, Gender, and NS/NNS Task would significantly affect participants' output. This procedure would also help detect whether such variables might affect performance individually or in interaction with each other. Results from Table 4 reveal that statistical significance is conspicuously attested at the level of the Goal-Orientation variable (F = 29.05, p < .05) confirmed by substantial effect size ($\eta^2$ = .84). The NS/NNS Task variable also scored moderate significance comparably with that of Goal Orientation (F = 1.79, p = .17; $\eta^2$ = .25). Except for the meager significance of Goal/Task combination (i.e., $\eta^2$ =. 11), no interaction effect is documented somewhere else. In light of these results, follow-up ANOVAs were selectively conducted on the variables of Goal Orientation and NS/NNS Task to examine their degree of variance in the data attendant to the four performance measures.

***Table 4.***
*Multivariate Results for Speaking Fluency Measures*

| | Goal Orientation | ANOVAs | | | Pairwise Means comparisons | | | |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| | | *F* | *P* | $\eta^2$ | Mean | *MD* | Lower Bound | Upper Bound |
| Speech Rate/Min. | HMLP | 15.2 | 0 | 0.3 | 2.09 | 0.01 | 1.97 | 2.17 |
| | LMHP | | | | 2.35 | | 2.25 | 2.46 |
| Dysfluency/Min. | HMLP | 11.7 | 0 | 0.3 | 11.1 | 1.94 | 10.17 | 12.05 |
| | LMHP | | | | 8.73 | | 7.83 | 9.81 |
| Subordinates/T-Unit | HMLP | 232 | 0 | 0.9 | 1.05 | 0.67 | 0.99 | 1.13 |
| | LMHP | | | | 0.35 | | 0.28 | 0.44 |
| Lexical Density/Min. | HMLP | 40.6 | . 000 | 0.5 | 47.7 | 11.99 | 45.37 | 51.05 |
| | LMHP | | | | 35.7 | | 32.28 | 39.16 |
| **NS/NNS Task** | | | | | | | | |
| Speech Rate/Min. | NNS mate | 3.86 | 0.06 | 0.1 | 2.15 | 0.23 | 2.04 | 2.25 |
| | NS mate | | | | 2.29 | | 2.18 | 2.39 |
| Dysfluency/Min. | NNS mate | 1.75 | 0.2 | 0.1 | 9.52 | 1.06 | 8.56 | 10.49 |
| | NS mate | | | | 10.4 | | 9.33 | 11.67 |
| Subordinates/T-Unit | NNS mate | 1.7 | 0.2 | 0.1 | 0.67 | 0.14 | 0.65 | 0.8 |
| | NS mate | | | | 0.86 | | 0.78 | 0.95 |
| Lexical Density/Min. | NNS mate | 0.42 | 0.84 | 0 | 43.2 | -0.17 | 39.85 | 46.5 |
| | NS mate | | | | 43 | | 39.4 | 46.61 |

The findings reported in Table 4 provide details about the effect distribution on the four measures of fluency and complexity. As to the Goal Orientation variable, statistical significance figures across three performance measures, most evidently the measure of Subordination/T-unit (*F* = 231.9, *p* < .05; $\eta^2$ = .87). Equally significant is the variance related to the Lexical Density/Minute although its effect size is smaller yet still significant ($\eta^2$ =. 54). As for the two fluency measures, they show lesser variance compared with those of complexity, yet with a moderate effect size (Speech Rate/Minute: *F* = 15.16, *p* < .05; $\eta^2$ = .31; Dysfluency/Minute: *F* = 11.7, *p* =.002; $\eta^2$ = .26). Overall, Goal Orientation has a substantial effect on complexity and a partial influence on fluency. Regarding the NS/NNS Task variable, no evident statistical significance is partially represented through the Speech Rate/Minute measure (*F* = 3.86, *p* =.057; $\eta^2$ = .10) and the Subordination/T-unit measure (*F* = 1.70, *p* =.20; $\eta^2$ = .05), yet with a negligible effect size accounting for only 5 % of the overall variance. It follows that the NS/NNS Task shows inconsistent and moderate effects on fluency and complexity.

To investigate the source of variance in the effect values reported above (i.e., which of the levels outweighs its counterpart within each independent variable), a pair-wise mean comparison was carried out. Table 4 provides details about the series of comparisons performed based on the means of each variable level. As for the NS/NNS Task variable, the findings in Table 4 show that it has a disproportionate, yet moderate, effect on both fluency and complexity. At the level of fluency, the speaking performance of the participants improved regarding the Dysfluency/Minute measure, as evidenced by the

decrease in dysfluency instances when responding to the NS Task (Mean range: *M* = 8.56 to *M* = 10.49) compared with their rendering at the NNS Task (Mean range: *M* = 9.33 to *M* = 11.67). Such is the advantage for the NS Task when it comes to speech rate (Mean range: *M* = 2.18 to *M* = 2.39) vis-à-vis the NNS Task (Mean range: *M* = 2.04 to *M* = 2.25). At the level of complexity, the NS Task performance outscores the NNS Task one in terms of subordination as it records higher values (Mean range: *M* = .78 to *M* = .95) than that of the NNS Task (Mean range: *M* = .65 to *M* = .80). As to the measure of Lexical Density/Minute, no differentials are noted. Overall, it can be inferred that the informants have a moderately better performance when exposed to the NS Task than the NNS Task.

As regards the Goal Orientation variable, it appears that the HMLP group outperformed their LMHP goal counterparts at the level of complexity. Their range of Subordination/T-unit (*M* = .99 to *M* = 1.13) is far higher than that of the former goal group (*M* = .28 to *M* = .44), and so are the mean differentials at the level of the Lexical Density/Minute measure (i.e., *M* = 45.37 to *M* = 51.05 for HMLP and *M* = 32.28 to *M* = 39.16 for LMHP). In contrast, the fluency results point to a different pattern of differentials. The HMLP group shows more instances of Dysfluency/Minute (Mean range: *M* = 10.17 to *M* = 12.05) than the LMHP group (Mean range: *M* = 7.83 to *M* = 9.81). The reverse is not the case for the Speech Rate/Minute results where the latter goal group reported a better performance (Mean range: *M* = 2.25 to *M* = 2.46) than their HMLP counterparts (Mean range: *M* = 1.97 to *M* = 2.17). In sum, goal orientation has a substantial effect on speaking performance, especially at the level of complexity.

Building on the reported findings, there is reason to confirm the hypothesis that goal orientation not only correlates with intercultural sensitivity but also such correlation has some bearing on speakers' output.

## 5. Discussion

The more interculturally-sensitive individuals were found to align with HMLP goal orientation and less culturally sensitive ones with LMHP goal orientation. This correlation was evenly distributed along the five parts of the ICS scale, thus indicating that the distinct aspects of sensitivity share a substantial commonality with the ten core antecedents of the goal scale. Nonetheless, it follows that despite the consideration of other variables —participants' educational background, gender, and age— thought to yield some rapport with ICS, only goal orientation garnered the lion's share of correlation with 60 % of the total variance. Moreover, these factors were not even as significant in interaction with the latter variable (GoalOrientation * Gender: $\eta^2$ = .08 being the highest). To such a goal-by-ICS strong correlation, one is still to assert with caution whether the other variables should have been operationalized otherwise. The Age variable might have provided more pronounced variation had the between-groups comparison considered a larger age range (i.e., comparing the actual informants with early-year subjects). Similarly, the Education factor would have had higher differentials had the study opted for informants with schooling narratives richer in intercultural interaction. However, the relative homogeneity of the informant group in terms of their intercultural awareness may stand out as a methodological advantage, so much so that the goal variable would appear as the prime factor to be measured against the ICS variable.

Regarding the speaking performance results, the analysis suggested that these individual differences clustering around goal orientation would influence the way language learners behave in intercultural situations as evidenced by the variation in their speaking performance. Where the HMLP group outperformed the LMHP one in the area of complexity, the latter showed a slight advantage in fluency. Viewed from an information-processing perspective, the participant speakers seemed to adopt two distinct processing modes (Ben Maad, 2010; Skehan, 1998) concomitant with their goal and intercultural awareness profiles. That is, while the HMLP/High ICS participants allocated their attentional resources towards elaboration (i.e., as evidenced in their high subordination and lexical density scores), it was at the expense of speaking fluidity (i.e., illustrated in the great number of false starts, repetitions and pausing added to the slower speech rate). Such a trade-off situation is conversely illustrated among the LMHP/Low ICS participants who selectively devoted their attention to speaking fluidity to the detriment of structural and lexical elaboration.

Parallels of such behavioral and cognitive variance are also manifest in intercultural awareness literature. As with the HMLP goal side, individuals with substantial intercultural sensitivity essentially adopt a type of deep-level processing (Pieterse, van Knippenberg, van Dierendonck, 2013) in the face of cultural diversity situations that are associated with unpredictability and uncertainty. Since they are disposed to tolerate ambiguity, they view challenges as opportunities, and so they opt for information elaboration (i.e., in the form of structural and lexical complexity here) with little concern for communication breakdowns. Contrarily, the LMHP goal individuals engage in superficial information processing (Pieterse, van Knippenberg, van Dierendonck, 2013). Due to their little tolerance of ambiguity when confronted with cultural situations, their avoidance-driven behavior would resort to

stereotyping as an effort-minimizing strategy. Such heuristic behavior may well rely on the use of formulaic language to keep the communication flow undisrupted, as in the present study. In conclusion, the processing trade-off (i.e., observed through the speaking data) corroborates the strong correlation between intercultural awareness and goal orientation identified by the psychometric results.

One major implication that emerges from the findings consists in the interface between goal achievement research and intercultural awareness. The present study sheds some spotlight on how individual differences – being represented by one's goal orientation at this juncture and associated with intercultural sensitivity – may influence the language learning experience. The findings provided further support to the value of goal orientation which, contrary to other disciplines such as organizational psychology, has been meagerly considered in language learning research. Button, Mathieu, and Zajac (1996) the goal-orientation concept offers a more comprehensive framework that bridges the situational and the dispositional influences of individual differences. It concurs with Dörnyei's (2003) proposition to reconsider our understanding of individual differences as both stable and situated variables. Accordingly, the present study fits into this holistic understanding of individual differences and represents an interesting extension of this perspective by adding some focus on the intercultural side of language learning.

Although it corroborates Dombi's (2001) claim that individual differences have an important influence on one's intercultural disposition, it extends its research line both theoretically and methodologically. Where Dombi (2021) refers to individuals (e.g., attitudes, motivation, anxiety) as isolated variables, the focus on goal orientation in the current study confirms their strong internal correlation, and thus their treatment as a coherent whole. Also, in its examination of the influence of such variables on language learning, it goes beyond the psychometric scrutiny of the participants' attitudes and attests to the variance in their oral production. That is, it may not be enough to capture how a given individual difference like anxiety identifies with the intercultural disposition of LMHP goal individuals unless one appraises how they jointly determine what processes and trajectories they pursue in their language learning experience. Equally, the learning course of the HMLP goal individuals would be shaped in accordance, at least in part, with particular individual characteristics (e.g., risk-takers) as affiliated with higher intercultural sensitivity.

These results should yet be interpreted in view of certain limitations, particularly when it comes to the sampling procedure. The reliance on convenience and volunteer sampling may inhere some self-selection bias since the participation in the study was solely contingent on the participants' willingness to engage in the testing experimental course and consent to be audio-recorded. Therefore, one should be cautious whether the sample in focus would disproportionately represent the students who seem more motivated for and open to intercultural encounters, which may upset the generalizability of the findings.

## 6. Conclusion

The present study has examined whether individual differences (represented by the Goal-Orientation variable) may influence language learners' intercultural responsiveness. Not only has it attested to such a strong correlation, but also documented how that synergy influences the processing choices made by the learners during intercultural activities. That is, one's particular goal orientation may reflect his/her disposition towards a learning mode banking either on restructuring (as in the case of the HMLP group) or rote-based proceduralization with utter reliance on the formulaic repertoire (as in the case of the LMHP group). Following the findings reported presently, this study extends the recently adopted dimension of intercultural awareness in language learning and teaching methodology and research. While the mainstream discourse in this field garners all its resources towards optimizing intercultural contact and refining learning materials to promote intercultural awareness, it is suggested here to view the whole enterprise from the angle of individual differences as a valued tributary in the shaping of one's intercultural competence. The implications of this account should not however be overstated unless further empirical effort is exerted. Working on a larger number of informants would certainly yield external validity to the current findings, and so much interest in exploring this research path.

## Declarations

### *Competing interests*

The author declares no conflict of interest

### *Authors' contribution*

The author conceived the rationale and design of the study, collected and analyzed the data. The author also read and approved the final manuscript.

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### *Availability of data and materials*

The datasets of the current study are available by author upon request. They are subject to participant

privacy regulations.

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