Language mindsets: Implications for goal orientations and responses to failure

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The term "language mindsets" refers to one’s beliefs in whether language ability is unchangeable (an entity mindset) or language ability is malleable (an incremental mindset). The purpose of this study is to (a) introduce an instrument to assess language mindsets (i.e., the Language Mindsets Inventory (LMI)) and (b) test a causal model that maintains that learners’ mindsets predict the goals that they set for language learning, and these goals in turn affect how they respond to failure. First, psychometric analyses across two studies provided strong support for the reliability and validity of the LMI. The LMI was related to students’ language learning experience and expectations, effort beliefs, fear of failure, intention to continue. Second, the results of a correlational study and an experimental study supported the hypothesized "mindsets-goals-responses" model. In the experiment, language learners were randomly assigned to two conditions, in which one or the other language mindset was primed. In the incremental condition, learners more strongly endorsed learning goals regardless of their perceived language competence, and in turn reported more mastery-oriented responses in failure situations and stronger intention to continue learning the target language. In contrast, in the entity condition, learners who perceived themselves having strong language skills endorsed performance-approach goals and in turn reported more helpless-oriented responses and fear of failure. The implications of these findings for fostering students’ motivation are discussed.

References:

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