Achievement attributions and a multi-component attribution retraining protocol

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Achievement attributions are subjective explanations given by language learners for their performance on a language learning task or test (e.g. an activity, a project, or a recent test). Insofar as they reflect a retrospective reasoning why they performed in a certain manner, how language learners explain their performance may also inform us how they are likely to behave in the future (Weiner, 2010).

Related to causal attributions is the concepts fixed vs. growth mindsets (Dweck, 2006; Mercer, 2012). Studies into attributions of language learners (e.g. Erten & Burden, 2014) reveal that language learners more than often tend to resort to reasons beyond their control (e.g. teacher, ability, and luck) as main causes for doing well or less so doing. Many of these reasons are also stable in nature (e.g. ability and luck), reflecting more of a fixed mindset than a growth one. Such attributions can be classified as a maladaptive and can be counterproductive for future motivated language learning behaviours.

It has been argued that undesired attributions (e.g. ability and luck) can be changed into more desired ones (e.g. effort and employing effective strategies). However, attempts into changing language learners maladaptive attributions are scarce with very little published materials although there have been some attempts to do so with college students (e.g. Haynes, Perry, Stupnisky, and Daniels, 2009). There is much we can learn from these early studies. This talk has been organized in two parts. The first section will highlight mainstream research into causal attributions and attribution retraining. Following this a multi-stage model for attribution retraining will be introduced for language learning/teaching purposes.

Keywords: attribution retraining, causal attributions.