

GROWTH MINDSET IN LANGUAGE LEARNING PODCAST

Episode 1 – The goal is communication

Short introduction to mindsets

The concept of growth versus fixed mindsets is relatively new. It started in 2006, when Carol Dweck, a professor of psychology from Stanford University published her study. Simply speaking, her theory divided people into two categories: people with **fixed mindsets** and people with **growth mindsets**.

Fixed mindset people believe you are born with innate talent and intelligence and that these qualities are fixed, and unchangeable. They are interested in getting the right answers and believe that tests measure how smart they are, and serve as predictors of their success in the future. They want to be recognized for their skills and abilities – effort is for those who have neither.

People with growth mindsets, on the other hand, believe that intelligence can be developed and strengthened by effort, dedication and hard work. Mistakes are perceived as learning opportunities. They embrace challenges and like to figure things out. They believe that if you combine effort with coaching and time, there is no way of knowing where it will take you, therefore no test can predict your future potential. While the fixed mindset person does not allow people the luxury of becoming, a growth mindset person would always claim that **becoming is better than being**.

The implications of this theory are that how you perceive yourself, whether you are a growth or fixed mindset person, has a profound impact on how you go about your life.

Mindsets' effect on language learning

Learning languages, just like singing, acting, or painting is profoundly affected by the fixed mindset way of thinking – it is common to think that you either have a talent for it or not. When you are learning a language there is lots of memorization, thinking on your feet, you have to project and pronounce your words well – in other words, you are juggling quite a lot of skills. In order to see if you are being understood, you must test your skills publicly – it requires an interaction with another human. You have to put yourself in an incredibly vulnerable position. You try to remember it all at once – perfect grammar, impressive vocabulary, your pronunciation, etc. Some people become simply paralyzed, especially those who are accomplished in their profession and are used to being successful. They have done well at school; they are accomplished professionals and they assume learning a new language should come easy. After all, they are smart. When they encounter difficulties, they get annoyed, depressed, and often give up.

Having a growth mindset means accepting challenges, embracing the learning process, believing in progress, perceiving mistakes as positive and learning from them, and therefore it is crucial to your future success as a language learner.

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Tip #1

The goal is communication

In order to practice speaking and make sure you remember the new vocabulary, follow my suggestions below.

1. **Repeat.** It is important to remember newly learned words. You can't use something you don't know. Research shows that to remember a new word you have to hear it multiple times and you have repeat it **out loud** multiple times. Try to remember 3-5 words per day. When you hear them, repeat them immediately at least 10 times.
2. **USE what you know.** Do not hold yourself to some lofty ideal of perfect academic language. Use what you know with communication in mind. Because in order for effective communication to take place you must understand what you hear and you must be able to express yourself well enough to be understood, focus on listening and speaking **from day one**. The more you speak, the less of a big deal it will seem to be.
3. **Use real life situations to your advantage.** Whenever you meet a native speaker, initiate a conversation! Vocabulary learned in a real-life situation in, a specific context, is much easier to remember.
4. **Challenge yourself.** Challenges come with stress and anxiety. In order to relax and be spontaneous, imagine worst-case scenarios and plan for them. What is it that you are scared of? Once you do that, it will become much less scary. What will you do if that really happens? Chances are, you will not have to use your plans but you will feel prepared.
5. **Evaluate and reflect.** At the end of each exchange, think – what was successful? What could have gone better? Reflect and learn from it. If you lacked for a word or a phrase, learn that particular phrase. Repeat them so many times that they become second nature. They will come in handy in future exchanges.
6. **Associate.** You will find that you would remember words better if you can design some way of associating them with something familiar.
7. **Join discussion forums** in the target language. You will be exposed to authentic language that is impossible to learn from a textbook.
8. **Read children's books or books you are familiar with in your native language.** Children's books are fun and simple. You will understand most of what is said and new words and phrases will be easy to remember. Reading familiar books in the target language alleviates the pressure of understanding the story. You will be able to guess the meaning of many useful words and phrases from the context and it will be easy to remember them in the future.