The Effect of Language Mindsets on Language Anxiety Among International Students

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INTRODUCTION

- When individuals attempt to learn a second language (L2), their mindsets regarding the language learning process are indicative of their confidence during L2 interactions. This can in turn affect their willingness to participate in language interactions and is reflected through approach and avoidance behaviours.
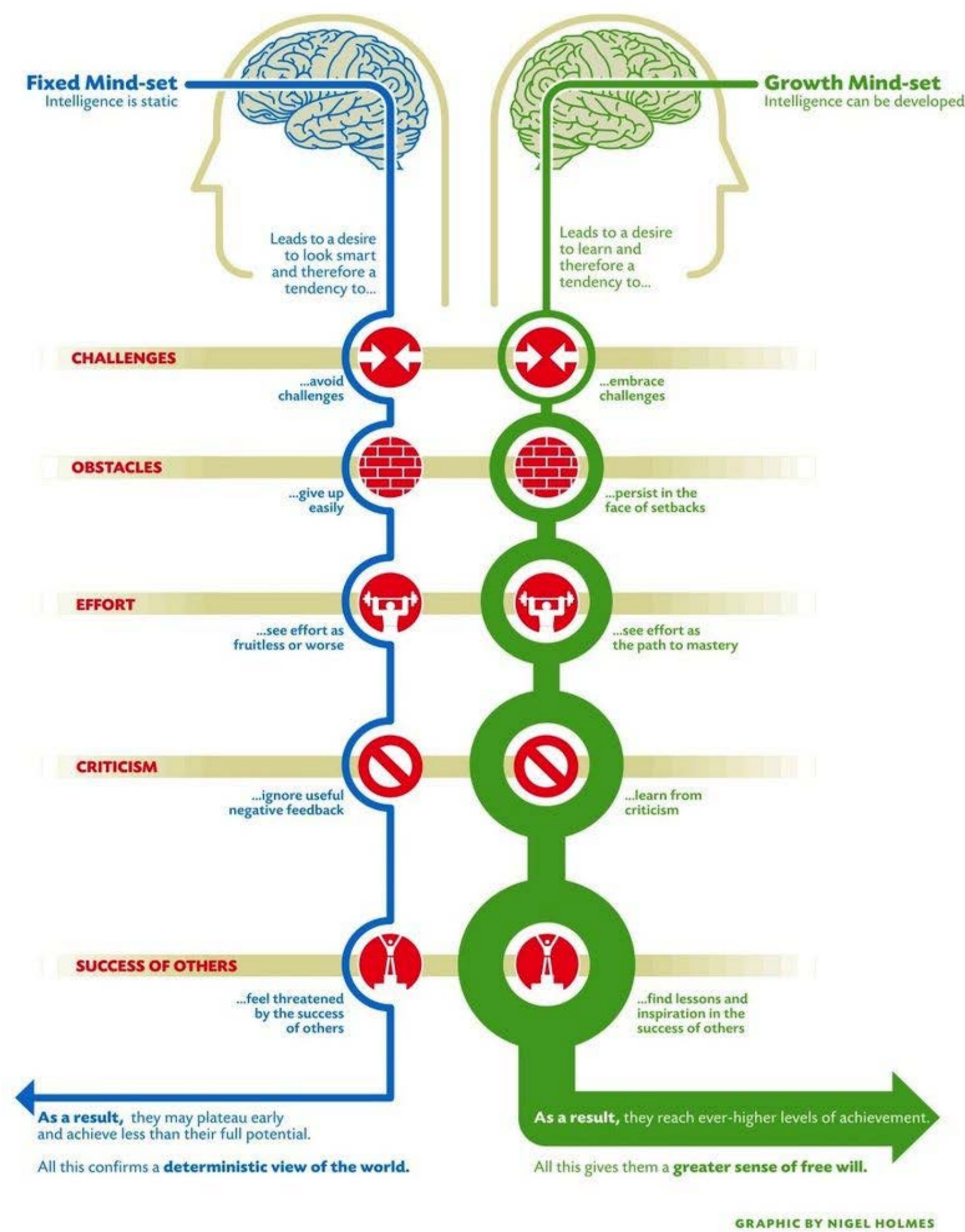

Image retrieved from http://www.parentcorticalmass.com/2011/05/what-is-incremental-intelligence.html

- **Anxiety as a contributing factor**

  One explanation is that people with an entity mindset experience more anxiety when they participate in second language tasks because they do not believe that they can develop proficiency with practice (Lou & Noels, 2016). This may be reflected in self-report measures, where they will report more anxiety than people with an incremental mindset.

- The current study seeks to extend the research on entity and incremental mindsets by priming ESL international students with each mindset. When these students interact with native speakers, entity-condition students should exhibit more anxiety and less approach behaviour than students in the incremental condition.

METHOD

Participants:
- 40 immigrant or international students who speak English as a second language and have lived in Canada < 10 years
- 20 participants in incremental condition; 20 participants in entity condition

Demographics:
- M age = 20 years
- 14 male: 26 female

Procedure:

1. **Manipulation:** participant read article priming incremental or entity mindset and completed comprehension questions
2. **Interaction task:** participant and confederate engaged in a videotaped "getting to know each other" conversation structured with list of questions. Participant controlled how many and which questions were asked
3. **Questionnaire:** Participant, confederate & experimenter filled out questionnaire about task 2
- Participant was debriefed
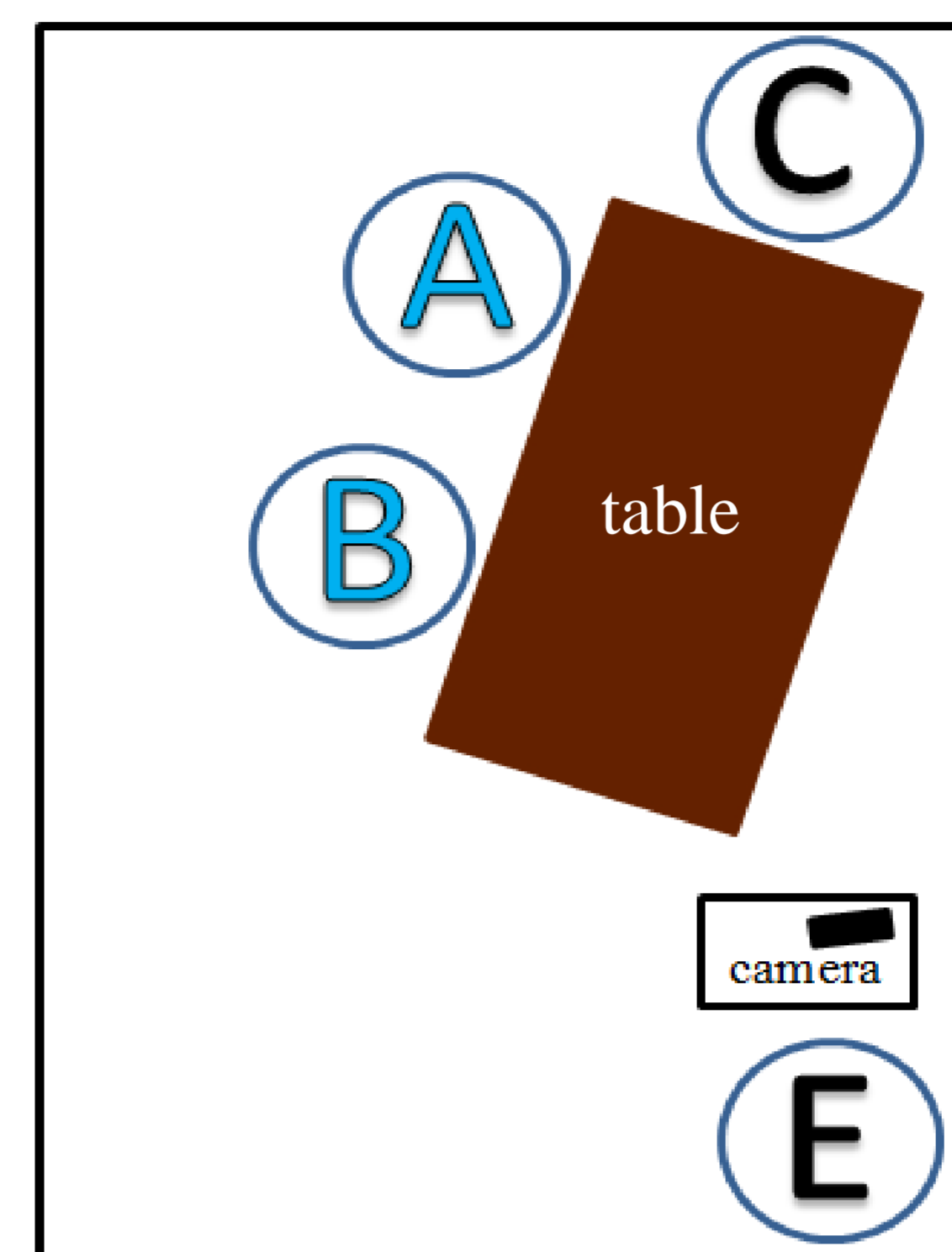
A: Seat closer to confederate
B: Seat farther from confederate
C: Confederate's seat
E: Experimenter's seat

Measures:

Scales used in participant questionnaire :

Effort belief scale adapted from Clement & Baker, 2001

> E.g., "The harder you work at English, the better you will be at it."

Expected fluency scale adapted from LMI and Lou & Noels, 2015

> E.g., "To what extent do you believe you have the potential to be fluent in English?"

Confidence scale adapted from Clement & Baker, 2001

> E.g., "I believe that I know enough English to speak correctly."

Anxiety scale adapted from FLCAS and Horwitz, Horwitz, & Cope, 1986

> E.g., "I get nervous and confused when I am speaking in English."

Approach scale adapted from Plant, Devine & Peruche, 2010

> E.g., "I responded to my partner very actively."

Language change scale adapted from LMI and Lou and Noels, 2015

> E.g., "I responded to my partner very actively."

RESULTS

- **Effect of manipulation**

  Incremental and entity conditions did not have a significant effect on any of the dependent variables.

- **Effort beliefs and expected L2 mastery**

  Participants who believed their L2 skill could be improved through effort reported more expectations that their L2 mastery would improve, more inclination toward approach behaviours, more confidence, more belief in the potential for language skill to change, and less anxiety.

  Participants reporting high on expectations to improve L2 and become fluent also showed more approach behaviours, reported more L2 confidence and reported less anxiety.

Correlations Between Measures

	Effort $\alpha = .84$	Expected fluency $\alpha = .70$
Confidence $\alpha = .90$	.53**	.43**
Anxiety $\alpha = .91$	-.37*	-.38*
Approach $\alpha = .81$	.37*	.40*
Language change $\alpha = .94$	.38*	.134

Note. * $p < .05$; ** $p < .01$

DISCUSSION

- Mastery of a second language is important to immigrants' adjustment to a new country. This process can seem less daunting if the person adopts an incremental mindset and views L2 mastery as a developed skill, as opposed to one which is innate.

- While our priming manipulation did not have an effect on participants' entity/incremental mindsets, the results show that individuals who self-report an incremental or entity mindset feel significant differences in anxiety and confidence, which are then reflected in approach and avoidance strategies. We can assert that the effect exists but that further development of our manipulation must be completed.

- Small sample size may explain why our manipulation did not have an effect, so more data must be collected in order to more fully understand the effect of our manipulation.

- These results are consistent with research that shows the positive effects of an incremental mindset. This has important implications for L2 learning programs for immigrants and international students; instructors should not only teach explicit language rules, but also encourage students to see language as a gradual, effort-based process. Students will be more likely to practice using the language and be less anxious about making mistakes or seeming foolish or inferior. This in turn facilitates further language development and eventually L2 mastery.