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RE-FRAMING FAILURE: MINDSETS IN FOREIGN LANGUAGE LEARNERS

A THESIS APPROVED FOR THE DEPARTMENT OF MODERN LANGUAGES,
LITERATURES, AND LINGUISTICS

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To J.Ed, Edward and Abigail, my sweet family. You have watched me struggle, fall, and get back up and you have been there every time to encourage me to keep going. I'm glad we have each other as support to go through hard things. (Ph 4:13)

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Abstract

In recent years, Carol Dweck, Ph.D's mindset research has influenced and shaped educational practice. However, Dweck's research has received little attention in foreign language pedagogy and classroom discourse. This study argues that explicit instruction, discussion, and examination of mindsets in introductory collegiate-level foreign language classes may significantly increase a student's willingness to communicate in the target language, contribute to a more positive view of themselves and others in the context of foreign language learning, and allow students to re-frame their understanding of failure in order to promote learning. The overarching goal of this study is to provide research to the foreign language community which supports transparent incorporation of mindset theory into the classroom in order to promote safe foreign language learning environments and to equip students with the tools to successfully address and persevere, in spite of fixed mindset triggers.

Keywords: Mindset; Growth Mindset; Fixed Mindset; Fixed Mindset Triggers; Willingness to Communicate; Perceptions of Self and Other.

Chapter 1: Introduction

Reframing Failure: Mindsets in Foreign Language Learners

This study will critically examine data collected from two first semester elementary German language classes at a medium-sized university in the Southern Plains of the U.S. This study is centered on Dweck's growth mindset theory. Stanford University Professor of Psychology, Dweck, PhD, as a young researcher, "became obsessed with understanding how people cope with failures and decided to study it by watching how students grappled with hard problems" (Dweck, 2006, p. 3). During her research, Dweck had an opportunity to work with elementary-school-aged children, and to observe how they solved a series of puzzles. Discovering patterns in their responses to failure, she determined that some of the children actually loved the challenging problems and thrived when met with a challenge (Dweck, 2006, p. 3). Dweck goes on to describe the children's lack of discouragement or awareness. "Not only weren't they discouraged by failure, they didn't even think they were failing. They thought they were learning" (Dweck, 2006, p. 3). Described here by Dweck is a mindset that views failure as an opportunity to learn.

Dweck asserts that her 30 years of research shows that "the view you adopt for yourself profoundly affects the way that you lead your life" (Dweck, 2006, p. 6). Dweck's findings engendered the terms growth and fixed mindset. Individuals who hold a fixed mindset believe that their qualities are carved in stone and cannot be changed (Dweck, 2006). Conversely, individuals with a more growth-minded outlook tend to believe that their basic qualities can be cultivated through efforts, strategies, and help from others (Dweck, 2006). Dweck's mindset research, which suggests that basic qualities can be cultivated through "effort, strategies, and help from others"

(Dweck, 2006, p. 7), serves as the foundation for this mindset research and discourse within the context of the foreign language classroom.

The study consists of an electronic survey of 36 students followed by a smaller group of seven one-on-one interviews. The initial survey was designed to ascertain whether students currently hold a growth (cultivation of qualities through effort, strategies, and collaboration) or a fixed mindset (the belief that one's potential is fixed), or some combination of the two, and how this may affect their willingness to communicate in the target language, as well as their views of themselves and others with regard to failure or making mistakes. It is my hope that the results will show that the transparent and explicit incorporation, instruction, and examination of mindsets in the foreign language classroom should be cultivated and co-constructed dynamically among teacher and students in a learning community in order to help students re-frame their definition of failure and foster a more collaborative and positive language-learning environment.

Chapter 2: Literature Review

A large body of research in both content-area learning and foreign language learning shows overwhelming support for the notion that explicit incorporation of mindset identification and instruction combined with consistent effort leads to success in the foreign language classroom. Accordingly, this literature review provides an overview of current research related to the growth and fixed mindsets including content-area learning and FLL. Dweck's mindset research, (2006) spanning over 30 years, as well as other key research in the field discussed in this literature review, confirm the benefits of growth mindset theory, the belief that basic qualities can be cultivated through effort, strategy and collaboration, and by extension also support the application and incorporation of mindset theory instruction into the elementary foreign language classroom in order to foster an increased overall willingness to communicate in the target language and to

promote a safe foreign language learning environment. Specifically, inquiry topics related to the growth and fixed mindsets, the willingness to communicate in the target language, and student perceptions of themselves and others, shaped the research direction of this literature review. Accordingly, the overarching themes for the organization of this literature review include: mindset identification and explicit instruction, the willingness to communicate in the target language, the role of natural talent (linked to a fixed mindset), and the learning environment. The goal of this study is to show the existence of both mindsets in collegiate foreign language learners, and to provide ways in which students can benefit and improve by examining fixed-mindset triggers. More precisely, it is important to help students to offset fixed-mindset beliefs and triggers by recognizing what causes them and learn how to persevere in spite of them.

Dweck (2006) suggests a person's basic qualities can be cultivated. She asserts that "though people may differ in every which way—in their initial talents and aptitudes, interests or temperaments—everyone can change and grow through application and experience" (p. 6). Conversely, as observed in my experience as a foreign language instructor, college freshmen often come to the elementary foreign language classroom with the belief that because of poor performance on written and speaking assessments in high school foreign language classes, results may be the same in college. Therefore, when the mindset is fixed, students may believe that if they do not have a natural talent for language learning, failure is inevitable. Additionally, a third belief, also seen over several semesters of foreign language instruction, is that if one has to work hard, a deficiency must be present. Deficiencies, therefore, are commonly equated with failure and not seen as opportunities to learn and grow in challenging situations.

Dweck's research, by suggesting that perseverance, in spite of obstacles, characterizes growth mindset, supports the notion that deficiencies can be seen as opportunities to grow.

Specifically, she states, “The passion for stretching yourself and sticking to it, even (or especially) when it’s not going well, is the hallmark of the growth mindset. This is the mindset that allows people to thrive during some of the most challenging times in their lives” (pp. 6-7). Consequently, with the understanding that performance outcomes are not fixed and that effort combined with appropriate learning strategies could bring about significant improvements in assessment outcomes, students might be more likely to persevere in challenging linguistic situations such as taking the risk to speak the target language in class. By extension, if students understand that mindset influences performance, it may change not only how they perform in the foreign language classroom, but how they perform in other classes as well. Indeed, a growth mindset combined with appropriate methods for studying and awareness of fixed-mindset tendencies, could foster greater overall success and perhaps even a greater percentage of retention of freshman in general, and specifically in foreign language classes. Dr. George Bogaski, an analyst at the University of Oklahoma specializing in retention, explains that students at OU who receive a grade of D, F, or W in a foreign language class are less likely to return to the university than students who receive similar grades in other courses. (G. Bogaski, personal communication, October 4, 2018) Retention information, specific to foreign language courses at OU, is attached as Appendix C.

Furthermore, Dweck suggests that failure is separate from who we are and that it can be learned from. “Even in the growth mindset, failure can be a painful experience. But it doesn’t define you. It’s a problem to be faced, dealt with, and learned from.” (2006, p. 33) Importantly, Dweck (2006) states that everyone, including individuals with a high level of intelligence, must work and put forth effort (Dweck, 2006, p. 33). Consequently, if students with a significant fixed-minded view of FLL can understand early on that success requires effort and that talented people work for their success, it could be a significant turning point for them not only with regard to

collegiate foreign language learning but at the university in general. By extension, students also need to understand that getting an A on the first exam does not ensure their success any more than receiving an F indicates failure going forward. In other words, failing grades show learning and/or effort gaps, not intelligence gaps. Conversely, higher grades indicate retention of knowledge at the time of the exam but do not indicate that success will occur without continued effort. Dweck (2006) describes a fixed mindset as the belief that something that cannot be changed. Dweck suggests that a person with a fixed mindset believes that if they are not good at something, they never will be. (Dweck, 2006) Thus, helping students to understand that they do not need to compete or compare themselves with others, but simply to do their best, put forth effort over time, revisit study habits as needed, and be aware of fixed-mindset tendencies is crucial to long term success. In order to understand how mindset may affect foreign language learners, this review will include research from journal articles, qualitative and quantitative research studies, and known researchers and teachers in the field. For example, researchers Sarah Mercer and Stephen Ryan have studied and researched mindset related to foreign language learning and specifically the connections between mindset and natural talent in foreign language learning.

The Role of Natural Talent in FLL

Language learning and psychology researchers Mercer, at the University of Graz, Austria, and Ryan, at Waseda University in Japan, studied the role of natural talent in FLL by interviewing five Austrian EFL students and four Japanese EFL students in order to “conceptualize FLL mindsets based on individuals’ beliefs about the respective roles of talent and effort in the language learning process.” (Mercer and Ryan, 2009, p. 436) Specifically, Mercer and Ryan seek to understand and shed light on individuals’ beliefs related to talent and how it affects the language learning process. In keeping with current mindset research, Mercer and Ryan describe a fixed mindset in relation to the belief that “natural talent” is of central importance whereas a growth

mindset is related to the belief that effort and hard work play a significant role in influencing a student's ability to learn a language. Importantly, their research links fixed mindset to the false belief that natural talent is required in order to acquire a foreign language successfully. By extension, their research supports the assertion that mindset teaching and study-method training, ought to be incorporated into the elementary foreign language teaching curriculum. According to Mercer and Ryan, their article's purpose was to "conceptualize FLL mindsets based on individuals' beliefs about the respective roles of talent and effort in the language learning process." (Mercer and Ryan, 2009) The authors suggest that a person believing in the central importance of a 'gift' or 'natural talent' for successful language learning could be said to have a fixed mindset, while someone who believes that their own efforts and hard work affect their language learning abilities could be said to hold a growth mindset (Mercer and Ryan, p. 437). Accordingly, the definitions provided by Mercer and Ryan related to mindset and the link between beliefs about natural talent and the fixed mindset show the need for addressing these beliefs in the classroom and for helping students to both recognize and react properly when a fixed mindset belief is triggered.

Mercer and Ryan conducted semi-structured (neither tightly structured nor completely unstructured) in-depth interviews of five first-year Austrian university EFL learners and four first-year Japanese students in the fall of 2008. Learners, they found, tended towards either an effort-based mindset, which aligns with the growth mindset theory, or a talent-based mindset, which aligns more closely with the fixed mindset theory. Mercer and Ryan found that their data showed something more complex than simply an effort or talent-based view of learning. Accordingly, they state:

Some learners seemed to believe that natural talent plays the key role in successful language learning, which we took to be indicative of a fixed mindset, whereas other learners appeared to

hold beliefs strongly suggestive of the value of hard work and the potential to influence their ability through practice and effort, which we took as indicative of a growth mindset. However, in most cases, the data indicate something more. (Mercer and Ryan, p. 438)

These complex findings support Dweck's later research in 2015—most people show a mixture of both the growth and the fixed mindset. Depending on the subject and situation, they may more strongly exhibit one mindset over another, but both mindsets co-exist. Significantly, this supports the notion that each individual is a mixture of mindsets even, at times, in the same subject area. Importantly, this confirms the need for mindset examination surrounding FLL beliefs in order to help learners and instructors set appropriate learning goals and expectations.

The Role of Growth Mindset Combined with Effort and Study Methods

Dweck's original mindset research (2006), pointing primarily to effort as the basis for success, was revised in 2015 to include the idea that effort alone is not sufficient for success, but that a combination of effort and study methods, as well as awareness of fixed-mindset triggers and ways to address them, could contribute to student success. Dweck's original research concluded that students who believed that they could develop their intelligence and “grow their brains” through effort and study methods outperformed the students who believed that their intelligence was fixed. It later became evident that some educators were sharing the false belief that growth mindset simply meant effort when in fact effort and the right study methods are needed in conjunction with each other.

When students learned through a structured program that they could “grow their brains” and increase their intellectual abilities, they did better: “Finally, we found that having children focus on the process that leads to learning (like hard work or trying new strategies) could foster a growth mindset and its benefits” (Dweck). In her 2015 article, Dweck addresses the misconception that growth mindset is just about effort. She confirms that effort is key but that effort alone is not sufficient: New strategies as well as outside input are necessary parts of the equation. Dweck goes

on to suggest that students need to try new methods as they approach learning. Accordingly, she believes that students “need this repertoire of approaches—not just sheer effort—to learn and improve.” (Dweck, p. 2) Furthermore, she suggests that we “also need to remember that effort is a means to an end of the goal of learning and improving. It’s good that the students tried, but it’s not good that they’re not learning.” (Dweck, p. 2)

According to Dweck, a growth-minded approach “helps children feel good in the short *and* long terms by helping them thrive on challenges and setbacks on their way to learning.” (Dweck, 2015) In other words, it is important to recognize the effort but it is also necessary to help students to see that sometimes additional effort, or other types of effort or methods, might be needed for success. Dweck asks the question, “How can we help educators adopt a deeper, true growth mindset, one that will show in their classroom practices?” (2015) She brings the instructor and their role and influence into the picture by addressing mindset in classroom practice. Dweck supports the idea that instructors ought to adopt a growth mindset that “shows up in classroom practices.” (Dweck, 2015) When addressing how to help educators develop more of a growth mindset, she offers a unique solution.

You may be surprised by my answer: Let’s legitimize the fixed mindset. Let’s acknowledge that (1) we’re all a mixture of fixed and growth mindsets, (2) we will probably always be, and (3) if we want to move closer to a growth mindset in our thoughts and practices, we need to stay in touch with our fixed-mindset thoughts and deeds (Dweck, 2015, p. 3).

Surprisingly, in an effort to adopt a growth mindset, the first thing she suggests is recognizing that a fixed mindset does exist and that we are all mixtures of both. Dweck further states, that “If we “ban” the fixed mindset, we will surely create false growth-mindsets” (Dweck, 2015). Importantly, she discusses the need for being aware of fixed-mindset triggers. “If we watch carefully for our fixed-mindset triggers, we can begin the true journey to a growth mindset.”

(Dweck, 2015, p. 3) Importantly, Dweck's revised research calls for a more holistic approach to mindset teaching. Not only ought a growth mindset be emphasized and sought after, recognition of the fixed mindset in certain areas in order to watch out for those triggers, as well as appropriate instruction related to study methods are crucial for success.

The Role of Self: Self-Determination, Engagement, and Identity

Researchers Noels, (Professor of Psychology), Chaffee, (Professor of Psychology), Lou (PhD Candidate in Psychology) and Dincer (Assistant Professor and Head of Dept. of Foreign Languages) maintain that students who choose to learn a foreign language because they are personally interested in the language are more likely to academically and socially engage with the language (2016). Accordingly, they suggest that this would positively correlate to communicative and cultural competence with the language. (Noels et al., 2016)

Noels et al., further claim that a "self-determined orientation can be fostered in a social environment that is responsive to learners' need to be active, competent agents who have mutually satisfying relationships with others." (Noels et al, 2016) Importantly, students who are intrinsically motivated may tend to more actively engage with the language. Noels et al., suggest that "engagement is the glue or the mediator that connects the dynamics of the social context and outcomes of interest" (2016). Alternatively, a student who is not intrinsically motivated to learn the language may benefit from what the authors call "positive reappraisals" (p. 18). Positive reappraisals are described by Noels et al, as: "a strategy students may used to feel agentic, increasing their feelings of autonomy, competence, and relatedness without endeavoring to change anything about their class or their teacher" (Noels et al, 2016, p. 18). The authors further suggest that a student who is engaged will act on and influence his or her learning environment in order to accommodate his or her needs (2016). Accordingly, then students who understand that their learning needs and interests are valued will be more likely to seek assistance when needed.

Importantly, self-awareness regarding motivation and an understanding of mindsets connected to foreign language learning are crucial for students' successful navigation of, and perseverance through, fixed-mindset triggers.

The Role of Mindset Instruction

Researchers Lou & Noels examine whether the priming of an “entity language theory (i.e., the belief that language intelligence is fixed) or an incremental theory (i.e., the belief that language intelligence can be improved) can help shape learners' goals and influence learners' reactions in situations of failure (Lou & Noels, 2016, p. 22). The entity language theory, in other words, lines up with the fixed-mindset theory set forth by Dweck. The incremental theory, on the other hand, aligns with Dweck's growth-mindset theory. Lou and Noels also examined students' intention to continue learning the language. University level foreign language students in two foreign language classes were randomly assigned to two conditions in which either an entity (fixed) or an incremental (growth) language learning mindset was primed. The findings showed that learners in the incremental (growth) group “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.” (Lou & Noels, 2016, p. 22) Not surprisingly, learners in the entity theory group, including those who believed that they had strong language skills, reported more “helpless-oriented responses and fear of failure.” (Lou & Noels, 2016, p. 22) The research done by authors Lou and Noels is certainly an important positive contribution related to the discussion of mindset in the foreign language classroom. Their data clearly link “endorsement of learning goals” and “mastery oriented responses” with growth-mindset priming and “helpless-oriented responses and fear of failure” clearly linked to the priming,

or perhaps stronger percentage, of a fixed mindset. Accordingly, their study shows the importance of incorporating the growth mindset theory into the foreign language learning setting.

The Role of Mindset and the Willingness to Communicate in the TL (WTC)

In many classrooms, and especially in foreign language classrooms, including those sampled in this study, there are students who are so concerned with getting the right answer the first time that they do not speak or even attempt to speak for fear of failure. Importantly, MacIntyre (Researcher and Professor of Psychology) examines why some students choose to speak in the L2 when given the opportunity and some do not. The origins of the Willingness to Communicate (WTC) construct, he confirms, lie in the first language (L1). (MacIntyre, p. 564) Furthermore, MacIntyre suggests that “previous research in second language acquisition (SLA) has not examined the convergence of psychological processes underlying communication at the specific moment” (MacIntyre, 2007, p. 564) Therefore, MacIntyre’s project seeks to conceptualize communication “as a volitional (freely chosen) process” (MacIntyre, 2007). In fact, he connects students’ WTC to the situation in the classroom and maintains that the WTC “can rise and fall rapidly as the situation changes” (MacIntyre, 2007). In fact, his description of the processes involved in creating a WTC can be linked with mindset theory and views of self and classroom identity. As my study will show, fixed mindset related to WTC may keep students from speaking or feeling they have the freedom to speak in the classroom for fear of failure. Recognizing and addressing these fears can help students to re-train their responses and perhaps also encourage more of a WTC.

The Role of Learner Agency and Engagement

Mercer (2015) addresses the need for explicit discussions about mindset beliefs in order to reveal the existence of false or “inhibitive” thoughts about language learning to show inherent beliefs that may be causing conflict and misunderstanding in the FL classroom. Mercer addresses the false but commonly held belief that accurate grammar is necessary before speech can occur: “Consider, for example, a learner who believes that it is important to have accurate grammar first before you can speak and that you should only work on fluency once you have accurate grammar control” (Mercer, 2015, p. 4). Consequently, Mercer believes that students would likely struggle in strongly communicative classrooms. (Mercer, 2015)

Not surprisingly, learners’ beliefs about how language learning ought to occur will affect every area of their language learning experience. As a consequence, Mercer believes that it is important to identify students’ language-learning beliefs. Mercer, in addition to addressing students’ beliefs about the language-learning process itself, also seeks to identify student mindsets related to learning characteristics and aptitudes. Importantly, Mercer’s mindset interpretation aligns with Dweck’s later research in “Mindset revisited.” Accordingly, Mercer states, “In reality, it is perhaps more useful to conceive of mindsets as representing points on a continuum and people are likely to lie somewhere in between tending more to one or the other, rather than these being absolute either/or categories” (Mercer, 2015). Importantly, Mercer’s Austrian study is similar to my study in Norman, Oklahoma, and supports my findings that there is a mixture of both fixed- and growth-mindset beliefs in every individual and that neither ought to be ignored. As she discusses, “These deep-rooted beliefs may need conscious reflection and metacognitive attention for learners to become aware of them (i.e. the beliefs) and be able to discuss them and potentially work at changing them if need be.” (Mercer, 2015) Significantly, Mercer brings attention to the fact that students may need time to reflect on their beliefs. Not surprisingly, a mixture of mindsets

can be pervasive within the same class, as well as, within the same student. Consequently, one student may hold more of a fixed mindset in one aspect of language learning and a growth in another aspect of the language class while another holds the opposite beliefs. Importantly, this next passage, addressing inherent beliefs about developing abilities, aligns closely with my own research and experience.

To be agentic and to engage with language learning opportunities, a learner has to believe that their competence and abilities in a foreign language are something that can be developed and that they have a degree of control and influence over them. If learners do not feel and believe that they can change their abilities and their competences in the language, no matter how engaging a teacher's materials and tasks may be, the learner may see all effort and investment in learning as pointless. This means as teachers we must begin by setting the foundations for successful language learning, by aiming to have learners tend towards a growth mindset. This does not mean we should encourage learners to hold unrealistic beliefs about themselves or others and their potential to become highly proficient polyglots (Mercer, 2015).

Importantly, students need to understand that everyone is capable of change and growth and improvement in any area. Mercer suggests that students can be taught to identify and examine their mindsets with regard to foreign-language learning. Significantly, Mercer asserts that instructors can begin to explicitly discuss “deeply held” mindsets through, for example, discussions of survey responses.

Accordingly, Mercer's research is extremely important for foreign language teachers and students—it illuminates previously unknown, to others and sometimes themselves, and implicit beliefs in order to help students see that change is possible and a growth mindset is justifiable. By extension, as Lou and Noels suggest below, setting appropriate process-oriented-learning goals can lead to perseverance in failure situations.

The Role of Mindset and Behavioral Responses to Failure

In their study titled “Measuring Language Mindsets and Modeling their Relations with Goal Orientations and Emotional and Behavioral Responses in Failure Situations,” authors Lou

and Noels (2017, p. 214), tested the “mindsets-goals-responses model,” which asserts that the foreign language learner’s mindset will predict the goals set by the learner and that, consequently, the goals will affect learners’ responses in situations of academic difficulty.

According to Lou and Noels, “path analyses showed that regardless of their (i.e. the students’) competence level, greater endorsement of an incremental (growth) mindset was associated with the goal of learning more about the language, and this learning goal in turn predicted greater mastery and less helpless responses in failure situations” (Lou and Noels, 2017, p. 214). Conversely, the authors maintain that “greater endorsement of an entity mindset predicted the goal of demonstrating competence (i.e., performance approach goals) when students believed that they had stronger language skills” (Lou and Noels, 2017, p. 214). Consequently, Lou and Noels’ research confirmed the accuracy of the “mindsets-goals-responses model.” Importantly, their research supports a growth-minded approach for students in which process over product is emphasized. In fact, it addresses the importance of goal setting—not just goals for the sake of goal setting, but setting attainable goals such as learning more about the language. (p. 214) More precisely, if instructors can help set appropriate goals at the outset of the semester, such as “learning about the language,” vs. placing the focus on “learning the grammar of the language,” (p. 214) students may be more willing to believe that a growth mindset is possible and desirable in other aspects of language learning. Accordingly, as described by Lou and Noels, appropriate goal setting can be linked to more of a growth-oriented approach to language learning. Continuing with the theme of mindset in FLL, Mystkowska also contributes research to the field through her analysis of English-language learners’ beliefs related to FLL.

The Role of Mindset in Foreign Language Learning: A Person-in-Context Perspective

Anna Mystkowska provides research on English-language learners' opinions and beliefs regarding factors that would contribute to and promote language learning. In her article, Mystkowska addresses the results of "a small-scale qualitative study conducted among learners of English whose beliefs and opinions were analysed with a view to identifying factors which might contribute to the development of a positive mindset that would promote rather than impede language learning" (Mystkowska, 2014, p.133). Importantly, Mystkowska's article supports the idea that explicit growth-mindset instruction would be beneficial for foreign language learners. In fact, in the study mentioned, even those students who indicated that they had some sort of talent knew that this talent alone could only take them so far and that in order to be successful effort would be required (Mystkowska, 2014, p. 141). By extension, as Mystkowska claims, one must not only consider these ideas and theories in abstraction, but rather it is important to consider each student individually and to assist the student in reaching their potential through consistent effort over time. (Mystkowska, 2014) Accordingly, each student may have different beliefs about success or failure and in order to help them achieve success, those beliefs need to be addressed and responded to.

The Role of the Language Learning Environment

Villarreal's article provides an approach to growth mindset that is specific to foreign language and addresses how one can foster the growth mindset and incorporate the target language into the classroom. She suggests asking the question, "Have I created a safe learning environment where students are willing to take risks?" and claims that language learning involves significant risk. "We teach students in many of the most vulnerable days of their development. We must collaborate with students to promote a safe and supportive learning environment." Furthermore,

she contends that students are asked to practice the new language publicly, many times without sufficient practice time. (Villarreal, p. 1) Villarreal further maintains that because fitting in is often awkward, we must consciously create a safe learning environment. (Villarreal p.1) Importantly then, if students feel unsafe in their foreign language learning environment, fixed-mindset tendencies related to not speaking in class may become solidified and more difficult to recognize and change. As Villareal asserts, it is necessary to collaborate with students and provide learning environments that feel safe. Importantly, she maintains that we need to work together to “encourage learning failures” through the use of varied assessments and opportunities for feedback (Villareal, p. 2).

At the University of Oklahoma, where this research was conducted, for example, the German exams are largely grammar based but do include a listening section at the beginning of the test and writing and reading sections at the end of the test which address the ACTFL (i.e. American Council on the Teaching of Foreign Languages) national standards of interpretive listening, comprehension, and production of written communication. Villareal asserts that we ought to “encourage students to take risks with language” (Villareal, p. 2). Importantly, the ideas set forth by Villareal are certainly in line with the growth mindset and promote an environment that facilitates learning without fear of failure.

Villareal believes that students will improve in language success as foreign language educators shift their focus away from accuracy and direct it toward the language learning process itself. (Villareal, p. 3) “Focusing students on the application of their learning instead of perfection will lower the anxiety related to making mistakes because now mistakes are seen as opportunities to grow. This is not to say that we (teachers) do not want students to be accurate speakers, but rather that we focus on comprehensibility before accuracy.” (Villareal, 3) In other words, if we

can teach students that failure is often part of learning, and also encourage them to keep going, get help as needed, to continue to pursue communicative success and not perfection as their goal, their anxiety might be lowered and their willingness to speak the target language may increase. Accordingly, Villareal's views align with the growth mindset in that there is an attitude which emphasizes process over product and linguistic improvement through effort and practice. Importantly, if students see that effort can lead to success in shorter and more attainable, low-stakes assessments, (i.e. in-class partner activities) perhaps they will be likelier to put forth additional effort toward a longer, more traditional assessment such as a chapter exam.

Villareal recommends what I will call a growth-mindset outlook for educators as well. She suggests that "we need to exercise caution and care however as we fine tune so we do not extinguish the creative expressions that are a product of taking risks" (Villareal, p. 2) Thus, there is the delicate balance of error correction that ought to be exercised judiciously so as not to discourage students from taking risks. This idea, in itself, is very much a growth-mindset mentality for educators. We need to be aware of the risks and know our students well in order to navigate this delicate situation. Furthermore, she suggests that while we have managed to get rid of "the lone genius myth," that we have failed to replace it with methods that would encourage collaboration among students. (Villarreal pp. 2-3) According to Villareal, then, it is necessary to create a safe and collaborative classroom environment in which constructive feedback can take center stage. Accordingly, instructors need then not only to be aware of methods which lend themselves to constructive feedback but also to support and foster a collaborative atmosphere; if students can see the value of collaboration because of the growth mindset-oriented classroom environment, they may be likelier to be successful in the long run.

Importantly, Villareal maintains that not only are instructors able to give feedback, but (almost) anyone, including peers, who is familiar with “common goals evidenced in a grading rubric and communicative performances and performance expectations” can provide feedback. (Villareal, p. 2) She states that “everyone is growing toward or beyond the same targets and feedback is focused on the same criteria whether a student is giving himself or herself feedback, providing feedback to a peer or receiving feedback from the teacher.” (Villareal, 2) Significantly, she describes an environment that is steeped in the growth mindset and allows for collaboration in order to achieve learning goals: “Focusing students on growth and building a collaborative environment that celebrates creativity and risk-taking is a first step in focusing on helping students stay in the target language” (Villareal, 2). By extension, use of the target language, a national (i.e. ACTFL) communicative standard for students and teachers, can happen when a collaborative, growth-mindset oriented environment is fostered. Villareal recognizes the need to connect the psychology of Dweck’s growth mindset with the methodology of the collaborative learning process in SLA. Dweck addresses the importance of considering psychological factors, in addition to pedagogy.

In their article on “Academic Tenacity,” Dweck et al. suggest that not only ought we to consider curriculum and pedagogy with regard to teaching, but that psychological factors can be even more important:

The research reviewed in this paper shows that educational interventions and initiatives that target these psychological factors can transform students’ experience and achievement in school, improving core academic outcomes such as GPA and test scores months and even years later. When we refer to the psychology of the student, what do we mean? We mean that students need to think of themselves and school in certain ways in order to want to learn and in order to learn successfully (Dweck et al., 2014, p. 1)

Moreover, students need to have an understanding not simply of the material they are learning but that a growth mindset may be beneficial. Importantly, regardless of what they are

learning, they need to believe that by putting forth consistent effort over time, and focusing on the learning process, the product is likely to be stronger. By extension, Dweck points out non-cognitive factors that promote learning and asserts that students ought to be able to regulate themselves in ways that promote learning.

When these non-cognitive factors are in place, students will look—and be—motivated. In fact, these non-cognitive factors constitute what psychological researchers call motivation, and fostering these mindsets and self-regulation strategies is what psychological researchers typically mean by motivating students (Dweck et al., 2014, p. 3).

Students need to be able to regulate themselves, to be taught about the growth mindset and appropriate learning strategies. Furthermore, students need to understand that the process is even more important than the product. If they can understand early on in a particular course, for example, that the teacher will expose them to the material, but that they have to put forth the effort to learn the material in order to bridge the learning gap, they are far likelier to succeed long-term.

This is quite different than adults trying to motivate students through money and other rewards. Rather, we emphasize the type of motivation that students carry with them in the form of mindsets and skills, and the kind that educators promote by fostering these mindsets and skills” (Dweck et al., 2014, pp. 3-4).

Dweck and her colleagues support the idea that students need to take ownership as well. In other words, the educator can teach them about mindset but the students themselves must learn to regulate their time and their process. By extension, if students can understand how this applies to their lives, it will be life-changing, not only for foreign language learning, but also in life.

Research in this overview includes themes related to growth and fixed-mindset instruction, methods and strategies in FLL, re-framing learning failures, mindset, and the willingness to communicate in the TL, identity in FLL, and classroom environment. Specifically, it shows the benefit of explicit incorporation of the growth-mindset theory, and mindset examination, into the foreign language classroom. Therefore, the research supports the argument set forth in this study

which calls for the concomitant and integrative teaching of growth-mindset theory with emphasis on effort and methods that lead to successful acquisition. Significantly, the research I am providing in this study fills a perceived gap in the research, namely the need to address not just the fixed-mindset belief but to go a step backwards and look at what is triggering that belief and address the trigger. Importantly, if instructors can help students recognize and examine fixed-mindset triggers, which hinder their WTC in the TL and often keep them from viewing failure as an opportunity to learn, students may experience success even through failure and may begin to place more value on the process than the product of language learning. Consequently, conquering these fixed-mindset triggers in the short run may contribute to greater overall success in the long term—in FLL and in life.

Chapter 3: Methodology

Dweck's research, related to the growth- and fixed-mindset theories, informs the underlying assumptions set forth at the outset of this study. This study is qualitative in nature in that a small sample size (Creswell) was interviewed after an initial survey (see Appendix B) which provided information related to students' willingness and availability to participate in post-survey interviews. The research design of this qualitative study is a case study which allows for an in-depth description of a person's experience. In this instance, a case study has been useful in understanding and categorizing individual mindsets with regard to beliefs surrounding foreign language learning. Based on the current literature, it is important to speak one on one with the students and give them both time and opportunity to process and openly discuss their feelings and beliefs related to learning a foreign language.

The specific research questions which frame this case study are as follows:

1. How does mindset affect a student's willingness to communicate in the target language?
2. How does mindset affect perceptions of self and other students and/or the instructor?

The Characteristics of Qualitative Research

In this study, natural setting plays a key role. As noted by Creswell, (2009) qualitative researchers tend to collect data in the field at the site where participants experience the issue or problem under study. By extension, these face-to-face meetings allow the researcher to hone in on the participants' meanings and to further induce themes. (Creswell, 2009) An emergent design, a characteristic of qualitative studies, is one which allows a certain level of flexibility. Accordingly, the process may change or shift after the researcher enters the field and begins to collect data. Qualitative researchers try to develop a complex picture of the problem or issue under study. Because this involves multiple factors and many perspectives, a larger and more holistic picture emerges. (Creswell, 2009) An overarching goal of this study is to provide a holistic picture of the research questions, and provide possible answers by triangulating (p. 191) the actual data and placing it within the greater context of the secondary literature in the field.

Strategies of Inquiry

In a natural, or as close to natural, setting as possible, a qualitative researcher has the opportunity to have face-to-face interaction with the participants, which allows for direct communication within the context of their learning environment (Creswell, p. 175). Creswell considers the five approaches to inquiry and suggests that "case study" is a method in which a researcher can "explore processes, activities, and events. (p. 177). Because the data from this study was collected through face-to-face interviews, each interview was transcribed, and themes

were developed, so that the researcher could do an in-depth analysis of the participants' thought processes related to mindset in foreign language learning.

The Researcher's Role

As supported by Creswell, interviewing participants places the researcher as the key instrument in the data collection process. The researcher, through his or her direct interaction with the participants, is able to take the information obtained and begin to make sense of it by placing it into categories. (Creswell, 2009)

Because the researcher was unable to survey and interview her own students for the interview process, there were no significant potential conflicts of interest. It is worth noting, however, that due to the small community of German GTAs at this study site, certain topics seemed more difficult for one of the participants to discuss. From the researcher's perspective, there were certain aspects of the interview with participant five which were perhaps not quite as free as if the researcher had been outside of the department. This perception came about based on observations of participant five's body language as he discussed certain sensitive topics. He became more cautious and intentional with his speech. Overall, however, answers seem to have been given freely and honestly and the interview process felt very authentic and genuine.

Because the nature of this study is such that human participants were involved, approval of the study was requested and received from the Institutional Review Board at the University of Oklahoma. The subjects in the study were Elementary German students in their first semester of German at the University of Oklahoma. After obtaining permission from her supervisor and having obtained IRB approval, the researcher, a German 1225 instructor at the time of the conducted research, contacted the instructors for both German 1115 classes to gain entry and

secure permission to attend class and conduct the initial survey. Students were instructed to read the instructions and consent prior to completing the survey.

Data Collection Procedures

As previously described, the data were collected via face-to-face and semi-structured interviews allowing the researcher to categorize and “make sense” (Creswell, 1975) of the data. The initial sample size for the study was a 36. There were 23 students, 12 female and 11 male, in one of the German classes and 18, 6 female and 12 male, in the other. The design of this study was purposeful, involving specific cases to study. A small group of seven student interviews, with two male students and five female students, fit within the purposeful-design context. A smaller sample size allowed for meaningful dialogue between the researcher and the students and provided an open and safe space for explaining and thinking through their individual mindsets in the context of foreign language learning. The classes surveyed were chosen based on convenience and ease of access to the researcher.

Surveys

Participants were primed by their instructor with the knowledge that a Master’s Thesis candidate in the German section would be coming to class to conduct a voluntary survey related to her research. Participants received a brief introduction from the researcher followed by a statement. The initial survey, attached as Appendix B, included questions which were multiple choice, Likert (from 1 to 5) scale and open-ended. Participants were informed that they would not in any way be compensated for the study and that their participation was completely voluntary. Participants were then given instructions on how to access the survey and were able to complete the survey on their phones, laptops or tablets. A link was provided to the participants and they typed in the link to locate the survey. Participants were required to sign a consent form confirming

that they were both over 18 and willing to participate in the survey. Participants were asked a series of questions in order to identify and isolate certain mindsets. The survey itself contained a section for the students to provide their name and e-mail address if they were willing to be interviewed. Participants were then contacted via e-mail and arrangements were made to conduct the interviews.

Interviews

Based on the interview protocol described by Creswell (1998), seven Elementary German 1115 students, (five female and two male) of the 36 surveyed met with the researcher to discuss their survey questions. Of the seven participants who were interviewed, one interview was conducted with another participant present due to a time conflict. Once the first participant left, the second participant's interview was conducted one on one. The recorded interviews provided the students with an opportunity to elaborate on their survey answers. They were simply asked to re-state the answers from their surveys and to elaborate on their initial answers. The interviews were neither tightly structured nor completely unstructured but instead allowed discussion within the framework of the survey questions. Potential limitations included the size of the sample and availability of students for interviews. Another initial concern was the willingness of students to openly discuss their feelings and beliefs about their mindsets related to learning a foreign language and concerns regarding their current or previous instructor.

Table 1: Schedule of Participant Interviews

Participant Number	Recording Number	Date	Length of Interview
One	87	March 7, 2018	11.46
Two	88	March 7, 2018	16.30
Three	90	March 7, 2018	7.52
Four	91	March 7, 2018	12.50
Five	92	March 7, 2018	26.15
Six	93	March 7, 2018	17.33
Seven	94	March 7, 2018	30.24

According to Creswell, (183) the interview should follow a standard protocol and include components such as: heading, instructions, questions, probes to follow up, space to record the responses and a final thank you. Creswell suggests that the information can be recorded by making handwritten notes, audiotaping, or videotaping. (183)

Each participant signed a consent form prior to being interviewed. Participants were asked to state their name and basic information about themselves such as their major and where they were from. After providing introductory information about themselves, they were given a copy of the questions from the initial survey. Participants were asked to re-state their answers verbally. If time constraints were present, certain questions were primed over others to ensure that the most relevant information was obtained. When time constraints were not present, students were able to verbally answer each of the questions. The interviewer asked follow-up or clarification questions as needed throughout the process. The interviews varied in time and were between 7.52 and 30.24 minutes long. Interviews were transcribed and the data was analyzed using an on-line tool, Temi, which is an audio-to-text transcription service. The information requested in the interviews

consisted of questions which were intended to draw out participants' mindsets related to foreign language learning and their perceptions of themselves and others in light of these mindsets.

Data Recording Procedures

Interviews were recorded using the audio memo app on the researcher's I-Phone. Interviews were later saved to a secured hard drive.

Data Analysis and Interpretation

Due to the nature of the data obtained, the researcher was able to perform an in-depth and inductive analysis. As Creswell describes, "qualitative researchers build their patterns, categories, and themes from the bottom up, by organizing the data into increasingly more abstract units of information." (Creswell, 175) This process will be demonstrated below using a process called "open coding," as described by (Strauss and Corbin, 1998). This process provides a system for analyzing the data and creating codes under which the data can be categorized.

Open coding was the tool used to make meaning from the data. Open coding is an analytical process by which concepts are identified and dimensions are discovered in data. (Strauss and Corbin, 1998). Czarniawska (2004) points out, however, that coding is "part of the process of analysis," it is not the "analysis itself." It is important to note, then, that the codes utilized in this section on analysis and interpretation are significant not simply in terms of the codes themselves, but also in how they are used to make meaning from the data.

The four codes used in this study were chosen and developed as a result of reviewing the interview transcripts. The codes, while small in number, are used to reflect major categories evident in both the interview data and the secondary literature. These recurring themes include:

1. *Empathy* describes the action of being sensitive to, and understanding of, the mistakes made by others in the classroom setting. "Others" includes other students and the instructor.

2. *Courage* refers to the willingness to take risks and persevere without concern for failure or disapproval from others.
3. *Critical* describes disapproving thoughts and comments by or about others, and sometimes, about the students themselves.
4. *Fear* refers to the feeling associated with the anticipation of speaking out in class and potentially making a mistake.

The first two codes, “empathy” and “courage,” can be associated with more of a growth mindset as they suggest the willingness to be understanding of mistakes and to take risks in learning. The last two codes, “critical” and “fear” are more likely to be associated with a fixed mindset as they describe a more perfectionistic view that does not tolerate mistakes, at times in the students themselves and at times in others. The description of fear is associated with a fixed mindset in that it indicates a lack of willingness to try, either out of a perceived fear of failure or a concern for what others might think. The coding process itself allowed me, as the researcher, to begin to make sense of the significant amount of data in the interview transcriptions. Codes were given to indicate, and name, the key themes that emerged.

The following participant was chosen as a sampling representation because of the significant interview length (25.04) and due to the variety of themes which provided examples of three of the four codes. The coding process, represented in the following three portions of participant five’s interview, illustrates both the coding method and approximate length of each coded segment:

Segment one, Participant five-You’re subjecting yourself to like judgment and negativity and failure by like offering a word, a phrase and you risk yourself being wrong or judged or laughed at or ridiculed. (March 7, 2018)

The above data excerpt was assigned two codes as described below:

1. I assigned this excerpt *Critical* as this participant discusses the possibility of being judged, laughed at, or ridiculed.
2. The code assigned was *Fear* as this participant clearly believes that by speaking in class he is subjecting himself to failure by offering a word or phrase.

Segment two, Participant five-There's like a terseness sometimes which is used whenever like um, and this is due to like the fast pace of the class whenever we're doing um almost like lightning round things like, what is this? What is that? *Side question by interviewer:* Does that keep it fun and moving? Absolutely. But it can also cause negative emotions because somebody will get it wrong then it's a very fast nope. And like whenever you get that, like very fast, short, no in the middle of class it's kind of like, oh I'm sorry kind of thing. (March 7, 2018)

The above data excerpt was assigned two codes as described below:

1. I assigned this segment *Critical* as this participant conveys a sense of criticism of and by the instructor.
2. This section also received the code *Fear* because this participant describes negative emotions associated with making a mistake. There is evidence of fear to make a mistake when speaking in class.

Segment three, Participant five-I was very closely observing the instructor because they are put into a very unique situation because they have experienced the potential guillotine 20 times over by having to put themselves at the foot of 20 different students in class. There were times whenever he would say something and he would turn red out of like shame or embarrassment or something like that. But I noticed that he would like very quickly just like, take a breath and keep going. And I think you just have to be able to do that.

The above data excerpt was assigned one code as described below:

1. I assigned this segment *Empathy* as this participant conveys a sense of empathy toward his instructor. He is sensitive to the feelings of the instructor when the instructor makes a mistake, in spite of, and perhaps also because of, his own previously described difficulties with, and mistakes in, the language.

Reliability, Validity, and Generalizability

In an effort to provide reliability and validity to this study, procedures set forth in Creswell (2009) have been attended and adhered to. According to Creswell (p. 190), qualitative validity means that the researcher checks for the accuracy of findings by employing certain procedures. For the purpose of lending validity to this specific study, I can confirm that the transcripts have been checked to determine whether they contain obvious mistakes and that any mistakes have been corrected. In order to ensure qualitative reliability, or a consistent analysis approach across all participants, (Creswell, p. 190) I have confirmed that the definition of the codes is consistent among participants. Additionally, per Creswell's (p. 190) discussion of an intercoder agreement, or the act of cross-checking, I can confirm that my codes have been reviewed by my thesis committee and that the definitions are consistent. Prolonged time in the field (Creswell, p. 192), triangulation of data, and rich, thick description of findings (Creswell, p. 191) are additional aspects of this study which may be counted among reliability and validity techniques as set forth in Creswell (2009).

The Qualitative Write-Up

Results were analyzed using the Open Coding technique set forth by Strauss and Corbin. (1998) Data is categorized by themes or questions which were analyzed and discussed accordingly. Research questions, mentioned at the outset of the methodology section, were considered as themes began to emerge from the data. Connections between mindset and perceptions of self and other became clear and confirm that mindset is linked to a willingness to communicate in the target language. The Results and Discussion section provides direct quotes and analysis from each of the seven participants which confirm the existence of both mindsets within each individual.

Chapter 4: Results and Discussion

This chapter includes the findings of the analysis and interpretation of data gathered from seven face-to-face, semi-structured, interviews. The findings include a brief introduction of the participant followed by an in-depth look at themes which emerged from the participant's interview. The data obtained from each interview will be viewed through the lens of each research question. After the seven participants' answers have been individually analyzed through each research question, an overall analysis will be presented to compare and contrast themes among the participants. At the end of all of the individual assessments, an overall presentation of findings will be given. In order to categorize themes in the data, the following codes were given to discuss participants' views on willingness to communicate in the target language and perceptions of self and others: 1) Empathy; 2) Courage; 3) Critical; and 4) Fear. Participants will be discussed sequentially from participant one through participant seven.

The specific research questions which frame this case study are as follows:

1. How does mindset affect a student's willingness to communicate in the target language?
2. How does mindset affect perceptions of self and other students and/or the instructor?

These questions were developed as a result of personal observation as an instructor in the foreign language classroom. Consequently, hypotheses were made and the study was developed.

Portrait of, and Findings about, Participant One

Participant number one was in the last semester of her senior year, a Vocal Performance major, opera emphasis, at the time of the interview. She lived in Norman, Oklahoma, but stated that she was born and raised in Hawaii. Her previous exposure to German included a course on German diction as a part of her Vocal Performance major. Previous foreign language experience for this participant included Italian and French as part of her major and Spanish in high school. When

asked about whether she believed that anyone could be successful in a foreign language course she stated: “I think anyone can be successful in a foreign language.” She went on to suggest some methods for foreign language learning including immersing oneself, forcing oneself to speak only that language for a bit, or just surrounding yourself with people who want to do the same thing. (March 7, 2018)

How does mindset affect a student’s willingness to communicate in the target language?

In response to research question one, regarding how mindset affects a student’s willingness to communicate in the target language, the next section reports the findings about participant one.

Interviewer-Do you feel comfortable attempting to speak German in class?

Participant one-Yes. I feel like especially in this particular class, it makes it very comfortable because everyone’s kind of on the same level. (Code: Courage; Mindset: Growth) It’s just really hard for me personally to, to do something wrong. (Code: Fear; Mindset: Fixed) And so I think we all kind of hesitate and I think that hinders us from speaking, like in a fluent line because we are like, I don’t want to say this if it’s wrong. (Code: Fear; Mindset: Fixed)

When asked to discuss her willingness to communicate in the target language in the classroom context, participant one appears to have growth mindset tendencies. She describes being comfortable because everyone is on the same level. As previously seen in the methodology section, and re-stated at the beginning of this chapter, the interviews were assigned codes based on certain characteristics in the answers. Participant one, for the initial part of her answer, was assigned the code “courage” and mindset as “growth.” Not surprisingly, based on the secondary research, as well as my own, the next portion of her statement completely shifts in terms of code and mindset. She admits to finding it “really hard” to “do something wrong.” She realizes that these beliefs cause hesitation and are a hindrance to fluency. Not surprisingly, the feelings are fear based and coded as such. The mindset surrounding these feelings is fixed, as it shows an unwillingness, or at least a hesitation, to even try for fear of failure. By addressing the aspect of

hindrance, however, the fact that she is aware of the problem shows more of a growth mindset. Toward the end of her statement, she moves back into fear and fixed mindset and she confirms that she does not want to “say this” if it might be wrong. When asked about failure specifically, participant one reports: “I am concerned about failure because I do really like this class and I like the language and I would hate to be told that I am bad at it.” (Code: Critical; Mindset: Fixed) Through discussion of her beliefs about failure, participant one shows that she does not want to fail because she likes the class and the language and is concerned with possible criticism and an apparent need for outside approval. The mindset displayed here is fixed in that she fears criticism from others. This speaks to the importance of nurturing a safe and positive classroom environment and for encouraging mistakes as a part of the learning process.

How does mindset affect a student’s perceptions of self and other students and/or the instructor?

In response to research question two, regarding how mindset affects a student’s perceptions of self and others and/or the instructor, the next section reports the findings of participant one.

Interviewer-How will you feel if you make a mistake?

Participant one-Even on test two, I kind of feel like, oh, I thought I knew that. So it’s kind of like a downer on myself a little bit. (Code: Fear, Mindset: Fixed) I feel like if I learned from it, I’ll try not to make that mistake again. I know I’ll keep making mistakes because I’m a very, very, beginner, beginner, but I think things will start to get fixed and then it will become better. (Code: Courage, Mindset: Growth)

Participant one, in answering this question, shows a mixture of two opposing mindsets and two opposing codes. She initially states that she feels down on herself which shows a fear of failure and a fixed mindset. She quite quickly, in the second part of her answer, shifts into more of a growth mindset and shows courage as she recalls being a beginner and understands that she will keep making mistakes.

Interviewer-How will you perceive others who make mistakes?

Participant one-I'm afraid people will judge me for making a mistake, but I don't judge. (Codes: Fear and Empathy; Mindsets: Mixed) If people do make mistakes and if I happen to know the answer, I think it's really important to let them know, hey, I was on the same level. I can do it. You can do it too. Or maybe help them with the answer or help them with sentence structure. (Code: Empathy, Mindset: Growth)

In terms of how others will see her, participant one clearly shows a fear of being judged for making mistakes. This fear is rooted in a fixed mindset and it emphasizes a need for approval from others. However, she quickly shifts into empathy for others when they make a mistake and even expresses a willingness to help them if she can, which shows a growth mindset. Participant one, on the surface, appears to be what most instructors would consider to be an ideal foreign language learner. She came to the German classroom with other foreign language experience and a course on German diction and carries herself with confidence. During her interview, she showed confidence and was well spoken. Based on general background questions including, but not limited to, study habits, she seemed to be a very strong student in general. That being said, apart from an interview and specific questions targeting mindsets in the classroom surrounding her willingness to communicate in the target language, and without the opportunity to discuss her beliefs about herself and others with regard to making mistakes, it would not have been possible to ascertain underlying mindsets and assumptions concerning foreign language learning without this semi-structured and face-to-face interview. By extension, a tightly structured interview may not have allowed adequate time for reflection. Therefore, participant one's responses to both research questions support the outside research as well as my own. Specifically, individuals are a mixture of both mindsets and it is possible to have more than one mindset in the same subject area and even to have both at the same time. Therefore, time and attention need to be given for the identification of mindsets in the foreign language classroom.

Portrait of, and Findings about, Participant Two

Participant number two was a sophomore and was Civil Engineering major at the time of the interview. He lived in Norman, Oklahoma, and stated that he had lived in Norman most of his life. While he stated that he had no previous exposure to German before German 1115, he mentioned that he had always had an interest in visiting or going to Germany for career opportunities. Previous foreign language experience for this participant included Spanish, which he learned bilingually with English, as he stated that his mother is from Mexico. When asked about whether he believed that anyone could be successful in a foreign language course he stated: “I think so, yeah.” He went on to say that they have to have the proper motivation. He shared that because of his interest in learning the language he had been doing Duolingo and watching German shows with his roommates. (March 7, 2018)

How does mindset affect a student’s willingness to communicate in the target language?

In response to research question one, regarding how mindset affects a student’s willingness to communicate in the target language, the next section reports the findings about participant two.

Interviewer-Do you feel comfortable with attempting to speak German in class?

Participant two-I do. Because I mean that’s, I mean how else are you going to learn? So I mean, and we’re all in the same boat kind of. So why not try it? And if you’re wrong, I mean, you still learn. So yeah, I’d say I’m pretty comfortable now. (Codes: Courage, Empathy; Mindset: Growth) I guess if it were like a native speaker, that’d be kind of like awkward, (Codes: Fear and Critical; Mindset: Fixed) I guess, but not in class. I mean classes, that’s where you’re supposed to learn. (Code: Courage; Mindset: Growth)

Participant two comes across as confident and very growth-minded in terms of his willingness to attempt speaking the target language in class. He realizes that they (all of the students) are in the same boat and suggests that even if you are wrong, you still learn. He has an open-minded view of learning and suggests that one might as well try. He states that he is pretty comfortable speaking the target language in class. These assertions align with the codes of courage

and empathy as he shows a willingness to take risks and exudes empathy and a growth-oriented mindset towards himself and others when he states, “why not try it?” His statement, “if you’re wrong, you still learn,” shows an openness to trying in spite of possibly making a mistake. However, as growth-oriented as this participant seems to be, and as I’ve alluded to earlier in this study, each of us is made up of a combination of both mindsets sometimes and even in the same subject area. Participant two goes on to describe a speaking situation in which he would not feel as comfortable and tends toward more of a fixed mindset. Specifically, he asserts that speaking with a native speaker would be “awkward.” He understands that one ought to learn within the context of the classroom but apparently believes that with a native speaker the same idea does not apply. While this belief is more clearly fear of failure or making a mistake, it can also be coded as critical, as he seems concerned with what the native speaker would think of him and his speaking ability, and is more of a fixed mindset, as he limits learning to the classroom setting with other beginning learners. However, he comes back to a growth-minded outlook when he suggests again that “classes, that’s where you’re supposed to learn.” Importantly, these beliefs again confirm the mixture of mindsets and the need to really discuss, understand, and reflect on concerns surrounding foreign language learning whether inside or outside the foreign language classroom. While this specific example would occur outside the classroom setting, a fixed mindset is implicit with regard to the willingness to communicate in the target language.

Interviewer-Are you concerned about failure or making a mistake?

Participant two-No, not at all because making mistakes is usually how I learn to say it the right way. I mean obviously you don’t want to fail, but failing is a part of learning. (Code: Courage; Mindset: Growth)

Participant two comes across as primarily a growth-minded individual who is willing to take risks with regard to speaking as long as it is within the context of the classroom environment.

In this segment he showed courage in terms of willingness to try and growth mindset in his belief that failure is a part of learning.

How does mindset affect a student's perceptions of self and other students and/or the instructor?

In response to research question two regarding how mindset affects a student's perceptions of self and others and/or the instructor, the next section reports the findings about participant two.

Participant two- How do I perceive others? I mean, I see it as like we're all learning the language. So I mean I make mistakes, they make mistakes, so I mean I see it as necessary to learn the language. (Code: Courage; Empathy [self and other]; Mindset: Growth)

Participant two- I don't feel that like I'm holding the class back or anything when I try new things. (Code: Courage; Empathy [self]; Mindset: Growth)

In terms of how he perceives others, participant two shows empathy towards others who make mistakes and believes that it simply a necessary part of learning a language and he shows courage and self-empathy in that he affords himself the same opportunity as others in regards to making mistakes in an effort to acquire the language. Not surprisingly, these descriptions point toward a growth mindset in terms of how he views himself and others in the context of the foreign language classroom. Participant two, an individual who seems to be very growth-mindset oriented, also shows elements of being fixed-mindset oriented when it comes to language-learning contexts that do not occur within the classroom. While it appears that he is simply a hard-working and growth-mindset-oriented individual, one need only ask a few detailed questions to determine that a fixed mindset does exist with regard to his willingness to communicate. Accordingly, these findings suggest the need to understand, address, and discuss mindsets within the context of the foreign language learning environment.

Portrait of, and Findings about, Participant Three

Participant number three, in her sixth semester, was a double major in Communication and Spanish, from Dallas, Texas. Prior to German 1115 she did not have exposure to German but explained that she had been “doing foreign language learning” for most of her life. As a child, she stated she went to a bilingual elementary school. She did not take Spanish in middle school but took it all four years of high school and every semester in college. She studied for one semester in Chile which gave her confidence and helped develop fluency. When asked about whether she believed that anyone could be successful in a foreign language course she stated that she believed that everyone can learn a skill if they put their hardest effort into it. If you really had to, you could. (March 7, 2018)

How does mindset affect a student’s willingness to communicate in the target language?

In response to research question one, regarding how mindset affects a student’s willingness to communicate in the target language, the next section reports the findings of participant three.

Participant three-Do I feel comfortable attempting to speak German in class? Uh, yes, mostly. (Code: Courage; Mindset: Growth)

Participant three-I mean I do make mistakes and it’s not ever that big a deal. Like I think in other classes I’m more concerned with making mistakes because it’s like, you know, I’m at the point of in both of my degrees where I’m taking upper division level classes and if I make a mistake it’s more like, oh, I should know that by now. But in intro level, beginning German, it’s like, well we don’t, none of us really know a whole lot of anything. So we’re all kind of making mistakes. (Code: Courage; Mindset: Growth)

Participant three comes to this elementary language course as a seasoned foreign language learner and an experienced student. Her responses to the questions regarding “comfort level with speaking German” and “making mistakes” at this level are extremely growth-mindset-oriented and show courage. She is clearly a student who understands that making mistakes is quite normal based on the students’ knowledge of the language at this beginning stage. However, within this

answer which appears to show an overall mindset of growth and courage, there is a mindset that says that when one gets to a certain level, one ought not make certain mistakes. By extension, this actually shows a fixed mindset that is more fear based. She seems to be indirectly communicating that by the time one reaches upper division, one ought to know a fixed amount of information and that mistakes at that level are not seen positively or as a part of learning. Based on this assumption, this individual who is comfortable making mistakes at the lower level, is not comfortable making mistakes at a higher level and therefore also shows evidence of a mixed-mindset orientation.

How does mindset affect a student's perceptions of self and other students and/or the instructor?

In response to research question two, how mindset affects student's perception of self and other students and/or the instructor, the next section reports the findings about participant three.

Interviewer-How will you feel if you make a mistake in class?

Participant three-I feel kind of silly sometimes if it's like a completely wrong mistake. (Code: Fear; Mindset: Fixed)

Interviewer-How will you perceive others who make mistakes in class?

Participant three-I don't perceive people differently because they have trouble in class or say something wrong. (Code: Empathy; Mindset: Growth)

Participant three shows herself to be someone who understands that mistakes are part of learning, at the beginning levels at least. However, her reaction to making a mistake, "feeling kind of silly," depending on the degree (completely wrong) of the mistake, shows that she may not actually believe what she says. For instance, if mistakes are truly part of learning, it is not clear why "feeling silly" would be the result of learning. Moreover, she shows empathy towards others if they have trouble in class or if they say something wrong. Again, this participant's clear mixture of mindsets with regard to speaking the target language and making mistakes in class, and her

empathetic view of others, but not always of herself, shows the need for explicit mindset instruction and discussion within the context of the foreign language classroom.

Portrait of, and findings about, participant four

Participant four, in semester eight of her Vocal Performance major at the time of the interview, was born and raised in Norman, Oklahoma. Prior to German 1115 she took Spanish in high school and had taken both Italian and French in conjunction with her Vocal Performance major. Participant four believed that, with regard to being successful in a foreign language, people should have a special aptitude to really pursue it. She went on to say that a student could “skate by and pass the class.” However, she implied but did not specifically describe, that a “special aptitude” was needed to learn to be fluent.

How does mindset affect a student’s willingness to communicate in the target language?

In response to research question one, regarding how mindset affects a student’s willingness to communicate in the target language, the next section reports the findings about participant four.

Interviewer-How do you feel about speaking German in class?

Participant four-That one’s kind of a weird double-edged sword because I have taken diction. I’m very critical of what comes out of my, out of me. I’ll always because of the voice training and like the diction training and I’m always like, I don’t want this to sound wrong. Like even if the grammar is correct, I’m always kind of like, I don’t want to sound like an Okie. Since I’m still learning, it comes out slower than I would want it to come out. I feel pretty good as far as like spontaneous speech...I feel really comfortable when I’m like doing Stammtisch and everything is great. It was just in class. I’m just like, oh, it’s a different environment. I guess I want to be like a turtle. (Codes: Fear, Critical, and Courage (depending on context); Mindsets: Mixed) But like I have to remember that like, um, if I’m making no mistakes at all, that I’m not even speaking. I’m not even trying. (Code: Courage; Mindset: Growth)

Participant four is a student who came to German 1115 with experience in foreign language learning, which might, on the surface, presuppose a comfort with, and understanding of the need for, making mistakes as a part of the learning process. She is a student who might initially be deemed “likely to be successful” in foreign language courses based on all of her experience with

foreign language learning. However, in spite of possibly correct perceptions of her willingness to work at foreign language learning, she exhibits tendencies which show a fixed mindset in that she is fearful and critical of her mistakes. She admits that her speech is slower than she would like and she asserts that even when her grammar is correct, she still has a concern that she “does not want to sound like an Okie.” While she maintains that she has these feelings about speaking in her classroom context, she states that in the context of the Stammtisch (German speaking event at a restaurant) she is more comfortable. She likes the Stammtisch environment and is more comfortable with spontaneous speech in this setting. Importantly, at the end of this segment of the interview she came to the self-realization that she ought to remember that if she is “making no mistakes at all, she is not even speaking. Not even trying.” Within that segment she showed evidence of both fixed and growth mindsets and received codes of fear, courage, and critical. Consequently, this mixture of codes and mindsets supports the idea that mindsets ought to be discussed in the context of foreign language learning and that students ought to be equipped to address fixed-mindset tendencies through explicit instruction, examination, and discussion of mindsets in the foreign language classroom. By extension, an understanding of triggers such as a discomfort with, or fear of, speaking if the speech is not absolutely correct, and an understanding of how to persevere in spite of these feelings may also be beneficial for students in other contexts, such as coursework and career. For instance, an understanding of mindsets and associated negative triggers could help students thrive when placed in situations in which they need to speak about less familiar topics or face other challenging situations.

How does mindset affect a student's perceptions of self and other students and/or the instructor?

Participant four-I'm like a very like self-critical person, like just kind of by nature. I mean that might just be a singer thing, but like so not just German but across the board. (Code: Critical; Mindset: Fixed)

Participant four-...if you're trying or not, like I can tell you're not trying at all. Like it kind of irks me. Like I can tell that you're not like putting forth like a good amount of effort, like a decent amount of effort. Like if you're just kind of spacing out and like just not grasping it at all. (Code: Critical; Mindset: Fixed)

Participant four admitted to being a "very self-critical person" and to being irked when she described being able to tell that someone was not trying or "putting forth a good amount of effort."

On the surface, some of her concerns seem, perhaps, warranted. However, it is difficult for a student to determine who is or is not "putting forth a good amount of effort." How does one know what "a good amount of effort" is, or what a student may or may not be doing to prepare for class? The fact is, there are deeply-held beliefs by students about themselves and others and they need to be addressed and perhaps also re-framed in an effort to provide the best learning environment possible for all learners—the ones who seem to participate more—and the ones who may not seem to care. After all, how will the ones who are not intrinsically motivated become more motivated if they are feeling judged and afraid all of the time? Importantly, the amount of effort needed by one student to produce language may be very different from the amount of effort required by another student—and learning difficulties may also be present and must be considered. Additionally, intrinsically motivated students may put forth a significant amount of effort because they are more interested in the language and it can be frustrating for them to work with students who do not care about the class and do not put forth the effort. Accordingly, mindsets related to student's perceptions of other students, regardless of whether the students have apparent interest or not, need to be addressed and examined in the context of the FL classroom.

Portrait of, and Findings about, Participant Five

Participant number five was a junior in Environmental Sustainability from Moore, Oklahoma. Reflecting on his German experience he stated that he took one week of German 1115 at OU prior to transferring to another university. He recalled that his other foreign language experience included approximately three and a half years of Latin in high school. When asked to discuss whether he thought anyone could be successful in a foreign language, he asserted: “I do believe that anybody can be successful in a foreign language just like anybody can be successful at anything if they approach it in the right way.” (March 7, 2018)

How does mindset affect a student’s willingness to communicate in the target language?

In response to research question one, regarding how mindset affects a student’s willingness to communicate in the target language, the next section reports the findings about participant five.

Participant five-So I do feel somewhat comfortable to speak German in class. As a matter of fact, part of my rationalization is I should encourage myself to do it now. (Code: Courage; Mindset: Growth) I am uncomfortable attempting to speak German in class somewhat because these are just completely foreign words and sounds that I’ve never even heard before and can’t distinguish between sometimes. And this isn’t something I’ve practiced very much so I’m going to be making many, many, many mistakes. (Code: Fear; Mindset: Fixed) But I encourage myself to do it because it’s a resource of sorts. (Code: Courage; Mindset: Growth) I have the opportunity to practice using the language and have somebody who can *pick apart every mistake* (emphasis mine) and show them to me so I can take this in my free time and work at this. So it’s an opportunity for me to hone that skill. But it’s awful sometimes. (Codes: Fear, Critical, Courage; Mindset: Mixed)

Participant five shows a mixture of all of the codes and both mindsets in the short segment. On the one hand he is “somewhat comfortable speaking German in class,” but on the other hand, he points out that “these are just completely foreign words and sounds.” By extension, he suggests that he is both comfortable and uncomfortable at the same time. Accordingly, this confirms that a mixture of both mindsets can co-exist even within the same setting. Although it seems as if he wants to choose courage over fear, valuing the input that he could receive, he seems to view the

criticism both positively and negatively. While the emphasis on “*pick apart every mistake*” is mine, during the interview this participant seemed to see this type of criticism with more of a fixed mindset. In other words, he seemed to realize its value but perhaps was not completely open to hearing it. He alludes to the “opportunity of correction,” but comes to the fact that it feels awful. Consequently, it is not entirely clear whether he is truly open to the idea of criticism: He seems to understand the perceived benefit logically and from a linguistic perspective but still seems to emphasize the “awful” feeling that is associated with being corrected. Specifically, the awfulness of being corrected seems to override the effectiveness of it based on this discussion. This mindset aligns with fixed- and fear-based thinking. In this next segment, he describes putting himself “out there” as “jarring and scary.”

Participant five- A lot of times, since it is somewhat immersion-y, there’s a lot of things that I just don’t understand - a lot of the prompts. So there might be a question posed, “When is your birthday?” and you might answer something along the lines of “I want a puppy.” You just don’t, you’re not able to understand what you’re being asked sometimes and it’s kind of jarring and scary to put yourself out there and risk making a fool of yourself sometimes. (Codes: Fear; Mindset: Fixed)

Importantly, in this segment, participant five describes the discomfort that is often associated with being in a language-learning environment which emphasizes immersion. He describes a perhaps not uncommon situation in which students are being asked certain questions and to which they respond with an answer that is completely unrelated to the question being asked. Participant five’s strong words, “jarring and scary”, indicate his discomfort with the process. While this can be coded as a fear-based fixed mindset, it is important for the instructor to recall what the student might be experiencing and to attend to that. In fact, this could be addressed in conjunction with mindset discussions and also, as a reminder to the students, prior to entering into this language-learning context. According to ACTFL (American Council on the Teaching of Foreign Languages) standards, instructors are to aim for 90% comprehensible instruction in the

target language. By extension, language instructors ought therefore to remember that their speaking must be comprehensible. They can, perhaps, use their ten-percent English judiciously to remind students that they will not, and need not, understand everything and need to remind students that this sort of question-and-answer type session will occur with regularity and should remind the students how they can be prepared for these scenarios.

Participant five-I'm of course concerned to make a mistake because everyone wants to be perfect and the sooner the better, (Code: Fear; Mindset: Fixed) but at the same time it is an opportunity to make a mistake and have it corrected so you can work at that and very quickly resolve it. (Code: Courage; Mindset: Growth)

He implies that he has the desire to be perfect when he states that “everyone wants to be perfect and the sooner the better.” He also realizes, and again revisits, the idea that mistakes can be corrected. Participant five is again showing a fear to make a mistake but shows both fixed and growth mindsets in terms of his desire to be “perfect” (fixed) and understanding that “mistakes can be corrected” (growth). In the below excerpt, he explains the “potential negativity associated with trying” (to speak the target language), using the metaphor of a turtle on the guillotine:

Participant five-It's kind of that metaphor of a turtle who takes his head out of the shell at the risk of a guillotine chopping it off. And that's kind of what you do in a language learning environment. You're subjecting yourself to judgment and negativity and failure by offering a word or phrase and you risk yourself being wrong or judged or laughed at or ridiculed. There's a whole lot of potential negativity with trying. (Codes: Fear, Critical; Mindset: Fixed)

He again shows both fear and a fixed mindset in that he likens the foreign language learning environment to the turtle on the guillotine. Not surprisingly, he indicates a perceived negativity and judgment associated with offering a word or phrase. By extension, he suggests that there is risk involved because of the possibility of being “wrong or judged or laughed at or ridiculed.” While he does not indicate whether or not he has been through this, he expresses a fear or concern for what could happen when a risk is taken. He suggests that there is a “whole lot of potential

negativity with trying.” Importantly, these beliefs confirm the need for discussions on mindset and setting expectations and tone in the foreign language classroom.

How does mindset affect a student’s perceptions of self and other students and/or the instructor?

Participant five-I’m not really too concerned with what I think others will perceive of me, but at the same time I will admit to kind of thinking negatively sometimes about some people but only because they might make a mistake that is like very, very, very basic that we’ve been covering consistently. Like every day. And I mean, I know that I’ve been in this position myself, I know that this is an individual that is trying to learn a language that they have very little familiarity with, but sometimes like, I don’t know, there’s like if you make a mistake with the most fundamental, like it is something that is drilled into your head, but I will admit to having like mentally kind of shamed somebody before, but I’m not really concerned of others doing that to me. (Codes: Critical of others; Mindset: Fixed)

In this above segment, participant five seems to indicate that he is not concerned about others being critical of him, though he did describe the possibility of being laughed at or ridiculed in the language learning environment. Specifically, he suggests that he is the one who would be critical of others. By extension, he would be one to judge someone else and their effort, or perceived lack of effort, for making a mistake on something that is “very, very, very basic” that has been “consistently covered.” As with participant four, it needs to be made clear to students that it is not their job to judge other students. Their responsibility lies solely in doing their personal best, and not in judging whether another student is doing his or her best. Specifically, being critical of others can be associated with a fixed mindset in that there is no evidence of an understanding that with more or different effort, improvement can occur.

In this next segment there is evidence of criticism of the instructor:

Participant five-There’s like a terseness sometimes which is used due to the fast pace of the class whenever we are doing almost like lightning-round things where we’re like, “what is this?” “What is that?” (Codes: Critical and perhaps fear; Mindset: Fixed)

Interviewer-Does that sometimes keep it fun and moving?

Participant five-Absolutely, but it can also cause negative emotions. Someone will get it wrong then it's a very fast "nope." And whenever you get that very fast, short no in the middle of class it's kind of like, oh, I'm sorry kind of thing. (Codes: Fear and Critical; Mindset: Mixed)

In this above segment, there is a criticism of the instructor's method. More precisely, there is fear expressed in terms of being called on in this "lighting round" scenario and a criticism of the method itself. While the participant agrees with the question that a speed-round of questioning can, at times, be used to keep the class moving and make things seem fun, it can also cause negative emotions. Consequently, the terse "nope" in the middle of class can feel negative. This lightning-round may have some benefits in terms of keeping things moving, however, and the instructor might also reconsider this method and error-correction techniques in order to keep morale high, even when a mistake is made. Accordingly, proper context for learning and instructor expectation setting allow for student input and can be very helpful in these scenarios.

In spite of showing apparent criticism of the instructor, participant five goes on to show empathy towards the same instructor, displaying more of a growth-mindset-oriented attitude.

Participant five-So whenever I was first acclimating myself to the course, I was very closely observing the instructor because they are put into a very unique situation because they experienced the potential guillotine 20 times over by having to like put themselves at the foot of 20 different students in class. And there were times whenever he would like say something and he would turn red out of like shame or embarrassment or something like that. But I noticed that he would like very quickly take a breath, take a breath and keep going. And I think that you just have to be able to do that. (Codes: Empathy; Mindset: Growth)

In this segment, the participant shows both empathy and a growth mindset. He is putting himself in his instructor's shoes and showing empathy for his instructor's "guillotine experience." In spite of his own fear of the guillotine, he steps back and sees how his instructor might also have similar struggles. Participant five also sees in his instructor an ability to just take a breath and keep going stating that "you just have to be able to do that." Speaking specifically to his instructor and that scenario, participant five also seems to imply that he comes to the understanding that he, and

other foreign language learners, need to be able to do that as well. Therefore, this shows a growth mindset towards the instructor and a possible willingness to apply the same approach to his own learning.

Portrait of, and Findings about, Participant Six

Participant six, a second semester sophomore in Vocal Performance at the time of the interview, was from Edmond, Oklahoma. She stated that her only exposure to German, prior to German 1115, had been a short trip to Austria for a music festival and learning German song texts for Voice. Her previous foreign language experience, which she described as positive, included coursework in French and Italian, as required by her major, and Spanish in high school. She stated that she believed that anyone could be successful in a foreign language though some may have a stronger aptitude for it and pick it up quicker. (March 7, 2018)

How does mindset affect a student's willingness to communicate in the target language?

In response to research question one, regarding how mindset affects a student's willingness to communicate in the target language, the next section reports the findings about participant six. As a seasoned foreign language learner, she seems to have an overall comfort with the fact that she will make mistakes, but at the same time reflects that because of her Vocal Performance experience, she may at times be hindered in speaking the language due to her own internal struggle with wanting to be correct.

Participant six-I've gotten comfortable with making mistakes with language stuff. That's overall, I know the one thing that does help in the long run, but it can hinder me a little bit because of all the pronunciation rules I have in my head. Like having a fight between just getting it out and like, oh, like, oh, that was wrong. So that's the one thing that I kind of have. (Codes: Courage, Fear; Mindsets: Mixed)

Interviewer-Do you think that maybe the vocal performance people are harder on themselves and other vocal performance people because they have a higher expectation?

Participant six-I would say yes. I would also say it's not more like we're not really hard on each other because we're used to being there and being like it wasn't that bad. Like here's the good things. We're used to kind of like building up after a bad performance because we've all been there (Code: Empathy; Mindset: Growth) and we've all seen another person have one of those. Um, but I think we're definitely hard on ourselves (Code: Critical; Mindset: Fixed) just because so much that we have to do for our degree plan is just like nitpicking because it is.

Participant six comes to this elementary language classroom as an experienced language learner. With that comes her understanding that she will make mistakes, and she is seemingly comfortable with that fact, which indicates a sense of courage with language and more of a growth mindset. It is when she brings in her experience with Vocal Performance and German diction, however, that her fears and self-critical nature point toward more of a fear-based fixed mindset. She describes having "pronunciation rules in her head," the subsequent fight that ensues to "just get it out," and the concern that "oh, that was wrong." This confirms that even in an apparent "seasoned foreign language learner," there is an internal struggle that goes on to "just speak." This could potentially be alleviated through mindset discussions and training, and times for simply speaking imperfectly. By extension, there ought to be times in which the students can speak freely without fear of criticism or failure. For instance, in an authentic scenario with a novice foreign language learner and a native speaker who does not speak the native language of the novice learner, the main goal is communicative success, not perfection. Participant six goes on to express empathy for others in her description of her Vocal Performance peers. The Vocal Performance majors, as a whole, seem to be more critical of themselves than each other, at least within the German learners majoring in Vocal Performance. Those outside the Vocal Performance circle are looked at critically by some of the Vocal Performers if they are making mistakes and not putting forth a "good amount of effort," as was described by participant number four.

How does mindset affect a student's perceptions of self and other students and/or the instructor?

In response to research question two, how mindset affects a student's perceptions of self and other students and/or the instructor, the next section reports the findings about participant six.

Participant six-I don't feel too bad about failing. (Code: Courage; Mindset: Growth) I can't afford it with a five credit hour and also it will hold up my degree plan so I can't really afford to. So not an option, not an option. (This portion not coded -see below)

Participant six-I don't feel bad because then it can get corrected. Um, because I'd rather make it there and then have someone be like, oh, like, no, that's wrong. So I don't make it later in a test situation or a situation where I actually have to speak to someone. Um, so I'd rather, if it's making a mistake, I'd rather make it in the class where I can get it fixed and figuring out what I need to do. (Code: Courage; Mindset: Growth)

She seems to indicate here that she is comfortable failing in a speaking situation but states that an actual F would affect her degree plan. She states that it is, therefore, not an option. For the purpose of this study, since I am looking primarily at failure and making mistakes in the language learning context, this segment was coded "courage," as she speaks to "not feeling too bad about failing." However, based on the analysis of this interview, it is evident that a distinction will need to be drawn between failing momentarily and failing the entire course. While one can always learn and grow through failure, the impact of failing the course is greater in terms of the lasting effect. As with all other participants, participant six shows a combination of both growth and fixed-minded thinking. By extension, this contributes to the assumption that the discussion and integration of mindsets are important in the foreign language classroom.

Portrait of, and Findings about, Participant Seven

Participant seven, an Aerospace Engineering major with a possible minor in mathematics, was in her fourth semester. Born in Las Vegas, she spent most of her life in Oklahoma, and indicated that her parents were from Guam. Prior to German 1115, she had experience with

German in high school and through an MTC, or missionary training center, for her Mormon faith, where she took an intensive German course nine hours a day for six days a week. She was also exposed to Chamorro, her parent's native language. She shared that she believed that anyone could learn German but it would depend on whether they really wanted to. (March 7, 2018)

How does mindset affect a student's willingness to communicate in the target language?

In response to research question one, regarding how mindset affects a student's willingness to communicate in the target language, the next section reports the findings about participant seven. In this interview segment, participant seven shares how she will feel if she makes a mistake.

Participant seven-Um, I still have that little thing in the back of my head saying, uh, you're going to feel bad when you make a mistake, but I still do it anyways because I know that if I make a mistake, somebody else will learn from it. So I'll still do it. (Codes: Fear, Courage, Critical; Mindsets: Mixed)

In this segment, participant seven shows fear, courage, and self-criticism, which point to a mixture of both the growth and the fixed mindsets. She speaks about the "little thing in the back of her head," telling her that she will feel bad when she makes a mistake. Participant seven, when describing mistake-making, says, "when" and not "if" and she says that she will do "it" anyway. She believes that when she makes a mistake, someone else will learn from it, and she perseveres in spite of the potential to make a mistake. There is, therefore, a significant amount occurring all at once. Specifically, she suggests that she "will feel bad," when she "makes a mistake." This assumes both a bad feeling and that a mistake will be made. She goes on to share the realization that if she makes a mistake, someone will learn from it, so she pushes through in spite of the potential to "feel bad."

How does mindset affect a student's perceptions of self and other students and/or the instructor?

In response to research question two, how mindset affects student's perceptions of self and other students and/or the instructor the next section reports the findings about participant seven.

Participant seven-Um, I noticed in the class that I'm in right now, not naming names, but there are certain people that are having a really difficult time. But they also explained that they don't sit down and they don't study, they don't read the materials. They don't actually go home and talk and say, oh, that's the door. I know what the door is in German and say it, things like that. Um, but for me, I'll trying my best because I really want to learn the language. (Code: Critical ; Mindset: Mixed)

Participant seven-Well, when, you're in the same class, and you're given the same materials but you're working harder than that other person and you are trying to communicate with them, it just hinders you from learning. It frustrates me because I want to answer and I want to have a, um, natural conversation, but it's hard and it's hindering me from learning. (Code: Critical; Mindset: Fixed)

In the above segments, participant seven is showing criticism of others, and perhaps a lack of patience for them in terms of how they are learning. She appears to judge them for their lack of effort, although she has no idea what they may be going through either inside or outside the classroom. Importantly, participant seven asserts that she "tries her best" and that she really wants to learn the language. This student expresses a growth mindset in her own learning but applies a fixed-minded understanding of her peers. Students need to understand that they cannot judge their peers if the hope is to have a safe and positive foreign-language-learning environment. She continues to make judgments about what others do or do not do with the same materials she has been given and she feels frustrated at times because she believes that she is working harder and trying to communicate with the others. She does not, however, have the whole picture and, therefore, cannot fully understand what someone else might be going through and how this might be affecting them in the context of the foreign-language-learning environment.

Summary of Findings

Based on the research questions in this study relating to mindset and the willingness to communicate in the target language and mindset and perception of self and others, participants can be described as having varying degrees of both mindsets, even at times in answering the same question. To summarize the findings, a synopsis of each interview will be provided.

Participant one, a Vocal Performance major from Hawaii, shows both mindsets in terms of her willingness to speak the target language. She is comfortable speaking in class because everyone is on the same level, but she also describes the fact that it is really hard for her to do something wrong and because of that she thinks she (and her peers) hesitate to speak for fear of failure. Thus, she is both comfortable and uncomfortable at the same time. In terms of the second question related to perception, she is growth-minded in how she sees others but fixed-minded in how she sees herself and what she fears others believe about her. By extension, her answers to these two questions show a mixture of codes and mindsets.

Participant two, appearing to be mostly growth minded in his thinking, suggests that he is comfortable speaking the target language in class but would feel awkward speaking with a native speaker. In other words, he is growth-minded about making mistakes in the classroom environment and fixed-minded about mistake making outside of the context of the classroom, such as with a native speaker. Participant two, in terms of how he sees himself and others in light of mistakes, is growth-minded. He believes that making mistakes is a way to learn and he views himself and others in this regard with empathy.

Participant three, a double major in Communication and Spanish, when describing how she feels about speaking German in class, says she feels comfortable speaking German. In terms of her German introductory-level coursework, she sees mistakes as a part of learning. However,

within this same answer, she shares that in her upper-division classes she should not be making mistakes. She is growth-minded in terms of early foreign language learning but tends toward a fixed-minded view of making mistakes in higher levels of learning. When describing her perceptions of herself and others in terms of making a mistake, she maintains that she tends to “feel silly” when she makes a mistake, a feeling that does not seem to match up to her understanding that mistakes are a part of learning. Furthermore, she shows empathy towards others when they make mistakes. Participant three’s mixed-minded view of herself and others is further support for the need to examine mindsets in the FL classroom.

Participant four, a Vocal Performance major and seasoned foreign language learner, describes how she feels about speaking German in class as a “double-edged sword.” Because of her training in Vocal Performance, she states that she is very critical about what comes out of her mouth. More precisely, she does not want to sound like “an Okie”, she says, “I guess I want to be like a turtle.” While we did not explicitly discuss her understanding of the “turtle on a guillotine metaphor,” my understanding is that she wants to hide in her “shell” and not take the risk at times, for fear of failure. However, in an informal German-speaking environment, such as Stammtisch, she feels more comfortable with spontaneous speech. Although she is somewhat fixed-minded in terms of speaking in the classroom environment, she is also growth minded in that she realizes that if she is making no mistakes at all, she is not even trying. By contrast, in terms of how she perceives herself and others, she is fixed-minded. Specifically, she is critical of herself and others and holds a high standard for work and effort in the classroom.

Participant five, an Environmental Sustainability major, also shows both mindsets and multiple codes in terms of both his willingness to communicate in the target language and how he sees himself and others. He states at the outset that he feels somewhat comfortable speaking

German in class. He is at the same time, however, uncomfortable speaking German in class because the words are “completely foreign” and he’s never heard them before. In terms of mistake making, he understands the value of having his mistakes corrected but also says that it is awful sometimes. He can be critical of others, including his instructor, but seems to take a self-empathetic view of his own mistakes. Therefore, it can be seen in his answers that his beliefs align with a mixture of codes and mindsets.

Participant six, a Vocal Performance major with previous foreign language experience, states that she is comfortable making mistakes with “language stuff.” However, she goes on to describe an internal battle with speaking correctly and the possibility that she may make a mistake. She attributes that to the rules that are “in her head.” In general, she would rather make a mistake in the context of the foreign language classroom than with a native speaker or on a test. Her beliefs seem to align mostly with a growth mindset, but when describing her difficulty to just speak at times and fear of failure, a fixed-minded view can also be seen.

Participant seven, an Aerospace Engineering major, describes herself as being willing to speak even if it means making a mistake, because someone might learn from it. In spite of that, however, she suggests that she has a “little thing in the back of her head saying, you’re going to feel bad when you make a mistake.” Showing fear, courage, and self-criticism, her beliefs also align with both mindsets and codes. Furthermore, she is very critical of others who do not appear to be putting forth effort to the same degree that she does. By extension, participant seven tends to hold others to the same standard to which she holds herself. On the one hand, she comes across as growth minded in how she approaches her own learning, but, on the other hand, fixed minded when she believes others ought to work in the same way.

Accordingly, it can be seen through the analysis of participant interviews, that there is a need to discuss and examine mindsets in the foreign language classroom. If mindsets are assessed and expectations are set from the beginning, a safe learning environment that is free from judgment can be promoted and maintained. If students are going to communicate without fear, they need to know that they will not be judged or criticized by the instructor or their peers. Effective error correction need not promote “negative emotions” as described by participant five. Moreover, students need to understand that their primary role in the foreign language classroom is to do their best and that it is not to be concerned with how others are doing. Indeed, communicative success is not the same as communicative perfection and students and instructors need to understand and comport themselves accordingly. Furthermore, process over product ought to be emphasized and students need to be aware of their fixed-mindset triggers in order to address them. Instructors need to be informed of, and to understand, their own mindsets in order to help students understand theirs.

Chapter 5: Conclusion

As Dweck points out in her article “Carol Dweck Revisits the ‘Growth Mindset,’” people are not simply of one mindset or the other. Surprisingly, we are a mixture of both and to varying degrees. Just as Dweck states, it is not as though we want to ignore the fact that we have fixed-mindset tendencies in some areas. By contrast, what we need to do is recognize that they exist and look at what is triggering these fixed-mindset beliefs. The original aim of this study, to discover connections between mindset and the willingness to communicate in the target language and mindset and the perceptions of self and others, was met through the qualitative analysis of seven in-person interviews. Accordingly, as can be seen in the following visual representation of the findings, mindsets related to a student’s willingness to communicate in the target language, and

perceptions of self and others are mixtures of both growth and mixed mindsets and codes. (Codes: Courage, Empathy; Fear, Critical) None of the seven students was of a completely growth or fixed mindset but a mixture of both and to varying degrees.

Summary of Findings

Table two: Willingness to Communicate in the Target Language

Participants	Growth Mindset	Courage	Empathy (Self and/or Other)	Fixed Mindset	Fear	Critical (Self and/or Other)
1.	X	X	X	X	X	X
2.	X	X	X	X	X	X
3.	X	X	X	X	X	X
4.	X	X	X	X	X	X
5.	X	X	X	X	X	X
6.	X	X	X	X	X	X
7.	X	X	X	X	X	X

Table Three: Perceptions of Self and/or others (with regard to making mistakes)

Participants	Growth Mindset	Courage	Empathy (Self and/or other)	Fixed Mindset	Fear	Critical (Self and/or other)
1.	X	X	X	X	X	X
2.	X	X	X	X	X	X
3.	X	X	X	X	X	X
4.	X	X	X	X	X	X
5.	X	X	X	X	X	X
6.	X	X	X	X	X	X
7.	X	X		X	X	X

As can be seen in the above visual representations of the data, each participant has a mixture of mindsets and codes. While moving toward more of a growth mindset is ideal, fixed-mindset tendencies still exist and must be addressed.

Limitations of the Study

This study was limited in that there were only two courses surveyed and seven students interviewed. Additionally, another limitation is that only students from one university were surveyed and interviewed. By extension, because the community of German learners and instructors is fairly small at the study site, it is possible that some of the participants may not have felt the freedom to share as openly as they might have with someone from another section or department. While the sample size was small, because the interviews were one on one and students were able to elaborate on their thoughts and beliefs about mindsets in FLL, there was still a significant amount of data to analyze and from which to draw conclusions.

Implications of the Research

The secondary literature has already shown that students are neither strictly growth-minded nor exclusively fixed-minded in their beliefs related to FLL. Specifically, this study addresses the beliefs surrounding students' "willingness to communicate in the target language" and "perceptions of self and others with regard to making mistakes." Importantly, the research in this study can be placed into the greater context of current literature in that it confirms what has already been done: Students' mindsets about foreign language learning are mixed. Therefore, the question becomes, what's next? How can this research fill a perceived gap and/or advance the research in the field? It serves first to confirm the existence of mixed mindsets in foreign language learners at the University of Oklahoma, a location at which this study had not previously been conducted. By extension, based on the additional confirmation of mixed mindsets, it is important to begin to incorporate discussions of the same into the context of the foreign language classroom, at the University of Oklahoma and in other collegiate foreign-language classrooms. Importantly, instructors need to begin by examining their own mindsets surrounding foreign language teaching and learning and begin to find ways to help students to do the same. Once the instructor and students have at least a basic understanding of both growth and fixed mindsets, they can begin to look more closely at what they believe about different aspects of foreign language learning. For instance, this might most easily occur through open-ended surveys followed-up with in-class discussions of the same. Accordingly, students can begin to identify fixed minded thinking and attempt to determine what is causing the beliefs that lead to the fixed mindset. More precisely, they can begin to step back and see what triggers these thoughts and start to think through ways they could stop or take a break and then come back to these difficult tasks without giving up. By extension, instructors need to allow for these discussions to occur and make time to incorporate

them. Specifically, at the beginning of the semester, or even ahead of the semester, the surveys can be sent out and within the first week they can be discussed. Importantly, in conjunction with discussions surrounding mindsets, the instructor needs to incorporate discussions on the language learning environment and what constitutes a safe foreign language learning environment. Thus, it is up to the instructor to set the tone for the classroom and for the students to understand that while they might have an opportunity to help adopt classroom norms, and at times provide instructor-managed peer-evaluations, they are not the ones who should ultimately determine whether their classmates are or are not putting forth an appropriate amount of effort in the classroom.

Suggestions for Further Research

Based on the findings from this study, which confirm that foreign language learners hold to both growth and fixed mindsets to varying degrees, I will continue with mindset related research. Therefore, the next steps will include looking at connections between foreign language student retention and instructor mindsets in order to begin to understand the lower overall retention rates of foreign language learners as compared to retention rates at the university as a whole. (See Appendix B) Potential research areas may also include instructor mindset and error correction, instructor mindset and emphasis on target language usage and quality, and mindsets of high performing (STE) instructors.

In order to adequately address these fixed-mindset beliefs we must be willing to get to the root of the problem. For example, in the case of this study, if students are equipped with the tools to help them recognize and understand both the growth and the fixed mindset, they can begin to examine themselves in the context of each of their environments and identify areas in which they tend toward more of a fixed mindset and be aware of what triggers the fixed-mindset tendency. Thus, if students are prepared, in advance of the fixed-mindset trigger, it may be easier to work

through a false belief such as the idea that perfection is required prior to speaking the language or that speaking will be uncomfortable, perhaps even, “jarring and scary” and continue on in spite of the discomfort to move towards more of a risk-taking and growth-oriented response. By extension, if students can understand that the struggles they have with the willingness to communicate in the target language are not unique to them, and are, in fact, very common, perhaps they would be more apt to take the risk. Mindset affects the willingness to communicate and certainly also influences the perception of self and others. Accordingly, it is necessary that instructors, especially instructors of elementary foreign language classes, provide the tools to help students assess and examine their own mindsets, allow time to discuss these ideas, and equip the students with an understanding of how to persevere in spite of the triggers. If a student, especially a high-risk student, is ill-equipped to handle these triggers, they may easily give up at the very beginning without understanding that their perceptions of failure may need to be redefined and the triggers themselves really are not the problem. Thus, what we do with the triggers and how we push through in spite of them is what is more important. The so called high-performing students who appear to be low-risk still struggle with fixed-mindset tendencies and the at-risk, lower-performing students, also have growth-mindset views in certain aspects of the language. Importantly, instructors must be able to address these issues at the instructor level, manage these triggers in the classroom context, and be willing to meet with and talk to their students. As seen in the attachment related to retention, students who receive a D, F, or W in elementary level foreign language courses, are less likely to remain at the university than students who receive a D, F, or W or in other courses. (Bogaski, 2018) Retention and mindset go hand-in-hand. If students are going to persevere in foreign language learning and have a willingness to communicate in the target language they must understand that the fixed-mindset triggers alone are not the problem - what

they do with the triggers and working through them is what is most important. It is important, then, for both instructor and student to understand and examine their mindsets.

Accordingly, mindset training ought to be taught to incoming instructors and students and regular check-ins need to occur in order to promote success in the elementary foreign language classroom. The implications of this research point toward explicit incorporation of mindset instruction, combined with an emphasis on awareness of fixed-mindset triggers and how to address them, in order to promote a collaborative learning environment in which failure is re-framed as an opportunity to learn and communicative success is valued over perfection.

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Appendix A

Institutional Review Board Approval Letter

**Institutional Review Board for the Protection of Human Subjects****Approval of Initial Submission – Expedited Review – AP01****Date:** February 09, 2018**IRB#:** 8721**Principal Investigator:** Andrea L. Rodriguez, BA**Approval Date:** 02/09/2018
Expiration Date: 01/31/2019**Study Title:** Habits, Perceptions and Mindset of Collegiate Learners of German**Expedited Category:** 6 & 7**Collection/Use of PHI:** No

On behalf of the Institutional Review Board (IRB), I have reviewed and granted expedited approval of the above-referenced research study. To view the documents approved for this submission, open this study from the *My Studies* option, go to *Submission History*, go to *Completed Submissions* tab and then click the *Details* icon.

As principal investigator of this research study, you are responsible to:

- Conduct the research study in a manner consistent with the requirements of the IRB and federal regulations 45 CFR 46.
- Obtain informed consent and research privacy authorization using the currently approved, stamped forms and retain all original, signed forms, if applicable.
- Request approval from the IRB prior to implementing any/all modifications.
- Promptly report to the IRB any harm experienced by a participant that is both unanticipated and related per IRB policy.
- Maintain accurate and complete study records for evaluation by the HRPP Quality Improvement Program and, if applicable, inspection by regulatory agencies and/or the study sponsor.
- Promptly submit continuing review documents to the IRB upon notification approximately 60 days prior to the expiration date indicated above.
- Submit a final closure report at the completion of the project.

If you have questions about this notification or using IRIS, contact the IRB @ 405-325-8110 or irb@ou.edu.

Cordially,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Ioana A. Cionea'.

Ioana Cionea, PhD
Vice Chair, Institutional Review Board

Appendix B
Study Survey

Initial Consent to Participate in Research at the University of Oklahoma

[OU-NC IRB Number: xxx Approval Date: xxx]

You are invited to participate in research about foreign language learners and their habits, mindset and perceptions.

If you agree to participate, you will **complete this online survey**. There are no risks or benefits. Your participation is voluntary and your responses will contribute to foreign language research. Even if you choose to participate now, you may stop participating at any time and for any reason. Your data may be used in future research studies, unless you contact me to withdraw your data. Data is collected via an online survey system that has its own privacy and security policies for keeping your information confidential. No assurance can be made as to their use of the data you provide.

If you have questions about this research, please contact:

Andrea Rodriguez, GTA, arodriguez17@ou.edu, Principal Investigator (PI) and Dr. Daniela Busciglio, Adviser, busciglio@ou.edu

You can also contact the University of Oklahoma – Norman Campus Institutional Review Board at 405-325-8110 or irb@ou.edu with questions, concerns or complaints about your rights as a research participant, or if you don't want to talk to the researcher.

By answering the survey questions, I agree to participate in this research. Please print this page for your records.

Are you 18 years of age or older? ___ Yes ___ No (If no- cannot participate)

Appendix B, Continued

Survey questions:

Elementary German 1115 student habits, perceptions, beliefs, and experiences

Demographic Questions:

What is your age and date of birth?

What is/are your major/majors? Minor/minors? If undecided, please indicate.

What is your current semester?

Where are you from? (Where have you lived for most of your life?)

Prior to this class, did you have experience with, or exposure to, German or other foreign languages?

Please indicate the language, the amount of time spent on the language, and the style of exposure? (in high school, college, immersion abroad, at home with a native speaker)

Would you describe your previous experience as negative, positive, or neutral? How does that experience affect your beliefs about yourself and your abilities coming into German 1115?

Survey Specific Questions

Do you believe that anyone can be successful in a foreign language or that it takes a certain level of natural talent?

1. How confident are you that you can be successful in this course? 5 being very confident, 4 confident, 3 neutral, 2 not very confident, 1 not confident at all.

2. Why are you confident or not confident? (e.g. based on your previous foreign language experience)
3. How would you describe “successful foreign language study habits?”
4. What habits might either help or hinder you in terms of progress with the language?
5. What role does your instructor play in your success or failure?
6. What is your perception about your instructor’s willingness to work with you?
7. Do you believe that anyone can be successful in this course? Why or why not?
8. Do you feel comfortable attempting to speak German in class? Why or why not?
9. Are you concerned about failure or making a mistake?
10. How will you feel if you make a mistake in class?
11. How will you perceive others who make mistakes in class?
12. How would you describe a “safe foreign language learning environment?”
13. Please rank the following in order of importance: (4 being most important and 1 being least important) Your natural ability; your work ethic; your teacher’s lessons; your textbook’s explanations.
14. Would you be willing to be contacted for a follow-up interview? If so, please include your e-mail address in your response. Thank you for your time!

Appendix C

Foreign Language Student Retention Rates

