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Motivating Secondary Students to Speak in Spanish Outside of Structured Classroom Activities

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ABSTRACT

The purpose of this study is to determine what motivates students to speak Spanish outside of planned classroom interactions. These desired instructional and motivational methods, in theory, would lead to the goal of intrinsic motivation in students to interact in the target language whenever possible (with the teacher, with classmates, and with others outside of Spanish class). In addition, this leads to an analysis of how teaching techniques affect student engagement. The completion of this study has proven that student motivation rests in their abilities to relate the language to their own interests. Furthermore, various prompting strategies can promote a more extensive use of the target language. Over time, this combination of strategies will lead to an unprompted and authentic conversation that extends beyond the planned classroom activities.

One of the biggest struggles of foreign language teachers is figuring out how to convince students to use the target language more often. There is not a day that goes by without the students pushing back, trying to minimize the amount of Spanish that they speak. In turn, this limits the amount of Spanish that teachers can use with them. Consequently, this does not allow for maximum use of the language. Students

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do not understand that, if they wish to learn the language, they must use it as much as possible. Howard and Sugarman (200) assert that most effective language acquisition occurs when at least 90% of classroom instruction and conversation should be in the target language so that students are exposed to it. The remaining 10% is typically used to explain the advanced concepts in English, those that students would not otherwise understand due to their complexities (Howard & Sugarman, 2009). By committing to this level of usage, students would feel more skilled and confident in their own language use.

There are many reasons as to why students may combat the use of the target language. Most of them relate to the fact that they are nervous and uncomfortable, meaning they lack the self-efficacy to use L2 for fear of failure. As Bandura (1982) explained, self-efficacy is defined as an evaluation of "how well one can execute courses of action required to deal with prospective situations" (p. 122). A study by Collins (1985) showed that self-efficacy could be a key factor in predicting achievement and motivation in school settings. When students in this study were given a wide range of problems, including some that were unsolvable, and they were also given unlimited opportunities to rework those problems. Those students who identified as having high self-efficacy tried longer on the impossible problems and even reworked more problems that they missed, despite their (lack of) aptitude in the subject areas. Regardless of ability, students with high self-efficacy worked harder and performed better than those who had low self-efficacy (p. 104). Compared to individuals who doubt their capabilities, "those with high self-efficacy for accomplishing a task participate more readily, work harder, persist longer when they encounter difficulties, and achieve at a higher level" (Schunk, 1995, p. 112). If students do not believe they can be successful in completing their desired goals, based on their past experiences and the experiences of comparable peers, "they have little incentive to undertake activities or to persevere in the face of difficulties of failures" (Caprara, Gerbino, Paciello, Giunta, & Pastorelli, 2010, p. 36). This explains why students may struggle to push through the difficulties of learning a new language.

Furthermore, many students shy away from difficult tasks, especially when they are unsuccessful at first. Successful individuals have a growth mindset, which means that they feel that their skills and abilities are not fixed and can improve with effort. They also feel that failure is not permanent and is part of the learning and growing process (Elish-Piper, 2013, p. 59). On the contrary, students with fixed mindsets believe that every educational task has the potential to ruin them and label them as failures. As a result, they shy away from tasks that risk putting them in vulnerable positions, even if they would truly benefit from such evaluation and experience, like practicing their L2 skills. Dweck (2002) explained a study in which fifth-grade students with fixed mindsets preferred safe tasks over challenging tasks, even if they would learn something important. Even the most talented college students expressed similar sentiments, claiming that even if they would learn a lot from it, they would probably not attempt it to avoid doing poorly. Students who lack ability and intelligence initially basically have two choices: "they can seek to avoid the failure by succeeding, or they can manage these fears by altering the personal meaning of failure" (De Castella, Byrne, & Covington, 2013, p. 861). Thus, students need language instruction that encourages them to try and fail, with the underlying assumption that this failure will ultimately make them better.

Because of the lack of desire that students exhibit when it comes to speaking authentically in the target language, this study addresses the notion of how to motivate students to use the language outside of preplanned activities in the classroom by an analysis of survey information that students find motivational. This lack of informational resources on how to inspire use of the target language is where the gap in the research exists and represents the purpose of this study.

2. Literature Review

When considering how to convince students of the importance of using a foreign language more often, both during class and outside of class, motivation is the most important aspect to consider. Upon analysis of the literature about this topic, it is clear that there are several themes in common, all having a clear and direct correlation to the level of student motivation. A study by Dornyei and Csizer (1998) also confirms that individuals with the highest ability level cannot achieve long-term goals without proper motivation. They also go on to state that high motivation can make up for deficiencies in language learning (Dornyei & Csizer, 1998). Moreover, motivation in a foreign language classroom is different from that of other subjects because a language is viewed as part of one's identity, and it involves a change in self-image and the adoption of new social and cultural behaviors, instead of simply learning a set of rules or skills as one would in other content areas (Bahous, Bacha, & Nabhani, 2011, p. 34). Regardless, if language acquisition still aligns with students' long term goals., a strong sense of motivation will result.

Every student is motivated by unique psychological tactics and strategies. To that end, the extent to which these students feel the desire to speak a foreign language is greatly affected by instructional techniques exhibited in the classroom. One of the most scrutinized topics in motivational theory is the difference between internal (intrinsic) and external (extrinsic) motivation and which yields the highest results in the classroom. Intrinsic motivation involves the individual student's true motives for learning a skill (such as a foreign language) or completing a task. It describes the inherent interest, satisfaction, and enjoyment in meeting a challenge (Bernard, 2010). For example, intrinsically motivated individuals are driven to succeed because it is something that they want to accomplish *for themselves*. On the other hand, extrinsic motivation includes outside sources that affect how motivated students are to learn a language. These effects either reward or punish students, forcing compliance to learn a language (Dornyei, 1994). Examples of extrinsic motivation include grades, reward systems, and college or scholarship requirements. Dornyei (1994) argues that extrinsic motivation diminishes the intrinsic motivation in students when they are "forced" to comply (p. 276). One prominent example of this was illustrated in Lepper, Greene, and Nisbett (1973). After observing preschoolers who enjoyed drawing during play time, the researchers the children into three groups: the "expected-award" group (they were asked if they wanted to receive a certificate for drawing during play time), the "unexpected-award" group (they were awarded a certificate unexpectedly if they decided to draw during play time), and the "no-award" group (they were never asked if they wanted to draw and never awarded by doing so). Though one might expect the "expected-award" group to draw more, the researchers actually found that this group showed less interest in drawing and drew less, while the other two groups kept the same amount of vigor in their drawing. As Pink (2009) explained the experiment, the researchers "turned play into work" (p. 38) for the first group by incentivizing their efforts, hence decreasing their intrinsic motivation.

Research has found that curriculum must specifically address both intrinsic and extrinsic motivational factors, or integrative and instrumental subsystems, for most effective results. Dornyei (1994) explains that "the integrative motivational subsystem is centered around the individual's L2-related affective predispositions, including social, cultural, and ethnolinguistic components, as well as a general interest" (Dornyei, 1994, p. 279). This means that students may learn and use the language because they genuinely want to explore different cultures or feel a sense of accomplishment by conquering new linguistic skills. Contrarily, the instrumental subsystem corresponds to extrinsically motivating factors such as a future educational or career path (Dornyei, 1994). In other words, students are motivated to work toward goals that they see as a benefit to their future plans and objectives. They respond positively when what they are learning serves a purpose to them. With regard to foreign languages, this would encompass the rationale that secondary students give about taking required classes in college or for future travel experience. They may view it as a necessary means to an end, but they also may view it as a beneficial experience to help strive toward a future goal.

Student autonomy is a separate, but equally important, aspect of student motivation because it allows for students to take charge of their own learning. When they choose the objectives, content, methods, evaluation techniques, students have complete control of what they study and how they study it (Chan, 2003). By allowing this learner autonomy, students will choose topics that interest them, and will be more motivated to learn a new language (Pink, 2009). Brimijoin (2005) reinforced that "students who self-regulate their behavior, know their individual needs are respected, and develop a sense of relatedness are more engaged, and increased engagement is associated with higher levels of academic accomplishment (p. 257). In another study by Ying Liang (2015), she states, "We want to give children the tool (the surface structure of the target language), but we don't want to regulate their minds with this tool" (p. 55). She also goes on to say that teachers should appreciate children's interests, respect the children's cultures, and to use inquiry language as a way to facilitate critical thinking (Liang, 2015). Lastly, it is important to note that providing choice is not motivating in and of itself. Wang, Huang, and Hsu (2015) claim, "The nature of choices provided during instruction must be consistent with the students' interests, values, and goals so that the choices can be perceived as meaningful to have motivational effects" (p. 27). In summary, students are more inclined to do more when they are in control, and as a result, this was a key piece of the study design.

2.1. Research Questions

This exploratory research probed the perceptions of students regarding the teaching methodologies that will motivate junior level Spanish III students to use the target language on their own, both inside and outside of the classroom. The research addresses the following questions:

RQ1: What are motivational strategies that can be used to encourage student L2 usage outside of teacher-planned lessons and assessments?
RQ2: How do the teacher's attitudes, actions, and instructional methodologies promote or hinder the use of student L2 usage?

3. Methodology

As a means of addressing the given research questions, both student observations and student surveys were collected and analyzed. Observations were utilized to track student interactions and L2 usage inside of the classroom, while student surveys were employed to address new strategies that students may find beneficial in inspiring more independent L2 usage.

3.1. Participants

At the Midwestern pubic high school in which the study took place, the foreign language department is represented by four teachers. Three of the these teach Spanish, while the other teaches French. Because of the relatively small department size and close proximity within the building, collaboration occurs quite frequently. This collaboration generally takes the form of weekly meetings on Wednesday mornings. However, there is constant discussion about situations that arise with students, curriculum, grammatical and dialect questions, and language philosophy whenever the need arises (before or after school, between classes, on the weekends, etc.).

After considering various collaborative structures, as well as the makeup of the school and department, this study utilizes the "inquiry support" structure. According to Dana and Yendol-Hoppey (2014), "teacher-inquirers can take full ownership of their inquiry project but invite one or more

professionals who are not currently engaging in inquiry to support their work" (p. 82). In other words, the primary researcher can collect data via collaborative discussions among colleagues. Dana and Yendol-Hoppey (2014) also reinforce that teacher talk is important because of the strength that is provided by numbers with regard to strengthening the inquiry project. In order to fall in line with this belief, fellow colleagues were consulted in order to solicit input in how to formulate surveys and to help interpret data.

In total, 25 high school juniors from a designated Spanish III class were observed and surveyed. This was considered a quality sample of students because they are familiar with the researcher's approach to teaching. This allowed for a more authentic analysis of how the teaching strategies influence the level of second-language output.

3.2. Interventions

Throughout the course of the study, three key interventions were utilized. The first was a student survey, asking students to identify their personal opinions about their language use and thematic interests. Secondly, various prompting strategies were employed to indicate to students that their language output should be in Spanish. The prompting strategies included verbal phrases such as "Español, por favor" or simply responding to them only in Spanish until they began conversing with me that way on their own. Lastly, I tried an "ignoring" strategy where I simply did not respond at all, and stared blankly at the students, until they realized that the only language I "understood" was Spanish.

3.3. Data Collection

In order to answer the research questions identified above, data were collected through the use of a combination of student surveys and observations with regard to student participation. Student surveys incorporated data about their opinions of Spanish class and the level at which they engage in the language, including the positive and negative impacts of classroom instruction on their L2 usage. The survey also asked them open-ended questions about the topics in which they were most interested and would motivate them to speak more independently. Students completed this survey at the beginning of the study, the middle of the study, and at the end. During this time, various teaching strategies were implemented to increase student motivation based on survey responses. Lastly, the researcher employed a daily reflection throughout the course of the study as a means of documenting the events of each day.

For data collection purposes, students completed a survey (Appendix A) to determine if certain strategies are more beneficial than others. Moreover, a tracking tool was used to allow notations for the level of engagement in the language. This included teacher-student, student-teacher, and student-student interactions (Appendix C). The tracking was accompanied with daily journal entries (Appendix B) that allowed for reflection about the activities and topics that were addressed as strategies to increase the level of motivation among students. The student survey checkpoints were utilized three times over the course of the study. Data collection ran from May 2nd through May 20th, which was the last day of the school year.

The use of the three forms of data collection allowed for accurate triangulation and involved the inclusion of both qualitative and quantitative data. Quantitative data included student participation logs and student surveys. Qualitative data included the written responses in the student surveys, as well as daily journals about the events of each day.

4. Results

An examination the data collected during the classroom observation period confirms several key ideas that emerged, including the following: students spoke more in the target language when they were

prompted by the teacher, student interest led to student motivation, and motivated students were more willing to speak freely in the target language. Each of these findings was supported by a variety of observations through the data collection period and will be addressed fully in the following descriptions.

4.1. Teacher Prompts Provide Increased Language Usage

Throughout the study, several verbal and nonverbal prompts were employed to influence students' L2 usage. In the beginning, all of the students needed some form of prompting. This was seen primarily in the participation logs that were documented throughout the study. Interactions were notated in the log by using a "3, 2, 1" scale. Notations of "3" meant that students did not interact in the target language. A "2" meant that students interacted in the target language, but only after prompting. Finally, a "1" meant that students interacted in the target language on their own, and did not need prompting. Students were not permitted to interact in English without trying to change their language output (especially after the initial day of collecting baseline data). This means that most of the students had "2" notations for each of their interactions. As part of standard classroom practices, all students are required to have at least one interaction with the teacher during the class period. As a result, no student went a day without a notation, unless he or she was absent from the class on the given day.

As the weeks progressed, the number of total interactions remained constant. However, it became clear that students began to realize the importance of speaking in Spanish. The number of non-prompted Spanish interactions increased as the study progressed, as shown by the visual representation of the interactions throughout the study below.

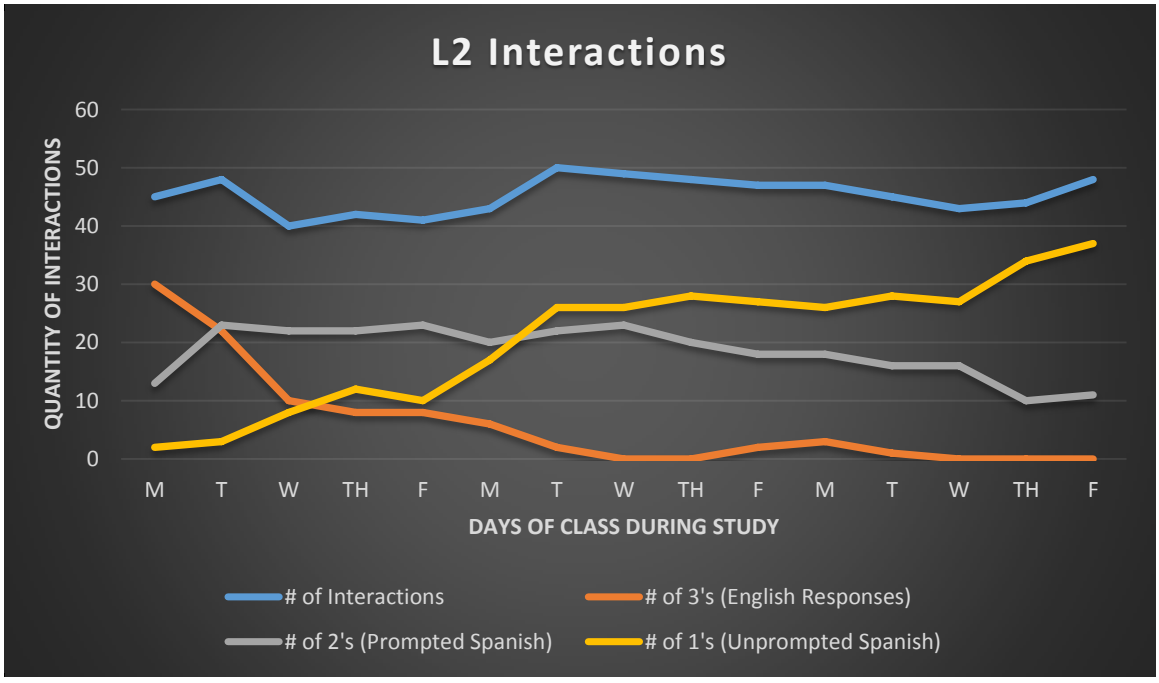

Figure 1. L2 Interactions

As is demonstrated in the graph above, student interactions were periodically in English at the beginning of the study, but generally nonexistent at the end of the study. This was due to the fact that students were not allowed to express themselves in English without then restating their words in Spanish. It was a difficult habit to enforce initially, but the results of the study proved it to be beneficial to the learning process.

Furthermore, the number of non-prompted Spanish interactions steadily increased over the course of the study. The daily reflection journals clearly show that the students began to have authentic conversations with the instructor in the target language, not only after being prompted to use their Spanish via the verbal prompts or the nonverbal "ignoring" strategy.

4.2. Specific Prompting Strategies Benefit Students More

In addition to the realization of how authentic language use increased, the researcher documented in the reflection journal a noticeable difference between the effectiveness of the prompting strategies. For example, while students responded positively to the verbal prompts, some initially found it to be a joke and continued to speak in English, while others seemed to only change to Spanish because they felt forced by teacher directive. By implementing the "ignoring" strategy, several students laughed at first, but they soon realized that it became an uncomfortable situation for them when the instructor stared at them in silence. Eventually, at the end of the second week, daily journal entries had no more mention of the uncomfortable silences. Instead, students began to realize that the only language the instructor "understood" was Spanish. Around this same time, it became clear that students needed fewer prompts to use Spanish, as is revealed in the figure above.

4.3. Student Interest Increases Student Motivation to Interact in Spanish About Own Interests

The next finding that surfaced as a result of the study was the effect of student interest on motivation and engagement. In the initial survey, it was clear that most students were already motivated to learn Spanish. The first statement on the survey, "I am interested/motivated to learn Spanish," addressed this concern. Since the given class was a level III honors course, the findings detailed in the graph below are not surprising. Most students either agreed or strongly agreed.

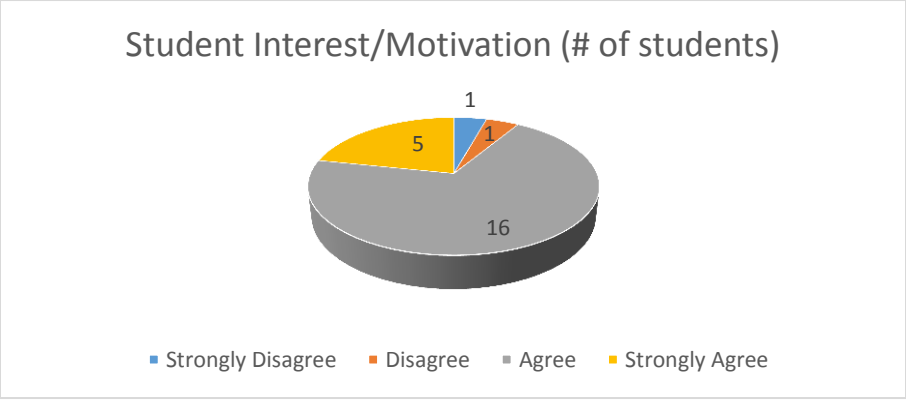

Figure 2. Student Interest and Motivation

It is also vital to note another part of the survey, which asked students to identify topics that would motivate them to speak Spanish more often. Some of the common responses included the following:

- Food
- Animals
- Sports
- Culture / History
- Restaurant Phrases
- Holidays / Fiestas
- Extracurricular Activities
- Work/Real-World Language Use

As the study progressed, it was interesting to see how five of the students who claimed to "agree" initially with their level of interest moved to the "strongly agree" rating by the conclusion of the study. While only five students moved from the "agree" to "strongly agree" rating, it is clear that their level of motivation did increase as a result of either the increased encouragement to speak Spanish or the addition of what they considered to be interesting topics. These specific students were more engaged in the lesson, as journals reflected, asking more questions and seeming to be more willing to converse about the topic. Before implementing the interventions, the participation log shows that while the students were engaged, they were not as willing to initiate conversations with their peers or the instructor.

4.4. Motivated Students Speak More Freely

Finally, the last finding of this study was the connection between motivation and the willingness to speak freely in the target language. This claim is supported by a variety of data sources, including the daily journals and student surveys.

In addition to the prompting strategies, the instructor utilized the topics from the student surveys during the second and third weeks of the study. Some of these included mini-lessons that were embedded in the class periods; others were lessons that took the whole class period. The increased language use was noted in the participation logs and daily journals. The participation logs showed a steady increase in authentic language use throughout the course of the study. However, as the graph shows, the largest gain was made between the end of the first week and during the first two days of the second week. This happens to be the time that the class focused on the culture of Spain, animals and onomatopoeia, and Hispanic sports. For some reason, students responded well to instruction about the animal sounds in a different language. They realized that there are similarities, but they also learned that the human representations of these sounds change based on common pronunciations of the given culture. Moreover, as stated in one of the daily journals, "Students seemed more enthusiastic with the day's instruction. Students were more engaged and genuinely interested in the topic. Student interactions were numerous and more related to the topic, not just simple daily conversational phrases, but related to the content material." In other words, it was not a simple matter of students being cordial in the target language, they were developing their content knowledge and language abilities at the same time during these lessons. As is shown in the lesson plans during the course of the study, students learned brand new vocabulary related to sporting events and athletes, various terms for animals, and the typical routine of daily life in Spain. It was very effective to incorporate this new knowledge of the vocabulary and culture related to these topics.

Lastly, and probably most importantly, the students even observed their own increased level of language use. This is seen through the results of the student surveys that were completed at the beginning, middle, and end of the study. Several figures of the results are included below.

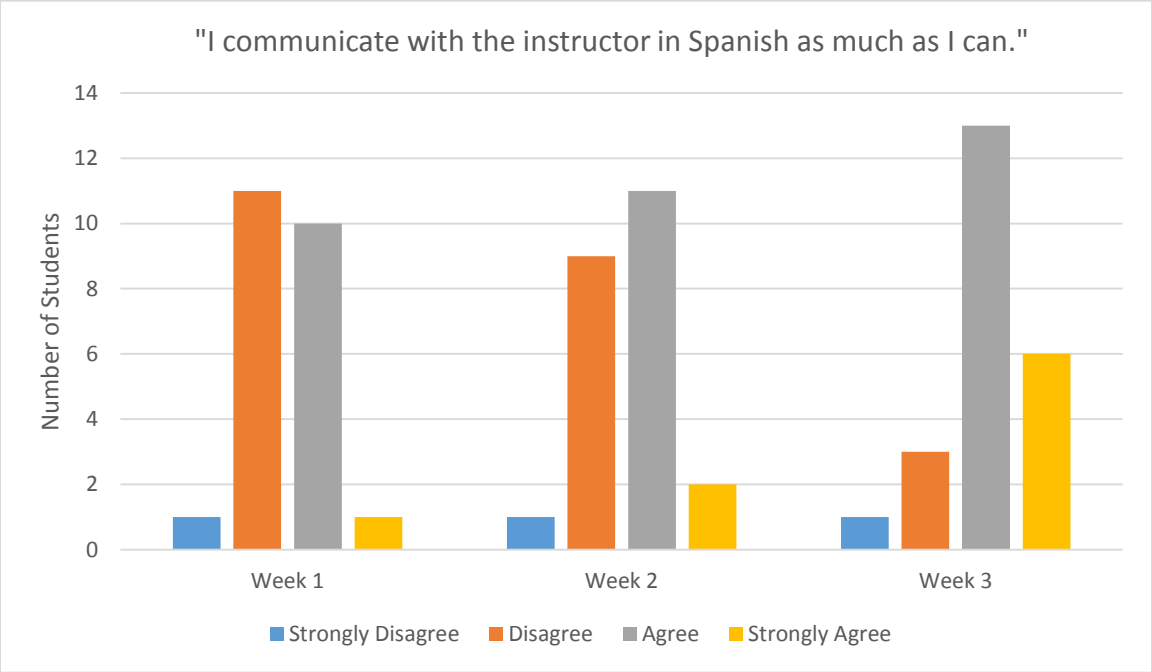

Figure 3.1. Survey Results: Self-Assessment of Communication with Instructor

Figure 3.1 clearly shows that as time progressed, students assessed themselves as experiencing more L2 interactions with the teacher. Student who agreed with the above statement increased from 10 to 13, students who strongly agreed increased from 1 to 6, and students who disagreed decreased from 11 to 3 in total. This shows a clear trend of students testifying that their L2 usage improved throughout the three-week timespan of the study.

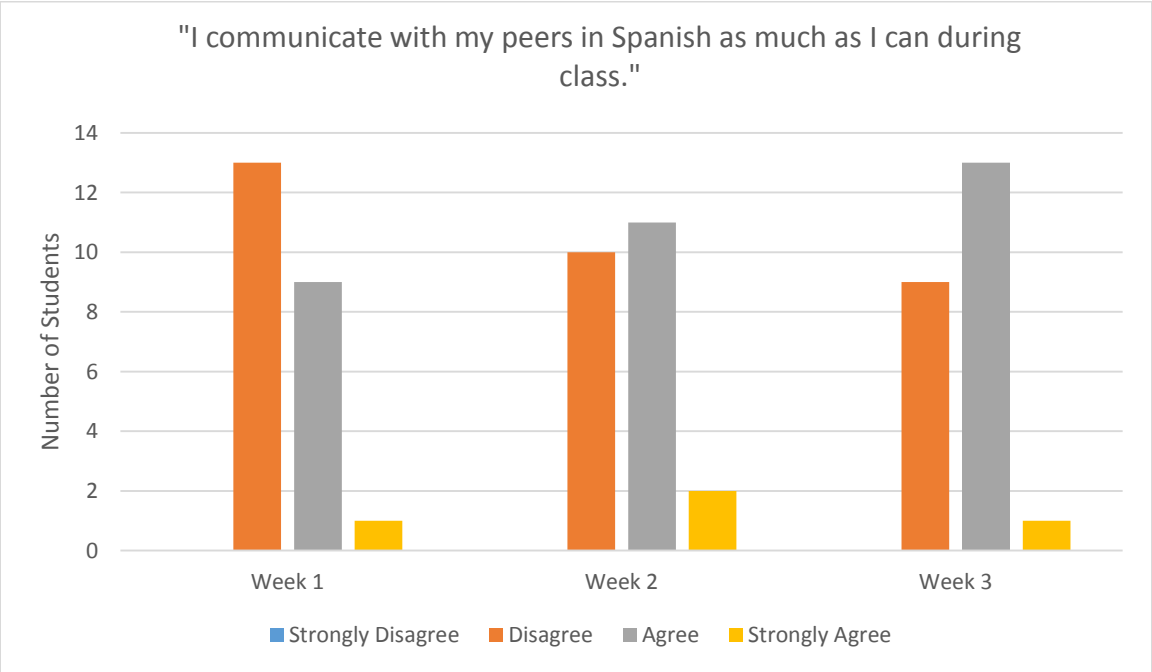

Figure 3.2. Survey Results: Self-Assessment of Communication with Peers in Class

Similarly, Figure 3.2 indicates that throughout the three weeks of data collection, students assessed themselves as experiencing more L2 interactions with their peers. Student who agreed with the above statement increased from 9 to 13, while students who disagreed decreased from 11 to 9 in total. This shows a trend of students self-assessing that their L2 usage improved throughout the study as well.

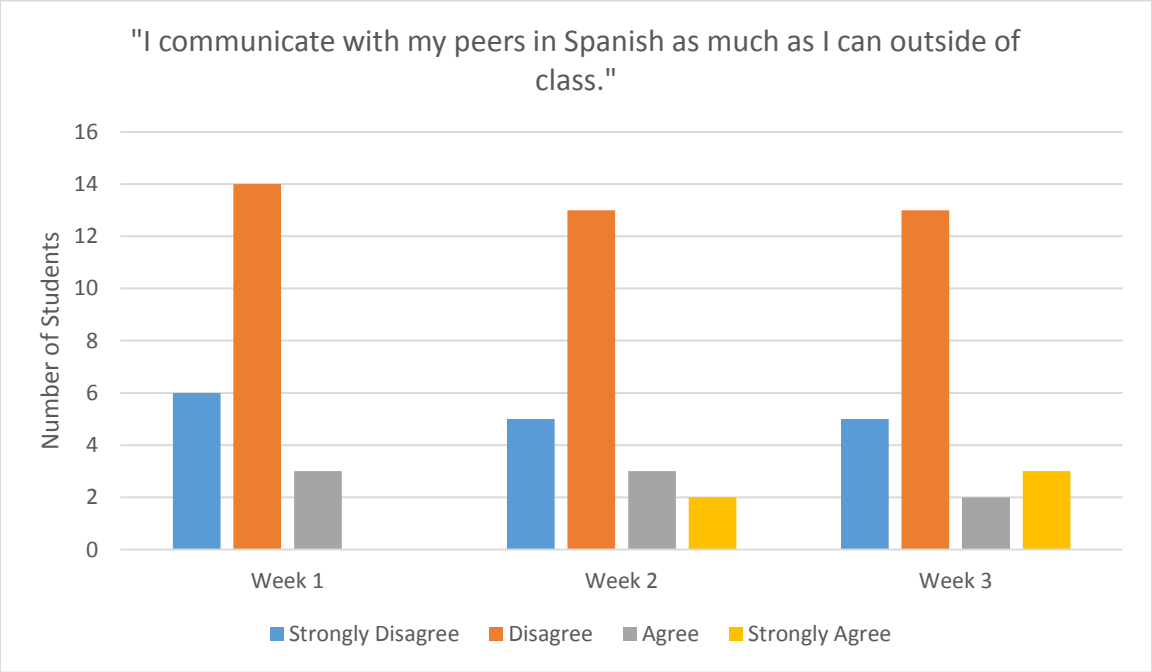

Figure 3.3. Survey Results: Self-Assessment of Communication with Peers outside of Class

Though less statistically significant, students also did experience an increase in L2 usage outside of school as well. Students who strongly disagreed with the above statement decreased by 3, while those who strongly agreed increased by 3. Though those who agreed actually decreased by 1, there is still an upward trend in Figure 3.3.

As is made clear by the graphical data, students had the self-realization that their use of Spanish had increased over the course of the three-week study. While this increase was mainly in the classroom, this is clearly the first step to L2 usage beyond the classroom. By the end of the study, the majority of students either agreed or strongly agreed that their communication with the instructor was primarily in Spanish and to the best of their abilities. However, the student-student communication, even though it improved, is still not ideal. Several students still believe that they are not communicating in Spanish to the best of their abilities. Finally, according to the third graph, student communication in Spanish outside of class had not changed significantly. A few students claimed that it has improved slightly, but their lack of self-efficacy in their L2 abilities still halted their progress.

5. Discussion

Reflecting upon the initial premise of this study, the goal was to explore possible solutions to the conundrum of motivating students to use the target language without prompting, both inside and outside of the classroom. Additionally, a secondary exploration involved an investigation of teacher attitudes, actions, and instructional methodologies to promote L2 usage. According to the data collected throughout this study, the best ways to motivate students to speak in Spanish are to prompt students to use the target language at all times (either through the direct correction or ignoring method), and to relate the designed

instructional conversations to student interests and to events that may be most likely duplicated outside of the classroom.

As the data shows, student interactions in the target language began to increase over the course of the study. The instructor utilized various strategies to increase the use of the target language amongst the students. First, the instructor verbally prompted students via phrases such as "Español, por favor" as a means of reminding them that L2 usage is the acceptable mode of communication. Secondly, the instructor attempted to ignore students until they realized that the only the teacher "understood" was Spanish, thus forcing them to communicate in that way. Considering the data that has been presented earlier, it is clear that these interventions were effective. The trend line of student interactions clearly demonstrates an increase in both the number of student responses in the target language, as well as an increase in the number of those interactions that were unprompted. Around the midpoint of the second week, the researcher documented fewer found interventions for several of the students. As noted in the daily journals, students seemed to respond more to the "ignoring" strategy, which therefore appeared to be an effective intervention. Students appeared uncomfortable and frustrated with the lack of responses in the beginning. It forced them to change their language output quicker, and allowed for fewer instances of having to correct the language output for future interactions. Students disliked being in that situation, so they began to learn how to avoid it by speaking in Spanish when addressing the teacher. This steady trend continued through the remainder of the study.

The other component of the student motivation piece was the adjustment to the content that was discussed during class. The instructor adjusted content, primarily based on the student surveys. According to Cummins (1998), it is important to apply several contextual supports in order for students to succeed in the L2. Some of these include activating the prior knowledge of the students, building their background knowledge, build redundancy within the instruction through use of the L2, using technology, allowing for the use of cooperative learning and other hands-on activities, and integrating reading and writing. As demonstrated by the daily journals, students became more attentive and willing to participate when the instructor introduced their chosen topics. The most prominent topic was the food discussion. Students loved talking about famous Spanish and Mexican dishes, and relating it to what they have tried in the past. They also loved preparing authentic dishes and bringing them in to share with the class. This increase in attentiveness allowed for an increase in Spanish language production, and guided students to enjoy speaking in a language other than English.

One enlightening aspect of performing this study was the realization that the teacher's actions and how the curriculum is presented the curriculum has the potential to hinder students' abilities and willingness to communicate in the target language. Students who possessed the self-efficacy to try and fail showed the largest increase in Spanish language usage. Moreover, any time instruction was delivered in English, the instructor noted that L2 usage was hindered. English from the instructor resulted in English from the students.

6. Recommendations and Implications

Limitations to this study include the length of the data collection period, which is relatively short. Despite this limited time period, it is reasonable to assume that more time would allow for an even greater increase in these unprompted, target language interactions. Given more time, it is possible that this fear may subside and students will likely increase their use of Spanish outside of the classroom. Another limitation is the number of students surveyed, which certainly would provide for more convincing evidence of effectiveness with a larger sample size.

As a result of the findings from this study, there are several implications for future work of teachers and researchers. For example, tracking interactions with students is extremely helpful if one

plans to meet goals on independent L2 interactions. Likewise, prompting resulted in more desired student interactions with both the teacher and peers. Moreover, surveying students to determine their personal interests and future goals was incredibly valuable in developing course materials to match students' interests, thus creating more buy-in and genuine, meaningful conversations. Lastly, when students understood that it was encouraged to try and fail at the target language, their confidence soared and interactions increased. According to Edwards and Roger (2015), "Confident learners are more likely to participate meaningfully in class activities and seek opportunities to communicate in their L2 outside the classroom" (p.2). By taking each of the strategies attempted in the study, and continuing to improve teaching methods as a result of implementing these strategies, students will gain the confidence they need to speak the language on their own.

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