

Spring 5-11-2019

Barriers to Bilingual: How Students Participate in Spanish and English Classes

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Recommended Citation

Strahan, Bailey, "Barriers to Bilingual: How Students Participate in Spanish and English Classes" (2019). *Masters of Education in Teaching and Learning*. 26.
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Barriers to Bilingual: How Students Participate in Spanish and English Classes

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Abstract

While participation has been linked to achievement in the classroom, various external factors can change students' willingness to participate. In this study the researcher sought to discover what participation looks like in regards to one of these factors, language. Additionally the researcher wanted to discover what students and teachers in a bilingual program thought of their own participation in regards to language. Through the use of surveys, interviews, and observations over the course of several weeks, the researcher was able to determine that many factors including student motivation, preferences, resources available, and misunderstanding all contribute to their willingness to participate in a given language.

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Barriers to Bilingual: How Students Participate in English and Spanish Classes

When the teacher is speaking English I feel excited because English was like the second language I learned because I know a lot of languages... umm I know China (Ni-hao), and I know umm Japanese (my name is and hello and how are you doing.) ...[And] I totally want to learn more Brazil.... Or if I can't learn that I want to learn British. (Jake, 3rd Grade, Native Spanish speaker)

Jake (all names are pseudonymous) was no stranger to talking. Every morning he had a new outrageous story he just had to share before we even got to the classroom. He had his hand up before myself or my cooperating teacher even finished asking a question and was always eager to share what was on his mind. He loved learning. He loved English, and he loved Spanish and apparently China [sic] and Japanese as well. William, Mia, and Andrea loved to answer questions too. They were native English speakers.

Kelly never raised her hand. She came in quietly every morning and stayed quiet for most of the day. Kelly was a native Spanish speaker. So were Lilly and Michelle. They hardly ever spoke up either, but then again my cooperating teacher and I did teach in English exclusively. However, our team teacher, Mrs. Garcia taught in Spanish. Were Jake, William, Mia and Andrea still just as eager to answer questions in Mrs. Garcia's class? What about Kelly, Lilly, and Michelle? Did they speak up more? These questions have nagged at me since the first day of school in my bilingual clinical teaching classroom. Obviously, I had no choice but to frame this study around students like this so I could uncover what really happens across the hall.

Purpose

This study was an action research study completed as a part of my Master's in Education and Learning program. Part of this program consisted of a year-long clinical teaching placement.

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My placement was in a third grade bilingual classroom in a small city in West Texas. This small city is home to 10 Title I schools, one of which is Carson Elementary where this study took place. Carson Elementary is made up of approximately 640 students. Sixty-four percent of the students are Hispanic, while 14% of students are African American and 14% of students are Caucasian. Carson utilized a dual language immersion program for their Spanish bilingual students. This program for third graders at Carson was set up so half of the students' day would be spent learning science, social studies, and reading in Spanish and the other half of the day would be spent learning math and reading in English. This meant that students spend equal amounts of time learning in their native language (L1) and in their non-native language (L2).

The purpose of this study was to understand participation patterns with these students in regards to the language of instruction. I wanted to observe students' participation in class when a teacher was teaching in their L1. Then, I wanted to observe their participation when a teacher was teaching in their L2. I then planned to compare the two settings to see if any patterns emerged. In addition to this, I also hoped to uncover how students and teachers perceived and responded to these patterns of participation. Specifically, this study was meant to answer the main question: How does students' willingness to verbally participate in class change when the teacher is speaking their L2? This question was further explored through two supporting questions:

- Does willingness to participate change when the teacher is speaking students' L1? If so, in what ways?
- What are students' perceptions of their own willingness to participate based on the language spoken by the teacher?

Theoretical Framework

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In order to understand the lens through which I viewed my data, it is important to understand Krashen's (1982) hypotheses regarding language acquisition. While he developed a total of five hypotheses, for this study I found only the last three of significant relevance. The first is the Monitor Hypothesis. This states that when acquiring a language, there is a filter that the language learners put the words they want to say through. This form of mental editing, so to speak, must occur before the language learners can speak up in their L2. The next hypothesis, or Input Hypothesis, states that the level of understanding (receptive language) is always a level higher than the level of speaking (expressive language). This means that students will not be able to speak confidently until they are able to thoroughly understand the language being spoken. And, finally, the Affective Filter hypothesis states that language acquisition is affected by external factors like motivation, self-confidence, and anxiety. According to this hypothesis, if a student does not feel confident in the environment or is anxious or frustrated, a mental wall will be put up that will keep them from comprehending the L2 at all (Krashen, 1982).

In order to analyze the data regarding language acquisition, the mental process must be understood. Krashen (1982) breaks down what is happening when language is being acquired and offers an explanation as to why language is understood receptively sooner than it can be spoken by language learners. This is vital to know and understand before any kind of analysis of participation amongst language learners can be conducted.

Literature Review

Several studies have pointed to the benefits of learning multiple languages (Stevenson, 2015; Plata-Ramírez, 2017). This could arguably best be achieved through bilingual education (Plata-Ramírez, 2017). While bilingual and English as a second language (ESL) teachers work hard to find resources to help them teach language and curriculum and culture all at once, these

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resources often leave much to be desired (Freire & Valdez, 2017). One common thread, however, seemed to have been the desire not to lose a students' L1 while acquiring a new language (Plata-Ramírez, 2017; Tocaimaza-Hatch, 2018). Teachers need to instill pride in their students' home language to promote retention of both their L1 and of their home culture (Plata-Ramírez, 2017; Tocaimaza-Hatch, 2018). By accepting and validating students' L1, teachers can lower their English language learners' (ELLs) Affective Filter and allow them to acquire a second language more smoothly (Krashen, 1982; Tocaimaza-Hatch, 2018).

While the benefits regarding bilingualism are hardly debated, best practice in regards to teaching bilingualism is. A three year study conducted by Yeh (2017) followed two bilingual teachers and noted the trends of each. In this, Yeh (2017) found while one teacher taught language by front loading vocabulary and definitions to avoid confusion, the other taught language through conversations and questioning her students. Although both forms of teaching language are valid, teaching through conversations and questioning (or constructing knowledge) has received more attention in recent years (Freire & Valdez, 2017; Plata-Ramírez, 2017; Yeh, 2017; Zavala, 2017). Constructing knowledge consists of students exploring a subject on their own and learning through natural questions that arise (Plata-Ramírez, 2017; Yeh, 2017). However, this form of teaching language requires active participation through engaged students in order to be effective (Yeh, 2017).

A number of factors can go into students not wanting to actively participate in class. The student could feel overwhelmed, unsure of the material, or too busy taking everything in to speak up (Krashen, 1982). Or, the student could feel unsafe or judged. This fear can act as a wall keeping students from being able to adequately process the information being covered in the classroom (Bailey, 2015). However, student achievement in the classroom has been directly

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linked to their engagement and participation in the learning process (Ing, et al., 2015). While no direct link has been found in regards to teacher encouragement and achievement, teacher encouragement has been found to increase participation which then increases achievement (Ing, et al., 2015). By communicating with students, teachers can determine what factors might keep them from learning (Bailey, 2015). These factors can then be addressed by the teacher to make students feel more comfortable in the classroom. Studies have shown that teachers play a pivotal role in making their students feel comfortable and safe enough to participate in class (Ing, et al., 2015; Yeh, 2017; Zavala, 2017). A major contributor to student comfort involves setting up a safe and respectful learning environment in the classroom (Bailey, 2015; Plata-Ramírez, 2017; Tocaimaza-Hatch, 2018). Through creating an environment where students feel accepted and at ease, teachers can begin to involve students, even if this environment is not compatible with their home language (Krashen, 1982; Plata-Ramírez, 2017; Zavala, 2017).

Research has indirectly alluded to the link between language acquisition and active student participation in learning (Krashen, 1982; Plata-Ramírez, 2017; Zavala, 2017). However, no study has analyzed exactly what it looks like for students to participate in a class taught in their L2 or if this participation changed when they were in a class taught in their L1. This study will help to fill this gap in the research.

Methods

I chose to take on the role of a participant observer in this study, despite usually being an active participant in the classroom. The reason for this is that at the time of this study, I was not fluent in Spanish, and my students knew it. I had witnessed my students altering their responses and behavior around me because they knew I was more comfortable with English. They had to change what they said and how they acted to ensure I could understand. However, I did not want

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my participation to alter students' behavior or responses in any way for this study. For this reason, chose to take a back seat so my data would not be skewed by the endearingly accommodating nature of my students.

Participant Selection

This study followed one third grade bilingual class as they participated in both English and Spanish classroom settings. This class consisted of 19 students. Of these, 14 students claimed Spanish as their L1, and five enrichment students claimed English as their L1. The class was made up of nine boys and ten girls with 18 Hispanic students and one Caucasian student. A parent information letter and consent form were sent home with each student. Students whose parents consented then signed an assent form and became participants in the study. Participants included 15 students, seven boys and eight girls. Mrs. Garcia and Mrs. Martinez also consented to act as participants. Both teachers were native Spanish speakers and began learning English at around five years old. Mrs. Garcia had taught bilingual classes at Carson for three years, and Mrs. Martinez was about to finish her tenth year of teaching, with four of those years being in a bilingual classroom at Carson.

Data Collection

All participating students were given a perceptions of participation survey. These surveys consisted of 10 questions including seven Likert-scale questions with three opportunities for students to give open-ended responses related to their perceptions of classroom participation. Students were able to choose which language (Spanish or English) they wanted their survey to be (see Appendix A). From the survey responses, six students representing the spectrum of responses were purposively sampled (Patton, 1990) to participate in 10-15 minute semi structured one-on-one interviews. Both teachers also participated in 20-30 minute, one-on-one,

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semi-structured interviews where they could share what they had observed in regards to student participation in their class (see interview protocols in Appendix B). All interviews were audio recorded and transcribed prior to analysis.

In addition to these forms of data collection, I also completed observations in two Spanish classes and two English classes each week over the course of three weeks. During these observations I tallied on a checklist list every time a student raised his or her hand in class. On this checklist I marked whether he or she was offering a comment, a question, or an answer and in what language. I also noted the language being utilized at the time along with any other information that was needed to define the participation. This data was double checked for accuracy by videotaping lessons.

Data Analysis

Qualitative data was coded for themes and sub themes as trends emerged in the surveys, interviews, and observations using the constant comparative method, with initial coding followed by creating hierarchies of categories and supporting codes (Hubbard & Power, 2003). In this coding process, data was analyzed for 15-20 level 1 themes in the first 20% of data collected. These themes were then used to code the remaining 80% of the data. Following this initial analysis, the themes were then analyzed for trends and then further sorted into 3-5 larger, overarching level 2 themes (Tracy, 2013). Memos explaining and reflecting on each level 2 theme were written. A codebook was then created to define each level 1 and level 2 code and provide examples of each (See Appendix C). As this qualitative data was collected and analyzed, the level 2 themes that emerged from the first 20% of the data were then used to code the remaining 80% of the data. Quantitative data, in the form of checklists and surveys, was analyzed for trends with descriptive statistics (Hendricks, 2012).

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Findings

As I dug deep into the behaviors and motivations of my students, I noticed some surprising themes emerging. And while some findings regarding student behaviors and perceptions were expected, others were definitely not. As I walk through the findings, both expected and unexpected, I begin with the bilingual foundations to give more insight about the background and motivations of the participants in this study. Then I will discuss student participation and success as well as hindrances to participating and resources for non-native speakers. In these sections, I hope to share how students viewed their own participation in class. I hoped to uncover what it looked like to participate, what kept them from wanting to participate, and ultimately what resources were in place to help them participate regardless of language. However, before digging into what I saw, it is important to have a good grasp on what the bilingual program is and how my participants ended up in this program.

Student Motivation

While 95% of my participants were identified as Hispanic, it is important to remember that no two students come with the same set of culture, background, and experiences. Through talking to the participating teachers and students, I feel as if I was able to better understand the motivations of several of my participants. I do not claim to know exactly what motivates many of my students; I am simply sharing the trends I found broken down by participants' dominant language.

Native Spanish speakers and their families. “My big sister has to talk to if someone talks in English because my mom doesn't understand English.” (Aria, 3rd Grade, Native Spanish speaker)

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It is important to note that while the United States has no official national language, it is nearly impossible to function in American society without some kind of access or connection to the English language. With this in mind, it is not surprising to find that many students and parents see learning English through the bilingual program as a necessity. Time and time again I heard students like the one above cite that they needed English to help their families function. From my experience, I have noticed that many native Spanish speakers cannot appreciate the benefits of a dual language system in which both languages are given equal amounts of time because speaking English is what is needed. For example, Gabriel expressed that he would rather speak English in not only English class but Spanish class and in social situations as well because “that’s why [his] mom left Dallas and came here, so that [he] could learn English.”

This necessary prioritizing of learning English is not without its side effects, however. After hearing from their parents how important it is to speak English and seeing their friends mostly socialize in English, many native Spanish speakers have begun to prioritize speaking English over Spanish because they know that English is what they need. I saw this in my observations when students would speak up in Spanish class. About 50% of the time, any participation from students in Spanish class was in English, and 20% of this English participation came from native Spanish speaking students. These results can be seen below in Figure 1.

This surprised me. Why would students who are fluent in Spanish and learning a lesson in Spanish choose to participate in English? When I presented this question to Mrs. Garcia, she responded “[It] is so hard sometimes because they think that now they're here and they want to fit in. They hear everyone else speaking English, they see TV in English, and so they really just want that English.” This was even further reinforced in my observations in the English-speaking class. I was astounded to see that in English class, 100% of participation was in English,

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regardless of whether it was native English or Spanish speaking students participating. While I was proud to see that these native Spanish speakers were doing well in their L2, their motivations for this fluency were much different than their native English speaking friends.

Counts of Participation in Language of Instruction

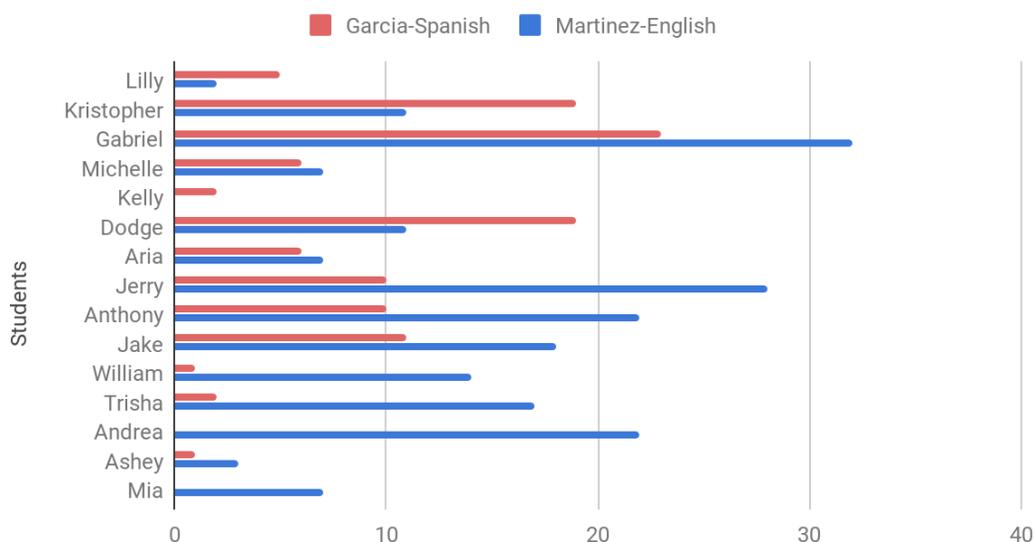


Figure 1. Counts of participation in language of instruction.

Native English speakers and their families. “[English] is easier, but when I get older and I know a lot of Spanish, I will like Spanish more.” (Andrea, 3rd Grade, Native English speaker)

While the native Spanish speakers were motivated by necessity, this urgency was not something that native English speakers had immediate access to. Teachers and parents of native English speaking students, for the most part, seemed to find motivation in the benefits that come with being bilingual and the opportunities this can bring in the future. However, the future and delayed gratification are hard concepts for third graders to grasp. These students had been told over and over again that they would appreciate knowing Spanish in the future, but what did that

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do for them now? Most of their friends speak English to them, and they get little to no Spanish at home, so what's the point? Unfortunately, this lack of an immediate source of motivation often keeps students from taking risks and participating in their L2.

A lack of participation in Spanish can be seen dramatically in the data from classroom observations. In these observations, 90% of native English speakers' participation in Spanish class was in English. These student had difficulty speaking up in a language that was still fairly new to them as can be seen in Figure 2. And while some of the reasons for this difficulty will be discussed later, lack of clear motivation seemed to be a major source of hesitancy. While native English speakers did express a desire to learn another language, the only area where they cited needing another language was in some ambiguous "future" scenario. Motivation was not the only factor that impacted student participation in this class. As many educators know, classroom environment can have an impact on how students respond and behave in class.

Mrs. Garcia's Class Total Participation

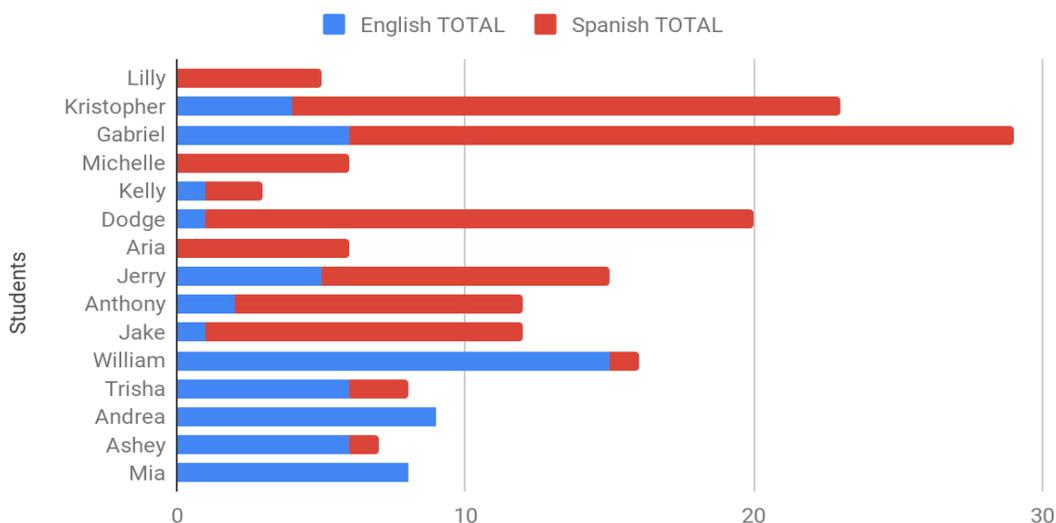


Figure 2. Mrs. Garcia's class total participation.
NOTE: William, Trisha, Andrea, Ashley, and Mia are native

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Classroom Factors

Just like any other classroom, the students in this study expressed preferences for certain classroom set ups and certain subjects. Seemingly regardless of language, they expressed bias for subjects and activities that they perceived as fun or easy. Whether it was their preference for subject or activity, or the way they perceived what their success in each classroom looked like, they had opinions that shaped the way they behaved and responded in each class. These biases and their effects are discussed here in regards to why students may have had certain biases and how teachers saw these biases in relation to students' language development.

Student preferences. "I wish my teacher would do less, less subjects but it is only Mrs. Garcia because she does do a lot of subjects. I think there are like three subjects. She might need to take one of them away." (William, 3rd grade, Native English speaker)

For this bilingual program, it is important to note that Mrs. Garcia taught reading, science, and social studies in Spanish. Mrs. Martinez taught reading and math in English. They both had the same amount of time each day to teach their subjects. Because of this, several students, like the one above, showed a preference for Mrs. Martinez's classroom where there were fewer subjects to juggle. They showed a preference for being able to take more time for stations and journal writing in Mrs. Martinez's class that they perceive was less work. Gabriel made this clear in his interview, stating he enjoyed class in English with Mrs. Martinez because they "can play some games and we do rotations, we do math learning...and we get to play Quizizz." I found through the classroom observations, that students worked the same amount in each class, but the extra subject taught by Mrs. Garcia seemed to be a deal breaker for them with Gabriel even further suggesting that social studies should be moved to Mrs. Martinez's room

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because in that classroom “we only have reading and math. And we don’t have yellow (social studies).”

In addition to this, students also tended to show a preference to classes that were “hard” or objective in nature like science or math. Classes that required more subjective thought and abstract explaining like reading were almost never cited as a favorite subject. Dodge, a native Spanish speaker claimed math as his favorite subject. When he was asked about this preference for an English class, he defended it by saying, “I have a little bit [of trouble] with words.” This “trouble with words” is what kept him from preferring other subjects, like reading and social studies that are taught in his L1. Even Andrea, a native English speaker stated her “favorite subject is math and science” even though one class is taught in English and the other in Spanish. I found this preference (or lack thereof) interesting considering that reading was the only subject taught in both languages. When I discussed this phenomenon with Mrs. Martinez and Mrs. Garcia, they each had a different take on it. Mrs. Martinez cited the low reading levels of a lot of the students saying, “some of ours like during reading, they’re reading below grade level too, so when we do math, they’re-- that’s their time to shine.” The low reading levels of these students, whether caused by the language barrier, switching languages of instruction, or some other cause seemed to be, in Mrs. Martinez’s opinion, what was keeping them from fully participating in reading. However, Mrs. Garcia had a different take stating that in reading, “they’re not doing something at all times so it’s a lot of thinking and thinking about what they are reading and so sometimes they just--by the end of it, they’re done.” While I believe that both teachers hold valid viewpoints of this phenomenon, Mrs. Garcia’s comment seems to align more with the bias students were aware of. This can be seen in Dodge’s “trouble with words” and Gabriel’s expression of how he preferred classes with “more things too” in them. Students cited wanting to

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“do things” in classes, not just think about things. They liked science and math because they could touch and manipulate their learning until they understood it. Understanding was a huge factor in how students view their roles and successes in the classroom.

Student successes. How would you feel if you did math in Spanish instead of English? “Not comfortable because sometimes--I understand more more of the like--understand more words in English about math” (Dodge, 3rd grade, Native Spanish speaker).

The quote above from a native Spanish speaking students was not what I expected to hear when I asked the question. This student, even though he indicated a preference for Spanish, said that he would want to keep math in English, because math in English was where he thought he could be more successful. There were numerous times where students indicated understanding and successfulness as a factor when discussing how comfortable they were in a given class. For example, native Spanish speaker Aria claimed that her preference for writing in Spanish stemmed from her being “better at Spanish than English” while fellow native Spanish speaker Dodge preferred English “because [he writes] more better in English.” Again, seemingly regardless of language, students tended to gravitate towards classes they perceived as “easy” or where they see success as being attainable for them. While this seemed to have a slight relationship to the language being taught, it dealt mostly with the environment and teaching style students felt most comfortable with. Jake observed this relationship between student behavior and teaching style himself saying, “sometimes like some kids in [Mrs. Martinez’s] class aren’t that bad but when we go to Mrs. Garcia’s class they know Mrs. Martinez isn’t there so they act bad.”

Through observations I noticed a tendency for Mrs. Garcia (the Spanish teacher) to call on native English speaking students first, and then native Spanish speakers if the first few

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students could not come up with the correct response. Many native English speakers cited feeling unsuccessful, or less successful than their peers in Mrs. Garcia's class when they could not come up with the correct answer. On the other hand, Mrs. Martinez tended to only call on students whose hands were raised or who seemed to already be confident in what their answer may be. A higher percentage of students, both English and Spanish speakers, cited feeling more capable of success in Mrs. Martinez's class, and thus more willing to take risks to answer questions. These perceptions of success showed up in the observation data where English speaking students raised their hands to offer answers 22% of the time, while their native Spanish speaking counterparts made up the other 88% of hand raises. However, native English speakers made up 31% of hand raises in English class. For reference, 33% of participants were native English speakers, a number that was much more closely represented in the participation in English class than that in Spanish. Despite this discrepancy in willingness to participate, Carson's bilingual program was set up with many supports and resources to help students feel more comfortable participating regardless of language of instruction.

Resources for Language Learners

When you think of traditional resources for language learners, dictionaries and a lot of pictures come to mind. While these resources were still present at Carson, they were joined by a plethora of new ideas and technology to assist students in their language acquisition. As I collected and analyzed data, I noticed trends in the resources native Spanish speakers cited as most useful, and those that the native English speakers cited as most useful. Here I have broken them down by language to better understand why some students prefer certain resources to help with their learning.

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Native Spanish speaking students. Why do you think you speak more English with friends than Spanish? “Sometimes they speak English at me, [and] I speak English at them...sometimes I [just] feel talking to them in English” (Gabriel, 3rd grade, native Spanish speaker).

Despite the resources that Mrs. Martinez intentionally provided for her students in English class such as reference sheets, reading questions aloud, and allowing access to prior learning in journals, native Spanish speakers still preferred turning to their friends for help in their L2. In Carson’s bilingual program, there was a strong emphasis on partner work. At every table group, there was at least one fluent English speaker, one fluent Spanish speaker, and usually one student who was confident in both languages. This was what most native Spanish speaking students cited as their biggest resource in class. Native Spanish speaker Jake saw partnership as mutually beneficial saying, “I like that it helps kids that do not know how to talk English to talk English. It also helps Spanish speakers like the ones that have trouble reading in English.” When students were asking a partner for help, they were learning new language and receiving support in their learning immediately. On the other hand, when they were providing a partner with assistance, they were reinforcing their own learning at the same time. Unlike the native English speakers, who I will discuss later, these students expressed enjoyment when it came to helping friends with students like Jake saying that partners were a “good thing, because it helps [students] understand stuff.”

Another surprising resource that native Spanish speakers shared with me that helped their language acquisition was playing with friends on the playground or talking to them at lunch. When I asked students which language they used with friends outside of the classroom, across the board they said English. And while I originally thought that this stemmed from wanting to be

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able to communicate with the native English speakers (whose Spanish is still in beginner stages), this was not the case. Students, like Gabriel in the opening quote above, expressed that they enjoyed speaking English outside of class even with Spanish speaking friends. Native Spanish speakers took their roles as partners outside the classroom continuing to learn and grow, using their native English speaking counterparts as their greatest resource.

Native English speaking students. “Mostly I use Google Translate because if I ask anyone for help with how to spell the words they might say to use Google Translate” (William, 3rd grade, Native English speaker).

While their native Spanish speaking counterparts often chose to rely on friends, the native English speakers shared a much stronger preference for the resources provided by Mrs. Garcia in Spanish class. While native Spanish speaking students received real-time help from their partners, their native English speaking counterparts tended to wait until after the lesson was over and turned to Mrs. Garcia directly for translation. This not only kept Mrs. Garcia from meeting with small groups immediately following her lesson, but it also meant that students could be confused for long periods of time before they ever got support. While the reasons for this delay instead of simply turning to their partner will be discussed later, it was not the only resource available to these students.

Probably the most surprising resource that these students claimed as helpful was Google Translate. While Google Translate is a great resource that I myself have used on several occasions, it was not one that I expected to come up as a lifeline for these students. Students found Google Translate to be more reliable and quicker than asking their partners, and it kept them from being dependent on anyone for their own learning. Andrea even mentioned that she keeps track of her Google Translate usage explaining how once there were “like three days that

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[she] didn't use google translate.” When asked how this made her feel, she simply responded, “proud.” Using Google Translate as a resource also had its drawbacks as students were only allowed to use it on journal writing assignments, which was not helpful in class when Mrs. Garcia called on them for an answer.

Resources and participation. “In Spanish it takes me a while to translate it in my head. [By the time I get it] someone has already answered” (Andrea, 3rd grade, Native English speaker).

The influence that resources have on students’ participation was clear from analysis of the classroom observation data. As seen in Figure 3, native Spanish speaking students who received help in real time from their partners had an increase of participation in English class (with Mrs. Martinez). On the other hand, native English speakers who waited until after instruction before seeking help did not show the same patterns of increased participation in their L2. This can be seen in Figure 3 as native English speakers (with the exception of William) did not raise their hands to comment in Mrs. Garcia’s (Spanish) class as often as they did in Mrs. Martinez’s (English). However, native Spanish speaking students went back and forth on which class they participated in more. Mrs. Garcia rationalized this willingness of native English speakers to wait before receiving help by saying, “they're not as eager to find out what I just said.” While Mrs. Martinez looked at native Spanish speakers’ patterns in her own class and said, “I feel like they in here ask their partner...because they get, they [already] got some of the gist of what is happening.” Mrs. Martinez believed that it was easier for the native Spanish speakers to ask friends because they already understood enough that they only needed a little bit of support in order to participate. On the other hand, the native English speakers needed more support in their L2 which kept them from fully participating when they were in Spanish class.

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Number of Attempts at Participation (Hand Raising)

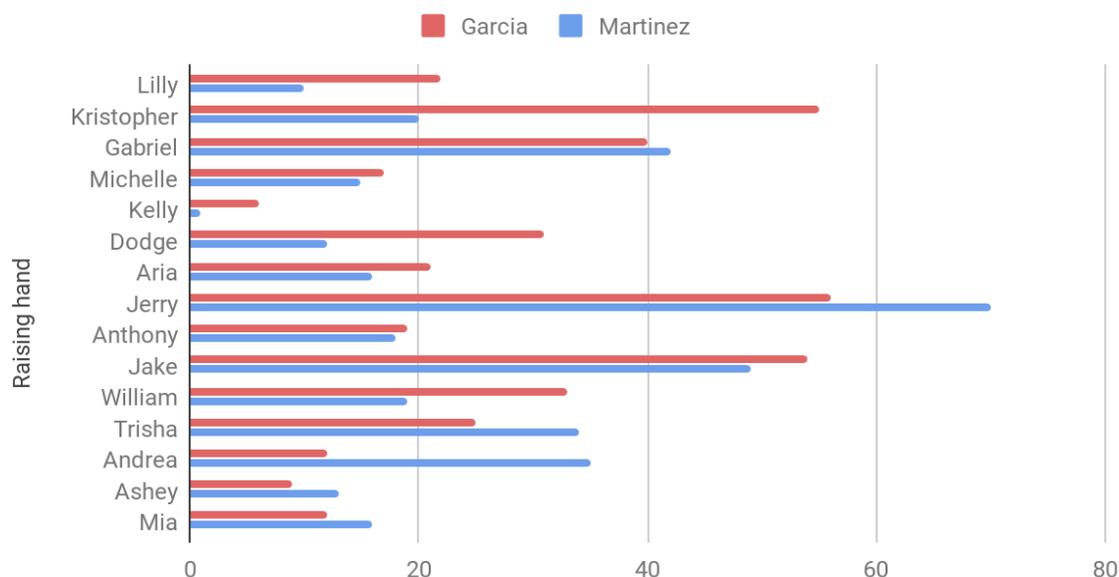


Figure 3. Number of attempts at participation (hand raising).

Note: The last five students (William, Trisha, Andrea, Ashley, and Mia) are native English speakers.

Hindrances Participating

Every student has reasons for not wanting to participate at any given time. However, in bilingual classes these reasons tend to come much more frequently, and tend to carry much more weight. How are they expected to participate when they are still learning the language of instruction? An unwillingness to participate can come from nerves, pressure, or a lack of understanding. Identifying where this hesitance comes from may make a world of difference in how teachers respond when a student is not participating.

External factors. “When I get the words wrong and when I get shy, I kind of--my voice gets quiet and I don’t yell” (Andrea, 3rd grade, Native English speaker).

External hindrances to participation may seem similar to classroom environment, but while classroom environment dealt with things that teachers did that some students may enjoy and others may not, external hindrances deal with those things that all students across the board

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expressed dislike for. The first of these factors, is the tendency of teachers to “attention check” students by calling on them if they do not think that the students are paying attention. This caused native Spanish speaker, Aria, to cite having “nerves” in class, while native English speaker William equated being called on to “getting in trouble.” It begs the question, why offer an answer or comment if you will just be called out regardless? In observations, I noticed a decrease in students raising their hands if they were called on often by the teacher without volunteering. Whether the teacher called on them because they did not offer participation or they did not participate because the teacher called on them was not always clear. However, students’ clear dislike for this qualified it as a hindrance to their participation.

In relation to being called on, I found it surprising that many students cited being afraid of being reprimanded as a reason they did not participate in class. William, a native English speaker said that when he is called on “it makes [him] feel like [he’s] am in trouble.” William, and students like him expressed concern with having to move their behavior clip down or have a “blurt” taken away from them if they chose to participate. Although it seems obvious to us that the correct form of participation would not result in one of these consequences, it was not so clear for the students. While some students were able to differentiate between appropriate and inappropriate participation, others were not able to make this distinction. These students feared talking with or without permission and chose not to participate to avoid negative consequences.

Finally, students cited a lack of language supportive resources as a factor in their choice not to participate. Although students had partners to help them with language issues, many of the native English speakers did not feel comfortable using their Spanish speaking partners to help them understand the material. Mrs. Martinez and Mrs. Garcia each had different takes on the cause of this hesitancy. Mrs. Garcia believed that the hesitancy came from native English

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speakers not helping their partners in English class and therefore not expecting to receive any help in Spanish class. On the other hand, Mrs. Martinez believed that it came from a lack of trust in their partners to translate the content correctly. This uncertainty of whether or not students have the correct translation kept them from being willing to participate and opened the door for several internal factors to also keep them from participating.

Internal factors. “[In Spanish class] I think I stay quiet mostly...I do not like speaking in Spanish because I can’t speak it perfectly” (William, 3rd grade, Native English speaker).

I heard comments like this more than I thought I would. Students seemed to be getting stuck in their own mind when it came to participating. Whether it was a lack of understanding, an inability to translate correctly, or just nerves, students seemed to have a plethora of reasons not to participate. These reasons, although not apparent in observations or to the naked eye, were still instrumental in determining whether or not students felt comfortable participating in class.

A lack of understanding may result in not being able to participate in class. However, for these students, this lack of understanding comes as a double-edged sword. Not only could there be gaps in knowledge regarding content, but these gaps may be caused or compounded by gaps in language understanding. Both teachers lamented not knowing whether misunderstandings were caused by language or content. Mrs. Garcia in particular expressed her frustration with understanding by asking, “would they know it if I taught it to them in English?” This question is difficult. Students referred to not understanding what the teacher is talking about many times, like native Spanish speaking Dodge who expressed a preference for Spanish class because English confused him. However, the cause of this misunderstanding was difficult to determine without simply translating the content on the spot. Assuming, however, that students do

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understand what the teacher is saying, sometimes it was only the voice inside the students' own minds that kept them from participating.

While analyzing both interview and survey data, on many occasions I came across the words shy, nervous, and perfect. Words that I am familiar with in many academic contexts, but had never really considered as factors for third graders. Native Spanish speaker Aria reported having nerves that kept her from participating. When I asked about the source of these nerves, she simply said that they came from "inside." Other students who discussed nerves got a little more specific. For example, William from the quote above said that he did not enjoy Spanish because he was not perfect at it. Time and time again, students cited having insecurities or uncertainties that caused them to be hesitant participants. While this hesitancy showed up less in the students who had more motivation to take risks, it was still prominent in both native English and Spanish speakers' responses. Although it seemed like the hindrances to student participation were overwhelming and often hard to pinpoint, there are ways in which teachers can break down these barriers and encourage participation regardless of language of instruction.

Implications for Teachers

The initial purpose of this study was to look beyond how students act and behave in my own classroom, to act as a fly on the wall and simply observe their habits in the Spanish class across the hall. However, I received much more insight and information into the motivations, preferences, and hindrances of these students than I ever expected. These insights have allowed me some understanding of what works and what does not work in the bilingual classroom for both my student and teacher participants.

An important implication of this study is for teachers to recognize the impact that classroom environment and student preferences can have on participation and learning. While I

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know that teachers prioritize their students while setting up their classroom, I would also encourage teachers to talk to students about how they feel in the classroom. When I talked to students about what they enjoyed and what they did not enjoy about each class, many students were confused at first. It was apparent that they had never been asked their own preferences by an adult before. I encourage teachers to do their own investigations each year into what preferences their students have regarding their learning. Yes, many students will request more recess, but the students who feel discomfort in the classroom may give great insight into small things that might help them learn better. For my students, it was not being called out, having interesting activities to do with more difficult subject areas, and making sure that the content is not overwhelming.

Another thing that I found to be a major factor impacting the students in this study was the underlying frustration of Mrs. Garcia and the native English speakers related to a lack of curriculum and support. Most bilingual programs are centered around teaching students English as quickly as possible. This means that there are many resources available for the native Spanish speakers, but nearly none are available for students who are trying to learn Spanish, or native Spanish speaking students who are trying to keep their home language. Learning or maintaining knowledge of the Spanish language can have amazing benefits in students' lives. While I urge curriculum writers and districts to prioritize this, I know that teachers themselves can bring about real change. I encourage Spanish teachers to reach out to one another and share resources. As it stands, teaching Spanish in elementary school is an expensive, time consuming, and often lonely endeavor. However, if teachers come together and share resources the burden of doing it all will decrease dramatically.

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Finally, I would like to ensure that bilingual teachers know that just because their students are not outwardly participating, it does not mean that they are not internally engaged with the material. Sometimes the brain power it takes to translate and understand the material leaves little room for contribution. However, by calling out students who are not vocally participating, teachers may be causing students to shut down or believe that they are doing something wrong. Yes, participation can have amazing benefits for students, but only if it is in a safe environment and at the students' discretion. As teachers, we need to ensure that our students feel comfortable in our classroom, and sometimes this means having patience when students do not speak up right away.

While this study brought forth many new ideas and rationales, it is not without its limitations, not the least among these being the language barrier. I would have liked to talk to the participants' parents as well in regards to their beliefs regarding the motivation of their students. I also was limited by resources to a single class of students. Future studies may benefit in expanding this range to see how student behaviors and responses change from class to class or even from region to region. Finally, I am limited by my own bias as being these students' teacher for a year. While I tried my best to prevent this bias from skewing the study, I am sure that despite my best efforts, some of it may have shown through. I hope for future research to explore where these motivation trends come from, how we can better improve our bilingual curriculums, and how we can instill motivation into our students.

Final Thoughts

While my original goal was simply to observe how students responded in two different settings, what I came away with was so much more. Is there a difference between participation in English and Spanish class? Absolutely. But, it is not necessarily a bad thing. Every student is

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different. This means that every student responds differently to learning a new language. While all students recognize the benefits of learning a second language, this does not mean that they will all have the same motivation or preferences in this learning. Some students learn better with the help of partners and activities, while others need more concrete support from a teacher or translating software. This does not mean that one set of students is better than another set, it simply means that teachers must be careful to ensure they are meeting the needs of all of their students.

Teachers of bilingual students are already used to the great amount of patience and support that is needed from their students. However, in regards to participation, different students are going to respond differently. While it may look like some students talk and some simply do not, it is important to understand that there is a lot more happening than meets the eye. These students are learning the same content as general education students, with the added stress of learning a new language. However, with the right mixture of patience, resources, and knowledge of your individual students' needs, the barriers that they face can be greatly reduced and students can find success with both language and the content.

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Appendix A

Number: _____

Student Participation Survey

1. What language do you feel most comfortable speaking at home and with friends?

English Only	Mostly English with some Spanish	Mostly Spanish with some English	Spanish Only	Both
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2. How do you feel when the teacher is speaking Spanish?



Hate it!



Not my favorite



I like it



Love it!

3. How do you feel when the teacher is speaking English?



Hate it!



Not my favorite



I like it



Love it!

4. How do you feel about raising your hand and answering a question in English?



Hate it!



Not my favorite



I like it



Love it!

5. How do you feel about raising your hand and answering a question in Spanish?

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Hate it!

Not my
thing

I like it



Love it!

6. How do you feel about asking questions in Spanish?

Hate it!

Not my
thing

I like it

Love it!

7. How do you feel about asking questions in English?

Hate it!

Not my
thing

I like it

Love it!

8. What would make you more comfortable participating in class?

9. What makes you not want to talk in class? Why?

10. Do you like learning in both English and Spanish? Why or why not?

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Appendix B**Student Interview**

1. Tell me about the bilingual program that you are in.
2. How do you feel about Spanish class? Why?
3. How do you feel about English class? Why?
4. What do you like about talking in class?
5. What do you not like about talking in class?
6. Do you think that you talk in class often? Why is that?
7. How could you feel more comfortable participating in class?
 - a. Why would this make you feel more comfortable?
 - b. What would this look like?
8. If you could change anything about the bilingual program, what would it be and why?
9. What language do you use more at home, English or Spanish? Why?
10. What language do you use more with your friends? Why?
11. How do you feel when you speak English?
12. How do you feel when you speak Spanish?
13. How do you feel when the teacher speaks English?
14. How do you feel when the teacher speaks Spanish?

Teacher interview

1. Why do you teach in English/Spanish?
2. Talk to me about the bilingual program.
3. What do you see from students year to year? Is this year any different? Why or why not?
4. What do you notice about the students when you speak English to them? What about Spanish?
5. What is your biggest priority when it comes to teaching? Why?
6. Do you notice discomfort in students when you are not speaking their home language? If so, what does this look like?
7. When did you become bilingual? How does this affect the way you teach your students?
8. What steps do you take to ensure everyone is learning when you are teaching? How do these steps help?
9. What makes bilingual third graders different from other third graders? Why do you think this is?
10. What is the biggest challenge when it comes to teaching all students in English or in Spanish? Why?
11. Do you ever change the language you are speaking for your students? What makes you decide to do this?
12. What benefits do students receive from being bilingual? When do these benefits begin to become prominent?
13. What students do you see answering a lot of questions in your class?
 - a. Why do you think they answer a lot of questions?

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- b. Do they answer in English or Spanish?
- 14. What students do you see asking a lot of questions in your class?
 - a. Why do you think they ask a lot of questions?
 - b. Do they ask in English or Spanish?
 - c. How do you decide what language to respond to them in?
- 15. How do you incorporate both languages in your class? What does this do for the students?
- 16. If you had unlimited resources, what would you want to bring to your classroom or to the bilingual program? How would this be helpful?

Questions may vary and additional questions may be asked depending on the answers of the participants.

Appendix C

Codebook

Level 2 Code Name	Level 1 Code Name	Definition	Example
Student Preference and Success	Do Understand	Students imply that they comprehend what is happening in class.	"Sometimes I understand more of the like, understand more words in English about math"
	Always doing Something	Students indicate preferences based on the number of activities in a class.	"Because when we're in Spanish we don't do that much things. And when we're in English class, we only do math rotations. More things in learning. More than Spanish."
	Subject Dependence	Students share how the subject being taught affects their view of the class.	"Um, I'm not sure why, but sometimes it makes it hard for me to understand social studies."
	Preferred Language	Students indicate the language they prefer speaking/learning in.	"When Mrs. Garcia is speaking Spanish sometimes I feel [like] speaking English"
	Participating in Class	Students discuss the situations in which they feel comfortable participating in class.	"I think I stay quiet mostly [in class], but sometimes I may ask questions."
	Before Bilingual	Students and teachers discuss what led them to Carson and this program.	"I never had learned English so that's why my mom left Dallas and came here so that I can learn English."

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Student Motivation	Bilingual Requirements	Teachers and students go over how the bilingual program differs from general education (gen ed) at Carson.	"I our program they have to write a full page after each content area, general ed does not. In ours they have to have two activities on different levels of Blooms for each content area. Gen ed does not."
	Student Motivation (Cont.)	Keeping Both Languages	Students and teachers discuss a desire to retain both English and Spanish.
Motivation Source		Students discuss what motivates them to learn two languages.	"My favorite language to speak is English...because my cousins talk English and my sister. And I want to learn English too.
Language at Home		Students talk about what language their parents and siblings speak at home.	"My mom doesn't [speak English]. My big sister has to talk to someone in English because my mom doesn't understand English."
Google Translate		English speakers discuss the benefits of using Google Translate.	"Mostly I just use Google Translate because if I ask anyone for help with how to spell the words they might say to use Google Translate."
Resources for Non-Native Speakers	Teacher Translates	Students express a desire for more help in the form of the teacher to translating what she has said.	"She does speak a little in English after we [try to] say it in Spanish"

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Resources for Non-Native Speakers (Cont.)	Language with Friends	Students use social interactions with friends to refine their language skills.	"A few [students] speak in English every day...because I like speaking English a lot and Spanish, well, a little bit."
	Learning and Improving	Students discuss what helps them in class and how they know that they are learning.	"Like when I am learning and they give me a paper I used to struggle a little bit and now I don't."
	Partners Helping	Students ask their more fluent partners for help with assignments in their L2.	"In English you will know the English words and then when you get to Spanish you can ask your partner what this means and then they can tell you."
Hindrances to Participating	Too Hard or Too Easy	Students discuss how participation fluctuates depending on the difficulty level of the content.	"Sometimes we were doing something and it was just...too hard for me."
	Lost in Translation	Students lament difficulty finding or translating the right words in their L2.	"In Spanish it takes me a while to translate it in my head. [When I get it] someone has already answered [the question]."
	Don't Understand	Students discuss what happens when they do not understand what is being taught.	"I feel a little confused because I don't really understand Spanish that good"
	Nervous when Speaking	Students discuss discomfort when participating in their L2.	"When I get the words wrong and when I get shy I kind of--my voice gets quiet."