

Measuring the Effects of Community-Based Spanish on Students' Willingness to Communicate (WTC)

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INTRODUCTION – WHAT IS WTC?

Willingness to Communicate (WTC) is a construct first advanced in the field of Communications to explain individual differences in communicative behavior in one's first language (McCroskey and Baer 1985; McCroskey and Richmond 1987). WTC was described as a personality-based predisposition toward approaching or avoiding speaking when given the choice to do so.

As any language instructor knows, talk is central to improving the oral component of second-language acquisition. Nonetheless, given the opportunity to do so, people differ dramatically in the degree to which they actually do talk.

So, what factors influence a student's willingness to communicate in and outside of the classroom, in formal and informal situations, with people they know and with strangers? This project measured the impact that students' experiences in a Community-Based Spanish (CBS) class had on their willingness to use the language.

THE PROJECT

Span 302 CBS vs. a standard Span 302 course: The same grammatical structures were studied, practiced, and assessed in both classes. However, instead of the normal readings and films used in the standard Spanish 302 course, students in the CBS course had six opportunities to meet with and learn from area native Spanish speakers in a variety of settings. All of the experiences were designed to create opportunities for the students to use their Spanish in both formal and informal situations, with opportunities for prepared and spontaneous communication.



METHODS

Classroom-Based Spanish Communication was measured with an 8-item scale (e.g., "Speak with a teacher before or after class," "Speak with a classmate who is a native Spanish speaker to carry out a short class activity.") where participants indicated how willing they are to engage in each type of communication on a 1 (Never) to 5 (Always) scale, $\alpha = .86$.

Community-Based Spanish Communication was measured with an 8-item scale (e.g., "Speak with a Spanish speaker in a service encounter," "Speak with Spanish speakers having trouble communicating in a public setting such as a store or bank.") where participants indicated how willing they are to engage in each type of communication on a 1 (Never) to 5 (Always) scale, $\alpha = .86$.

FINDINGS

Quantitative data for the Classroom-Based Communication and Community-Based Communication were analyzed with Mixed ANOVAS where Class Type (CBS vs. Comparison) was a between-subjects variable and Time in Semester (Early vs. End) was a within-subjects variable.

Classroom-Based Communication: The mixed ANOVA indicated more willingness regarding classroom-based Spanish communication at the end of the semester than at the beginning. Simple effects tests indicated that *participants in the CBS showed an increase in their willingness to participate in classroom-based Spanish communication from the beginning to the end of the semester*. In contrast, the willingness to communicate among participants in the standard Spanish course did not show a significant increase across the semester.

Community-Based Communication: The mixed ANOVA indicated more willingness regarding community-based Spanish communication at the end of the semester than at the beginning. Simple effects tests indicated that while participants in the standard Spanish class showed an increase in their willingness to participate in community-based Spanish communication from the beginning to the end of the semester, *the effect was stronger for students in the community-based class*.

QUALITATIVE DATA FROM CBS COURSE

Students in the Community-Based Spanish course were asked to respond to short essay questions at the end of the semester.

Do you think your experience with community-based learning this semester has helped you to become more willing to speak Spanish outside of the classroom and required assignments?

"I believe that I speak Spanish outside of the classroom more now than I did before this course. Through this course I have begun to willingly talk in Spanish to my friends and seek out other people to talk to as well. While I am still somewhat timid to use my Spanish, I believe that I am more likely to after having this class."

"This class has allowed me the opportunity to develop my skills as a speaker of Spanish. I am far more comfortable now than at the beginning of the semester to have a meaningful conversation in Spanish with anyone, regardless of their level of fluency in the language."

"This was an incredible experience. Learning is about so much more than merely memorizing grammar structures or vocab - it's about being able to apply your learning to all aspects of life. The community-based experiences created an intrinsic motivation within myself to continue in my pursuit of learning Spanish."

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