

Language at Work: The Impact of Linguistic Enclaves on Immigrant Economic Integration

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Abstract:

This paper studies the role played by linguistic enclaves on the economic integration of immigrants to Canada. Linguistic enclaves are defined as groups of people who are similar with respect to languages used on their jobs. A five category classification of major types of linguistic enclaves is produced, using responses to two questions on the Canadian 2006 census of population: language most often used on the job and language(s) regularly used at work. Two core questions are asked: 1) What factors influence the likelihood of employment in linguistic enclaves; and 2) What are the impacts of working in linguistic enclaves on earnings? These questions are answered by examining the economic integration of immigrant allophone women and men age 26-64 who were employed in 2005 or 2006 and who were enumerated in the 2006 Canadian census of population. The investigation shows that levels of language proficiency are important factors determining the type of language enclave where individuals are employed. Further language at work mediates much of the observed impacts of language proficiency on earnings. Wage determination models also confirm that employment in linguistic enclaves conditions weekly earnings; allophone immigrants who use non-official languages at work have lower wages than those who use only English at work.

JEL Classification: J31, J24

Key Words: Immigrant Workers, Wages, Enclaves, Linguistic Proficiency, Work Language

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