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

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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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Executive Summary

This paper examines the relationship between language enclaves and the economic integration of immigrants, paying particular attention to the earnings of immigrants. 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? The analysis utilizes two relatively new census questions on languages used at work most often and regularly; these question first were asked in the 2001 Canadian census of population and then included again in the 2006 census.

In research on immigrants, “enclave” is a popular term, diversely measured. At its most basic definition, an enclave can be defined as a distinctly bounded field enclosed within a larger unit or defined as a cluster of similar persons. Boundaries may be geographical, as depicted by “China town” or “Little Italy,” or based on membership in a cultural community (ethnic enclaves) or on other dimensions such as language. Driven by the limitations of available data, studies of “ethnic” enclaves predominate in investigations of the economic integration of migrants. Many of these studies conflate ethnic and linguistic enclaves, either employing language as an indicator (for example, the percentages of an ethnic group that speaks a specific language.) Left relatively neglected is a focus specifically on language enclaves - on how participation in linguistically bounded work sites affect the labour market integration of immigrants.

What can be learned by studying linguistically bounded work sites? The answer rests on conceptual and empirical distinctions. First, although ethnic and language enclaves may overlap for large immigrant origin groups characterized by high in-migration flows, it is wrong to assume that language enclaves are synonymous with ethnic enclaves. For example, mainstream enclaves are those consisting of work sites where the host country language is the only language used – this is so commonly taken for granted that employment in this setting is considered to represent participation in the mainstream economy. Furthermore, language enclaves can consist of settings where multiple languages are used and where workers often may find that their own languages are less frequently spoken. Second, studying linguistic enclaves, defined as languages spoken at work, increases understanding of the empirical relationship between the language proficiencies of individual immigrants and their economic integration. Low proficiencies in the host country language(s) may allocate workers to certain sectors of the economy. In such instances, the well established consequences of low language skills for earnings is likely to partially reflect the language enclaves in which such workers find employment. Third, these diverse linguistic enclaves have implications for the economic trajectories of immigrants. Workers who use only non-official languages at work or use non-official languages most of the time or regularly may receive lower wages because of crowding and competition, and they may be more vulnerable to unemployment and blocked mobility into the mainstream economy.

The population under analysis consists of allophone immigrants (those whose mother tongue is neither English nor French) age 25-64 who reported employment in 2005 or 2006 and who are not in Canada temporarily. It is this group that may be facing the

greatest difficulties with respect to economic integration, particularly if they lack destination country language skills. Recent studies suggest that poor knowledge of English or French are likely factors underlying the deteriorating economic situation of immigrants.

In order to investigate the economic integration of allophone immigrants, two innovative uses are made of census questions. First, 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. Second, a typology of language proficiency also is developed, derived from census questions about mother tongue, home language usage and official language knowledge.

These classifications are used to determine what factors influence participation in linguistic enclaves. While the likelihood of using non-official languages at work is increased by recent period of arrival, low education, advanced age, and being divorced, separated or widowed, language proficiency is a major factor associated with what languages are used at work. Although the majority of allophone immigrants work in settings where they use English and/or French, the percentages who use non-official languages either solely or alongside English/French increase with diminished levels of language skills. Nearly seven out of ten allophone immigrant women and men who have no conversational ability in English and/or French are employed in settings where they use only non-official languages. For those who use non-official languages in the home, between close to 15 to 30 percent are using non-official languages exclusively at work or in combination with English and/or French.

Analysis also confirms that much of the well know impacts of language proficiency on the earnings of immigrants derives from the association between language skills in destination country languages and languages used at work. Simply put, language skills of immigrants influence the jobs they find and the languages they use in their jobs; once that linkage is taken into account, the earnings gains and losses attributable to different language skills is substantially diminished.

In the second half of the paper, the analysis of earnings returns to types of linguistic enclaves in which immigrants work confirm the connection between earning and languages used by immigrants at work. The average weekly earnings of immigrant allophone women and men in Canada who use non-official languages either solely or in combination with English and/or French are considerably lower than those who use only English at work. Net of factors that also enhance the productivity of work and influence earnings (age, marital status, years of schooling, period of immigration and place of work), immigrant allophones who either speak only non-official languages at work or who use other languages most often have average weekly earnings that are between 50 and 60 percent below those received by their counterparts who use only English at work. City specific analyses of earnings also uphold the pattern of lower earnings, although the magnitude of the penalty for using unofficial languages at work varies by city.

The overall implications of the study are two fold. First, although language proficiency is often considered to be a form of human capital, language proficiency influences earnings of immigrants because it allocates workers to jobs where they use official or non-official languages at work. In that sense, language proficiency can be thought of as a proxy measure of languages used at work. Second, languages used at work are important determinants of earnings, indicating an inverse relationship between earnings and the use of non-official languages. Although many data collections currently lack information on languages at work, this study shows that having good measures of language enclaves furthers our understanding of immigrant economic integration.