

# Is There Really a Labor Market Advantage to Being Bilingual in the U.S.?

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# Mounting evidence of bilingual benefits

- Cognitive (e.g., Bialystok et al.)
- Educational (Genesee et al, 2007; Umansky & Reardon, 2014; Steele et al, 2016)
- Socio-emotional (Portes & Hao, 1998)
- Family cohesion (Feliciano, 2001; Portes & Rumbaut, 2001)
- Social adjustment (Portes & Rumbaut, 2001)
- **YET, a decline in bilingual education in the U.S.**

# Silly Question?

- *”for me, it was about setting my child up for success. All I could think about is him having a great paying job after finishing school.”*  
——North Carolina Mother of dual Immersion Student
- Explosion of dual immersion programs among the monolingual middle class
- But . . . Economic studies show no benefit, and often a penalty! If there is no economic benefit, will support for bilingual/dual language instruction wither?
- There **MUST** be something wrong with the economic studies!

# Study #1: Questions

- Robinson- Cimpian, NYU
- U.S. Census data (ACS), 2006-2010, for Latino workers nationally, ages 24 – 64, citizens only
- Questions
  - Are there employment differences between monolinguals & bilinguals?
  - Are there earnings differences?
  - Are there gender differences in earnings or employment?

Methods: Regression analyses

# Study #1: Findings

- “Male bilinguals earn slightly lower wages” (but not females)
- “Male bilinguals participate in the labor market at slightly lower rates” (but no difference for females)
- “Most consistent finding . . . is that bilingual and monolingual Hispanic individuals have remarkably similar labor market outcomes”
- Conclusion: Maybe it depends on labor sector?

# Study #2: Questions

- Alarcon et al., U of Texas, University of Barcelona
- U.S. Census Data (ACS, 2006-2010), individuals who were bilingual/monolingual along the **US-Mexico border** with high public contact: **criminal justice and health, ages 18 - 70**
- **Questions:**
  - **Will bilinguals in criminal justice and health IN HIGH NEED AREA earn more than monolinguals?**
  - **Will bilinguals be placed in higher level jobs?**
- **Methods:** Regressions & Ethnographic interviews

# Study #2 Findings

- No earnings premium for bilinguals: “bilingualism is treated as a freely available, naturally occurring resource of the border . . .”
- Higher level positions, e.g., management, were disproportionately held by monolinguals (other factors trumped bilingualism, even where language was key)
- Conclusion: Maybe where there is high demand for bilingualism **but also high supply**, there is no need to compensate bilinguals

# Study #3: Questions

- Alarcon et al.
- U.S. Census Data (ACS, 2006-2010) for Dallas-Tarrant County-All health and criminal justice workers, between 18 - 70
- Questions:
  - **Will bilinguals be compensated differently than monolinguals in a moderately high demand area where there are fewer bilinguals in the population?**
- Methods: Regression Analyses



# Study #3: Findings

- “Workers with the highest quality of bilingualism do not receive higher wages than monolingual English speakers”
- “Our findings hold for both border and non-border regions”
- “Spanish speakers *with very good skills in English* experience a decrease of 6% in wages in comparison to monolingual English speakers.”

# What happens if we measure literacy & age cohorts longitudinally?

- Census data doesn't tell us about literacy in the non-English language - just whether it is spoken at home. Can other data tell us more?
- Most studies look at workers who have entered the labor market across many different time periods
- Are there different questions to be asked?

- New questions
- **New data:** Longitudinal, younger cohorts, measures of primary language **and** English literacy
- New answers!

# Are there costs to losing one's primary language?

- Orhan Agirdag, University of Lueven:
- Data: Children of Immigration Longitudinal Study (CILS) & Educational Longitudinal Study (ELS)\*\*\*.
- **Follows children of immigrants, various backgrounds**
- Allows for assessment of primary language literacy as well as English literacy
- Longitudinal from high school to mid-20's
- Methods: Latent Class Analysis; Regressions

# Agirdag' s findings

- *Balanced Bilinguals* earn about \$5200 more annually at the beginning of their careers than do monolinguals; holds for different language groups
- That is, there is a substantial loss to the individual in earnings from losing the primary language
- And loss to the society in tax dollars!

## Agirdag, cont.

- Notes a social justice theme:
  - “In short, linguistic assimilation policies not only *steal* from people, they steal from those who already have less.”

# Is bilingualism related to dropping out, occupational status & earnings?

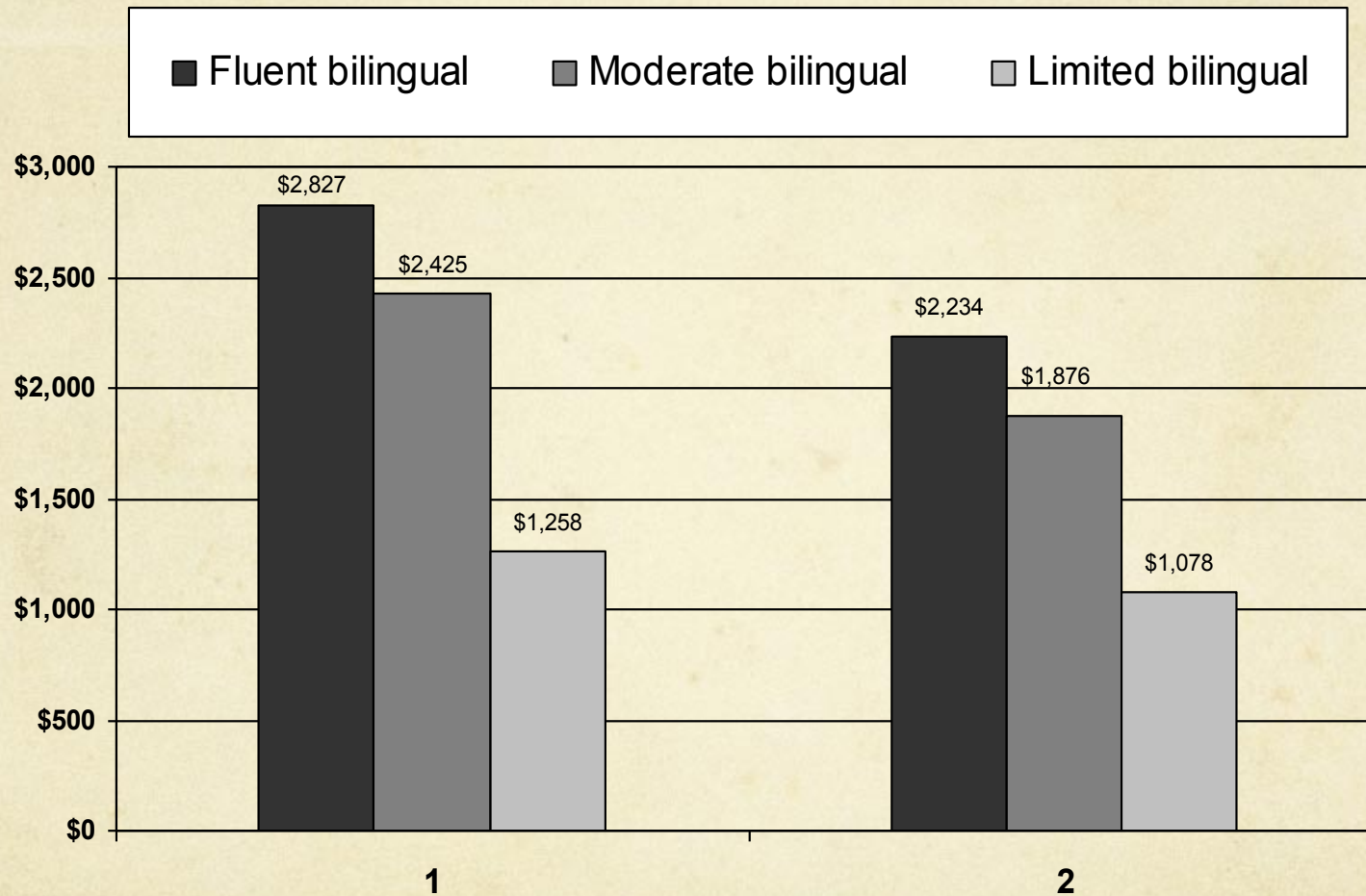
- **Ruben Rumbaut**, University of California, Irvine
- CILS and IMMLA longitudinal data merged, over 6,000 young adults (av age 27) in Southern California area followed from high school, **various backgrounds**
- 4 levels of bilingualism: fluent, moderate (“balanced”), limited (including literacy) and monolingual
- **Children of immigrants, various backgrounds**
- **Methods: Regression analyses**

# Rumbaut's Findings

- Monolingual and limited bilingual students are 66% more likely to drop out of high school than balanced bilinguals
- Bilingualism is significantly associated with occupational prestige; Fluent bilingualism has the strongest effect
- Earnings are positively associated with increasing levels of bilingualism (see table)



# Regressions of annual earnings on levels of bilingualism



# Does bilingualism affect educational attainment, (and indirectly earnings)?

- **Santibañez & Zárate**, Claremont & CSU Fullerton
- ELS national data (2002- 2006) – both Spanish and Chinese speaking (only groups with large enough Ns)  
16,000 students (approx 3000 immigrant/1.5 gen)  
10<sup>th</sup> grade to 2 years out of high school
- High use Bil, mod use Bil, L1 dominant & English only (assumed a basic level of education outside US)
- Methods: Regression analyses

# Santibañez & Zárate Findings

- “Spanish bilinguals are more likely to enroll in college than English monolinguals, all else held equal”
- “the odds of going to a 4-year college are higher for high use Spanish bilinguals relative to English monolinguals, clearly highlighting the bilingual advantage.”
- “the pressure of linguistic assimilation . . . reduc[es] the chances . . . to gain a college education, which increases their value in the U.S. labor market.”

# What do employers say about language skills?

- Surveyed nearly 300 employers across all sectors of the economy, large and small firms, based in California, but in many cases with satellites out of state and multinationals; plus interviews with 10 bilingual workers across sectors.
- Do bilinguals have an advantage in hiring?
- Are bilinguals in certain positions paid more?
- Perceived value of bilingualism?
- Opportunities for advancement?

# Do bilinguals have a hiring advantage? 2013

- 92% of employers said they would be hiring in the upcoming year; 56% said they would “seek out bilinguals” for at least some positions
- **Most likely:** arts, entertainment, recreation; transportation and warehousing; retail trade, health care & social services; educational services
- **Least likely:** Management and technical services (still two-thirds said yes)
- **Bottom line:** 66% of employers prefer to hire bilingual (all else equal)

# Are bilinguals paid more?

- A little more than half the sample would not answer this question.
- Of the 131 that did answer, 56% said that they do pay more for bilinguals in certain positions. The highest:
  - Health care and social services
  - Public administration
  - Finance, real estate
  - Educational services

# Do bilinguals have more opportunities for advancement?

- Between 63% and 80% of employers in Transportation Manufacturing/construction, Finance & real estate, Arts & entertainment, and Education
- Said **there was greater opportunity for advancement for bilinguals**
- But interviewees often said, “While I am not paid more, I earn more, I’ve been promoted more, and my job is more secure.” [**Invisible compensation**]

# What employers say about the value of bilingualism

- 64% bilinguals provide “more effective customer service”
- 51% - able to translate documents or help with advertising (literacy)
- 41% “better able to work in diverse environment”
- 25% multi-linguals “create a more welcoming environment”



# Conclusions

- There are significant benefits, especially to biliteracy in education, earnings, and employment
- And especially for those younger employees entering the labor market in a more global economy
- And for Latinos to go to (4 year) college (BIG)
- *Transitional bilingual education* is NOT the avenue to benefits
- The pay off comes from **maintenance** of the home language and development of literacy skills
- We have a wealth of language assets but we need to act fast because of rapid language loss!

# Further Reading

- Callahan, R & Gándara, P. Eds, (2014). **The Bilingual Advantage: Language, Literacy, and the U.S. Labor Market.** Bristol, UK: Multilingual Matters
- Also: Abridged version from ETS: *Is There Really a Labor Market Advantage to Being Bilingual in the U.S.?* By Patricia Gándara
- <http://onlinelibrary.wiley.com/doi/10.1002/ets2.12054/full>