

The Civil Rights Project



Proyecto Derechos Civiles

Call for Papers

Exploring Possible Benefits of Bilingualism in the Labor Market and Beyond

The Civil Rights Project/*Proyecto Derechos Civiles*, in collaboration with the Educational Testing Service (ETS), is pleased to issue a call for papers under the general topic of “The Benefits of Bilingualism.” We are especially interested in research that demonstrates whether there are labor market benefits to bilingualism in the United States, particularly for individuals who are proficient in one or more languages in addition to English. The benefit may take the form of increased salary, possible advantages in entering the labor market (“getting a job”), retaining a job (especially in recessionary times), being promoted within a job, or other ways in which the bilingual individual might be advantaged in the labor market. Although the call for papers does not direct itself specifically to other kinds of advantages, we are open to suggestions for papers that would provide strong evidence for additional benefits accruing from bi- or multilingualism.

We anticipate funding 5 or 6 papers at an amount of about \$5,000.00 each. Once contracted, the author(s) would be requested to submit the first complete draft by **July 31, 2012**. An Authors’ Roundtable will be scheduled for late summer 2012, at which the papers will be reviewed and discussed by other authors and experts in the field. The Roundtable will be held at UCLA and travel expenses will be covered for attending. Subsequent to the Roundtable, authors will be given 6 weeks to respond to comments and submit the final manuscript.

It is the intention of the Civil Rights Project/*Proyecto Derechos Civiles* to publish the papers in a bound volume with a major press. Additional dissemination of the papers is also anticipated. Authors will be consulted on this process.

Limited Research to date

Most research into the benefits of bilingualism has centered on the value of non-English speakers learning to speak English – a characteristically American framing of bilingualism. And, this research finds that the stronger the English, the better are the job market prospects, and earnings, for the individuals (see Chiswick, 2008, López and Mora, 1998). Studies that look at the benefits of bilingualism in the U.S. from the perspective of having a strong command of TWO languages (or more) are

scant and often suffer from problems both of conception and of data limitations. For example, Chiswick (2009) attempted to determine if Spanish-English bilinguals in the U.S. earned more than monolinguals, using U.S. Census data and studying persons who were bilingual in the Chicago area. His findings were that bilinguals actually earned less on average than monolinguals, even controlling for education. He explained this by noting that bilinguals tend to cluster (or be segregated) in areas where job prospects are more limited, and bilinguals in the general population also tend to be minorities with all the attendant disadvantages of minorities in our society. In the general population in the U.S., bilinguals tend to be immigrants or children of immigrants, living in largely immigrant communities.

López (1999) asked a similar question, “Does speaking a second language affect labor market outcomes?” using a different data set, the 1992 National Adult Literacy Study (NALS) and had contradictory findings. It is important to note that the NALS data set allows for the evaluation of different levels of language proficiency and López’s findings are associated with speaking English and the second language “proficiently.” He found that bilingual individuals earn a slight premium compared to English monolinguals, and testing for differences in region, he further found that “individuals residing in states with English Only laws do not see this premium mitigated” (page 1). López argues that “since there is a return associated with bilingualism, policies that seek to make English the official language of the U.S. or emphasize English proficiency over other languages may inadvertently minimize the development of important human capital, namely bilingualism” (p.1).

Fry and Lowell (2003) also asked what the value of bilingualism is in the U.S. labor market, using the 1992 National Adult Literacy Survey (NALS). They concluded that bilingual workers do receive higher pay but this reflects the higher educational attainment they brought to the labor market rather than their bilingualism. Once observable characteristics are controlled, there do not appear to be any statistically significant wage payoffs to competency in second languages. The fact that self-reported bilinguals had acquired higher levels of education than the monolinguals in their sample is however, an interesting finding.

In a study conducted in Florida and based on 1993 U.S. Census microdata, Boswell (1999) found that the median income for fluent Spanish-English bilinguals was \$7,000 greater than for monolinguals. In the following year, Fradd and Boswell (2000) published a follow-up of the study in which they asserted that similar earnings advantages accrued to Spanish-English bilinguals in other U.S. cities, including San Antonio and Jersey City. Thus the evidence is somewhat mixed on earnings advantages based on census data and certainly appears to depend on where one looks. But 1993 data are nearly twenty years old as well, and these findings may have changed in the interim.

Others have attempted to look at potential earnings advantages of bilingualism using different data sets. Lopez and Mora (1998) investigated whether attending a

bilingual education program held any earnings advantage for Hispanics using High School and Beyond data (begun in 1982). They found no earnings advantage to bilingual education and, in fact, questioned if it did not create even greater socio-economic disadvantage. However, the data are very old and they do not discriminate among program type, quality, or individuals' length of exposure to the programs. Perhaps, most important, however, is the evidence that the most socio-economically disadvantaged students with the lowest English skills (most recent immigrants) are most likely to be assigned to bilingual education classrooms (August & Hakuta, 1997) thus seriously biasing the sampling frames.

Research to date is critically limited, relying on outdated and inadequate data sets often not constructed for answering questions about bilingualism. Moreover, most data sets are very limited in specifying levels of language proficiency and rely on self report. To the extent that such research exists, it is almost always conducted on Spanish-English bilinguals, and we expect that most researchers would choose to study this population, as Spanish is overwhelmingly the second most prevalent language in the U.S., after English, and there are large communities of Spanish speakers that represent a potential market for the language. However, our interest is not limited to this population.

Twenty to thirty year old data fail to capture the massive and rapid changes in demography and globalization and the increasing importance of multilingualism all over the world. Most analyses to date have focused on the labor market generally and not specifically in areas where there is a heavy demand for bilinguals, such as in social services or marketing. The few studies that have tested economic advantages of bilingualism in the U.S. focused on Spanish-English bilinguals, as other languages have not shown any evidence of labor market advantage to date.

Researchers interested in proposing a paper may have access to data other than the public use data generally available, but NELS, ELS, and the most recent NALS data sets are also rich sources of data for analysis of some of the questions we hope to address.

Research Needed

Among the questions that could be addressed are:

- Is there an advantage to labor market ENTRY for (e.g., Spanish-English) bilinguals into specific job categories? In a highly competitive job market with high unemployment, do bilingual individuals have a better chance of getting a job, all things being equal? In which job types? Where?
- Do bi- or multilingual individuals experience less unemployment?

- Overall, do bilinguals in certain job market sectors earn more than monolinguals? (e.g., social work, medicine, legal assistants)
- How many and what kinds of jobs hire exclusively for bi- or multilinguals? (e.g., translators, immigration specialists, certain national security positions)
- Which job types offer stipends for bilinguals? For which languages?
- Do individuals with multilingual skills have an edge in college and university applications to competitive institutions?
- Are there advantages to bilingualism for job entry, promotion, and/or retention (e.g., when there layoffs, are bilingual personnel less likely to be laid off) in specific job categories, e.g., social services, education, international business, or marketing?
- Are economic advantages to bilingualism greater in certain parts of the country or in certain communities than others?
- Do local, state, and federal governments acquire more tax revenue from individuals who are bilingual (due to increased earnings or lowered unemployment)?

Procedures for Submission

The above topics are suggested areas of interest, but authors are not confined to these topics. We will entertain others.

Potential authors should submit a two-page proposal to: Laurie Russman, CRP Coordinator, at crp@ucla.edu

The proposal should include: (1) Title and author information; (2) Question(s) to be addressed; (3) Data set to be used; (4) Analyses to be conducted; (5) Current state of the research, for example, is this work already underway?, and (6) Timeline for completion.

Deadline for Submission of Proposal: February 15, 2012

Accepted paper authors will be notified by February 29, 2012

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