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FINAL GRANT REPORT

English Proficiency Across Generations: Evidence and Consequences

The children of immigrants in the United States lag behind the children of non-immigrants in both educational and economic achievement. In a nation with an increasing immigrant population, it is important to understand why this occurs.

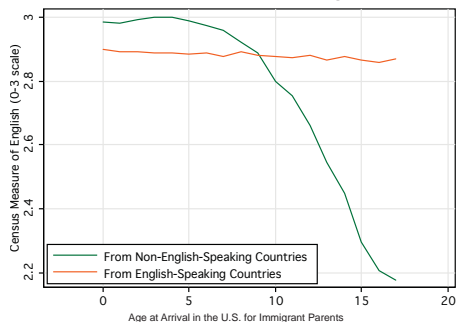
Of particular concern are the linguistic disadvantages with regard to English that the second generation may inherit from its immigrant parents. The gap between this second generation and other non-immigrants appears to be linked to English-language proficiency. Over eight percent of students enrolled in U.S. public schools, and over 25 percent of students enrolled in California public schools, are classified as English learners (EL) or limited English proficient (LEP), of which three-quarters are Hispanic. Only half of EL students are actually foreign-born, the rest are U.S.-born, mostly the children of immigrants. Therefore, simply growing up and attending school in the U.S. may be insufficient for developing English-language proficiency; parental English-language skills may also play an important role in the educational and, ultimately, the economic progress of these students. This study investigated this relationship.

Parents' English-Language Skills

There are considerable challenges to estimating the effect of parental English-language skills on children's outcomes. Parental English-language skills are correlated with many other variables (such as education, attitudes, and parental income) that also affect child outcomes. Additionally, reverse causality is possible; for example, as children become more English-proficient, they teach their parents English or encourage their parents to learn it. For these reasons, correlations of child outcomes and parental language skills may not reflect a causal relationship.

To understand the role of parental English-language skills, we examined a research strategy that was derived from the research literature of a *critical period of language acquisition*: younger children learn second languages more easily than older children and adults. Earlier exposure to English, therefore, should improve the odds that an immigrant to the U.S. becomes proficient in the language. For immigrants from non-English-speaking countries, their age at first exposure to English is closely related to their age of arrival in the U.S. Accordingly, there is indeed a strong association between immigrants' age at arrival (from non-English-speaking countries) and their adult English-language skills, as measured by a self-assessment in the 2000 Census (see Figure 1). The lower proficiency among later arrivers is quite pronounced for these immigrants, and consistent with the research evidence for second language acquisition.

Figure 1: English Proficiency by Age at Arrival: Parents Who Were Childhood Immigrants



In contrast, for immigrants from countries where English is spoken, the connection between their age of arrival to the U.S. and their age at first exposure to English is not as relevant, and therefore differences in proficiency by age at arrival are less perceptible for this group.

Children's English-Language Skills

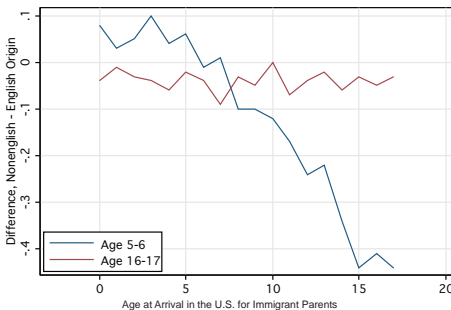
This critical period leaves its 'footprint' on the acquisition of English proficiency for the first generation, but does this developmental pattern carry forward to the second generation?

For young children, the shape of the relationship between their English skill and their parents' age at arrival corresponds approximately to that seen for the first generation (see Figure 2, blue line). We take this trend as evidence that immigrant parents' English-speaking proficiency (or the age at which the parents were exposed to English) has a significant effect on their U.S.-born children's English-speaking proficiency while the children are young. However, as these children grow, they are exposed more to English from their peers and teachers, and, by the time the child reaches high school, parental age of exposure to English ceases to be a factor (see Figure 2, red line).

Children's Educational Outcomes

Because, on average, children with limited-English-proficient parents enter school with poorer English-language skills, a logical question to ask is whether this early deficiency has longer-term consequences. Using the same research design with a national

**Figure 2: English Proficiency by Age at Arrival:
U.S.-Born Children of Childhood Immigrants**



longitudinal dataset, we estimated the effect of parental English proficiency on children's educational outcomes. Children who had limited-English-proficient parents, and who were exposed to English at later ages, were more likely to drop out of high school, be below their age-appropriate grade, and not attend preschool.

After examining standardized test scores, as a function of whether English was the principal language spoken in the childhood home, adolescents who spoke a foreign language at home demonstrated lower vocabulary and paragraph comprehension in English than those who spoke English at home. This effect was present even when controlling for a variety of family characteristics, such as parents' education.

Conclusions

These results suggest that early and frequent exposure to proficient speakers of English is important for the development of (non-English-speaking) immigrant children's English language proficiency, as well as for their long-term educational outcomes. Programs to help children in non-English-speaking families would perhaps help. Even more beneficial would be programs to help immigrants learn English upon their arrival to the U.S.; helping not only the immigrants themselves, but also their children, and eliminating the need for compensatory programs for their children.

—Hoyt Bleakley and Aimee Chin

This cover story is based on the final report for UC LMRI Individual Research Grant #05-05CY-01IG-SD, for which Chris Woodruff, UC San Diego, served as PI. The complete report is available on the UC LMRI web site.

Research Grants Awarded

The UC LMRI Faculty Steering Committee funded one Dissertation Grant from the October 2007 Call for Proposals. This award is for \$15,000 to be completed over one year.

Also, a mid-term funding decision was made to fund an Individual Grant, originally submitted in the February 2007 Call. This one-year award in the amount of \$20,000, was contingent

upon the completion of an earlier grant. Abstracts for both of these newly-funded grants are below.

DISSERTATION GRANT AWARD

A study of language use across classroom cultures in a 50/50 dual immersion program: Building content knowledge

PI: LAURA HILL-BONNET, UC SANTA BARBARA
DISSERTATION GRANT #08-07CY-02DG-SB
FUNDED: OCTOBER 2007

Over the past thirty years, dual language immersion programs have been lauded for their comprehensive approach to content and language learning as well as high academic achievement. However, very little is understood about the day to day interaction that promotes such achievement.

This study examines student and teacher talk in interaction in a "high stakes" content area such as mathematics. It explores how mathematical understanding gets talked about, demonstrated and discursively developed by language minority students across their primary and secondary languages in a dual language immersion program.

This study hopes to inform policy by shedding light on the daily interactions in developmental bilingual instruction by examining "how math gets done bilingually" in dual immersion. I question the notion of bilingual knowledge being an individual construction, and reformulate it as a social construction, thus building a wider conceptual base for the advocacy of learning in two languages.

This research in language and interaction around the development of content knowledge can be applied not only to dual immersion settings but to English Language Development (ELD) programs, Specially Designed Academic Instruction in English (Sheltered Immersion) pedagogy, and Content Based Instruction (CBI) in foreign languages.

INDIVIDUAL GRANT AWARD

Peer Negotiations, Emergent Literacy, and Academic Discourse: Mexican-Heritage Children's Narrative Development, Theory-Building, and Social Alignment in Peer Pretend Play and Peer- Based Story-Telling Practices in Preschool

PI: AMY KYRATZIS, UC SANTA BARBARA
INDIVIDUAL GRANT #07-07CY-07IG-SB
FUNDED: FEBRUARY 2007

This study expands on a previous study (see UC LMRI Research Grant #05-04CY-04IG-SB). The previous study examined how low-income bilingual preschool-aged children of Mexican heritage negotiated with their peers, and how these peer negotiations supported their use of decontextualized language.

The present study continues the examination of how narrative discourse is used by children in peer interactions, and adds to this inquiry the examination of children's explanatory discourse,

another type of academic language. It extends the previous study by introducing less familiar themes and materials into children's play, to examine how these occasion narrative and explanatory discourse.

UC LMRI RESEARCH GRANTS: FINAL REPORT ABSTRACTS

Following are edited abstracts from two recently completed UC LMRI Research Grants. Visit the UC LMRI web site for a searchable database of all UC LMRI-funded grants.

Peer Talk and Emergent Literacy: Mexican-Heritage Children's Narrative Development in Peer Pretend Play and Peer-Based Story-Acting-Out Practices in Preschool

PI: AMY KYRATZIS, *UC SANTA BARBARA*
INDIVIDUAL GRANT #05-04CY-04IG-SB
COMPLETED: JULY 2007

This study examined the influence of children's peer interactions in preschool on the development of their story-telling and negotiation skills. A preschool serving low-income Mexican-American families in California was the site of the study. The present study examined how children's classroom interactions with peers support the use of narrative and decontextualized language skills.

The findings suggest ways in which play with peers is important for developing children's abilities to imagine, talk about non-present events, and frame relevant scenes and activities of their play through talk. A second finding was that the peer-based story-acting out exercise seemed to promote story-telling and to yield quite elaborate stories.

Effects of a Vocabulary-added Instructional Intervention for At-risk English Learners: Is Efficient Reading Instruction more Effective?

PI: ALEXIS FILIPPINI, *UC SANTA BARBARA*
DISSERTATION GRANT #07-06CY-01DG-SB
COMPLETED: SEPTEMBER 2007

The primary aim of this study was to measure effects of two different vocabulary-added reading interventions compared to a phonological awareness and decoding intervention. The second aim was to investigate the relationship between risk and responsiveness in this sample. Results demonstrate that for young, at-risk English learners, increased instructional time spent on vocabulary is not only effective in teaching target vocabulary, but also more efficient. Students in the vocabulary treatments gained in phonological skills comparably to their peers who received 100% phonological awareness and decoding (PAD) instruction.

These findings are important because there are large disparities in vocabulary size between English learners and native speakers, and these disparities increase throughout the school years. By intervening early and introducing expository vocabulary instruction while maintaining critical word-level decoding instruction, this

study illustrates a more efficient model of early reading instruction for this population of at-risk students.

2008 UC LMRI Research Grants Call for Proposals

Deadline: February 1, 2008

For detailed information and grant applications,
visit the UC LMRI web site.

UC LMRI and the California Writing Project Co-sponsor Conference

Writing Without Borders for English Learners
February 24-25, 2008

Keynote speakers: Patricia Gándara and Jamal Abedi

What borders and boundaries impede our English learner students from becoming effective writers? This conference will examine current educational policies for English learners, research studies and recommendations, and best practices in EL writing instruction and assessment.

The conference will be held at Hotel Andalucia, in Santa Barbara, California. For more information visit the California Writing Project's web site: www.californiawritingproject.org or email: jmarlink@californiawritingproject.org.

Publication of UC LMRI Conference Proceedings

Building on UC LMRI's 2007 Annual Conference, which was co-sponsored and hosted by Arizona State University in May 2007, the Institute is happy to announce that a number of the presented papers will be published by Multilingual Matters in *The Education of Language Minority Immigrants in the United States*, co-edited by Terrence G. Wiley, Jin Sook Lee, and Russell W. Rumberger.

UC LMRI's Annual Conference May 2-3, 2008

CALIFORNIA'S PROPOSITION 227: TEN YEARS LATER Sacramento, California

Co-sponsored by Arizona State University's
Mary Lou Fulton College of Education

Registration and Further Information:
http://www.lmri.ucsb.edu/events/08_conf

LMRI News

Faculty Steering Committee: New Members and Updates

The Faculty Steering Committee is the primary intercampus advisory group to the UC LMRI. Members of the Faculty Steering Committee represent each of the ten UC campuses and serve renewable three-year terms.



Robert Ochsner

- **Barbara Merino** (*UC Davis*), has stepped down after completing her most recent term on the committee. Merino, a member since 1998, will be replaced by **Robert Ochsner**, whose term is through 2010.
- **Jamal Abedi** (*UC Merced*) has replaced **Kenji Hakuta**, who served on the committee since 2002. Abedi's term is also through 2010.
- **Kris Gutierrez** (*UCLA*) was reappointed to serve another three-year term on the committee.



Jamal Abedi

Gutierrez, Professor of Education at UCLA, was recently nominated by the National Academy of Sciences to serve as a member of the **U.S. Department of Education's Reading First Advisory Committee**. The Advisory Committee was established by the U.S. Secretary of Education, as authorized under the Elementary and Secondary Education Act, to evaluate state Reading First applications and to review third-year progress reports submitted by states under the Reading First program. For more information, see: <http://www.ed.gov/programs/readingfirst/advisory.html>.



Kris Gutierrez

LMRI Staff: Villaseñor Departs

Briana Villaseñor, UC LMRI's Management Services Officer (MSO) for the past four years, resigned as of December 2007 to spend more time with her newborn son and family. Briana has been vital to UC LMRI's mission, managing the grants competitions and the department budget; coordinating the annual conferences and biteracy forums; and processing travel arrangements and reimbursements for LMRI's Director and Faculty Steering Committee members.

Among her accomplishments, Briana was instrumental in updating the research grants database and converting it into its online searchable format, streamlining the annual reports into their current format, and instituting the online registration process for the annual conferences. She also had a key role in translating for UC LMRI's En Español web page. Finally, Briana was integral to the smooth transition of the additional workload when the California Dropout Research Project was taken on as an affiliate this past year.

As of press time, Briana's replacement at UC LMRI had not yet been named.

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Reports in This Issue

The UC LMRI Newsletter features abstracts from UC LMRI Research Grant/Award recipients and—as they are completed—the abstracts from their Final Grant Reports.

A searchable database of UC LMRI-funded Final Grant Reports can be found on the UC LMRI web site. (Abstracts featured in the newsletter are edited for space considerations.)

Dissemination Grant Reports can be found on the UMI ProQuest Digital Dissertations and Theses Database (<http://www.proquest.com/products.pdf?description=pqdt.shtml>). Dissertations are available free from this site if your library is a Digital Dissertation subscriber.

Back Issues: Newsletters from 1992 to the present are archived on the UC LMRI web site. A limited number of hard copies are available by request.

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