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LANGUAGE SKILL ACQUISITION IN IMMIGRANT SOCIAL NETWORKS: EVIDENCE FROM AUSTRALIA

ABSTRACT

This paper estimates the effect of linguistic enclaves on one of the most important determinants of both the economic and social integration of immigrants: language skills. Using longitudinal survey data, I find that enclave size significantly impedes language acquisition. I confirm the robustness of the results by exploiting an unusually rich set of variables to generate lower bounds on the effect of enclaves. The impact of linguistic concentration is particularly strong for women, younger immigrants, and those in the middle of the ability distribution. Enclaves are unrelated to language course take-up, suggesting that they affect language learning via social interactions among friends and colleagues rather than through formal education.

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