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Linguistic competition and education spending in Spain 1992–2008[☆]

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ABSTRACT

Linguistic competition occurs when two or more linguistic groups vie against each other for resources from the same state. What are the effects of this competition on education spending? In this paper, we examine two competing explanations. On the one hand, there is the claim that increasing levels of ethno-linguistic diversity can decrease education spending. On the other hand, there is also the argument that education spending is higher when there is electoral competition. Using a newly assembled dataset of education spending at the subnational level for Spain (1992–2008), we test these two arguments. We find (1) while ethno-linguistic diversity matters for spending, the effect is not in the expected direction and (2) electoral competition can affect education spending. We also find that the type of education curriculum (monolingual versus bilingual) can moderate the effects of ethno-linguistic diversity. These results shed light on the commonly held belief that diversity stunts education spending.

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1. Introduction

Linguistic competition occurs when two or more linguistic groups vie against each other for resources from the same state. This competition, in turn, can have an effect on education spending. What are these effects? On the one hand, ethno-linguistic diversity is associated with greater levels of preference heterogeneity. This heterogeneity results in suboptimal behaviors, such as the over-emphasis of targeted private goods and the under-provision of core public goods (Easterly & Levine, 1997;

Habyarimana, Humphreys, Posner, & Weinstein, 2009; Posner, 2004). Specifically, representatives have an incentive to “value only the benefits of public goods that accrue to their groups, and discount the benefits for other groups” (Alesina, Baqir, & Easterly, 1999, pp. 1243–1244). If education is a public good, then spending levels should be lower when ethno-linguistic diversity is high.

On the other hand, electoral competition incentivizes governments to prioritize public good spending. When the barriers for entry and exit are low and the costs of participation are low as well (Baum & Lake, 2003; Brown & Hunter, 2004), governments adopt policies that maximize and retain political support. Because education benefits the population at large and not just those in the winning coalition (Bueno de Mesquita, Morrow, Siverson, & Smith, 2003), spending levels are supposedly higher when there is electoral competition.

The above discussion suggests linguistic competition can affect education spending. What is less clear, however, is how it affects education spending. To test the

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Table 1
Autonomous communities and bilingual education systems.

Autonomous community	Bilingual education	Comments
Andalucía	No	
Aragón	No	
Asturias	No	
Balearic Islands	Yes	Catalan (73%); adopted in 1994
Basque Country	Yes	Basque (40%); adopted in 1983
Canary Islands	No	
Cantabria	No	
Castilla-La Mancha	No	
Castilla y León	No	
Catalonia	Yes	Catalan (60%); adopted in 1993
Extremadura	No	
Galicia	Yes	Galician (55.7%); adopted in 1983
La Rioja	No	
Madrid	No	
Murcia	No	
Navarra	Yes	Basque (10%); adopted in 1986
Valencia	Yes	Valencian (40%); adopted in 1983

Source: Jacques Leclerc's database on *L'aménagement linguistique dans le monde*, Spanish entry: <http://www.axl.cefan.ulaval.ca/europe/espagne.htm>. Accessed 16.04.13.

Note: All education systems—monolingual and bilingual—operate in Castilian.

effects, we focus on the seventeen autonomous communities (*comunidades autonomas*) of Spain from 1992 to 2008. Spain is an ideal case. At the subnational level, there is variance in ethnic diversity, electoral competitiveness, and education spending. Moreover, as noted in Table 1, six of the autonomous communities have bilingual education systems. This subnational emphasis allows us to control for many of the larger, national factors. Throughout the period under analysis, the country's electoral institutions have been effectively consistent at both the national and subnational levels, with similar proportional rules being used in elections to the national Congress of Deputies and to each of the seventeen regional legislatures. At the national level, these institutional arrangements produce a stable party system, largely dominated by the Popular Party (PP) and the Spanish Socialist Workers' Party (PSOE). Consequently, variation in education spending at the subnational level is unlikely to be the product of either the different strategic incentives created by variations in electoral rules, which have remained constant, or by the changing national fortunes of major parties, which have changed only at the margins. Instead, these subnational differences must be driven by variables at the subnational level. This is to be theoretically expected for a highly decentralized system that has allowed each regional government to adopt legislation across a range of policy matters—including education—and to administer them. We begin our analysis in 1992—the first year education spending was decentralized from the national government to seven of the autonomous communities. Since 1999, all autonomous communities have had control over their education spending.

2. Ethnic diversity, electoral competition, and education spending

Linguistic competition—when two or more linguistic groups vie against each other for resources from the same state—matters for education spending. Demographically, high levels of ethno-linguistic diversity can discourage inter-linguistic cooperation. The negative effects of ethno-linguistic heterogeneity are well documented: increased likelihood of civil wars (Boix, 2003; Cederman, Wimmer, & Min, 2010); lower qualities of government (Alesina, Devleeschauwer, Easterly, Kurlat, & Wacziarg, 2003); decreased levels of growth (Collier & Gunning, 1999; Easterly, 2001); and less desirable citizenship behaviors (Anderson & Paskeviciute, 2006; Costa & Kahn, 2003; Putnam, 2007). It is not a coincidence that “Banerjee et al. (2005, pp. 639) go as far as to describe [the negative association between ethnic heterogeneity and public goods provision] as ‘one of the most powerful hypotheses in political economy’” (Habyarimana, Humphreys, Posner, & Weinstein, 2007). Posner notes a similar trend, “Thanks largely to [the Easterly and Levine (1997)] article, it is now *de rigueur* for economists to include a measure of ethnic diversity in their cross-country growth regressions.”

There are many possible mechanisms for the observed negative effects of ethno-linguistic diversity. In their book, Habyarimana et al. (2009) identify a list of mechanisms. From this list, they classify the mechanisms into three groups—in their word, “families.” The first family focuses on preference homogeneity. The logic is that ethno-linguistic identity can strongly dictate an individual's preference and behavior. An individual, for example, is more likely to be concerned about another individual's well-being when the former and the latter are from the same ethno-linguistic group. Similarly, two individuals from the same ethno-linguistic group are more likely to value the same processes and outcomes than two individuals from different groups. Finally, these two individuals are more likely to work together because there is an inherent desire to work with other in-group people.

The second family touches upon the relationship of each individual to others in her ethno-linguistic network. When individuals are embedded in the same ethno-linguistic network, they speak the same language. This in turn can better facilitate communication; for instance, there is no need for translation. Aside from efficiency, ethno-linguistic networks minimize the likelihood of misunderstandings due to cultural cues, increase the opportunities that the two individuals would run into each other, and permit the ease for one individual to get in touch with the other should the need arise.

While ethno-linguistic identity is supposed to facilitate favoritism and induce cooperation, the mechanisms are not always positive. The third family has to do with the threat of punishment. When an individual behaves in some way inconsistent with her ethno-linguistic preferences and networks, it is also easier for other co-ethnics to discipline her for the defection.

Regardless of family and mechanism, individuals prioritize the utility of their own ethno-linguistic group over all others. When resources are scarce, there is a strong

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