

Seminari di Economia

Venerdì 17 gennaio 2020

Ore 12:20 – Aula Magna Palazzo Baffi

Facoltà di Scienze Economiche Giuridiche e Politiche - Via S. Ignazio 74,

Antonio Di Paolo

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Linguistic skills and the intergenerational transmission of language

Abstract – We investigate the pattern of intergenerational transmission of language in a bilingual society theoretically and empirically. In bilingual environments, transmission decisions are far from trivial. We provide a simple theory showing that changing the costs of acquiring a second language affects language skills as well as the language parents speak to their children. Empirically, we consider the case of Catalonia, where the two main speech communities, Spanish and Catalan, are of similar sizes, both languages are official, and each one enjoys the protection of a different layer of government. However, whereas all native Catalan speakers are bilingual, only a fraction of native Spanish speakers are fully proficient in Catalan. We exploit the natural experiment generated by a language-in-education reform that changed language learning costs by introducing Catalan–Spanish bilingualism at school, to estimate the causal effects of the exogenous increase in language skills on intergenerational transmission. Results show that the increased proficiency in Catalan among native Spanish speakers induced by the reform augmented their propensity to speak Catalan to their offspring. The causal effect of the policy-induced increase in language proficiency on language transmission is not confounded by spurious trends, potential changes in language identity and linguistically mixed partnership formation.

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