Everybody’s Talkin’ at Me Levels of Majority Language Acquisition by Minority Language Speakers

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Immigrants in economies with a dominant native language exhibit substantial heterogeneities in language acquisition of the majority language. We model partial equilibrium language acquisition as an equilibrium phenomenon. We consider an environment where heterogeneous agents from various minority groups choose whether to acquire a majority language fully, partially, or not at all. Different acquisition decisions confer different communicative benefits and incur different costs. We offer an equilibrium characterization of language acquisition strategies and find that partial acquisition can arise as an equilibrium behavior. We also show that a language equilibrium may exhibit insufficient learning relative to the social optimum. In addition, we provide a local stability analysis of steady state language equilibria. Finally, we discuss econometric implementation of the language acquisition model and establish identification conditions.