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Laboring for Language: Whether English Competency Impacts Workplace Conditions

In 1986, 73% of Californians voted to pass Proposition 63, a state constitutional amendment which declared English the official language of California (Dyste, 1986). Twelve years later, in 1998, 61% of Californians voted to pass Proposition 227, which required that instruction in classrooms be "nearly all" or "overwhelmingly" in English (Gullixson, 1999). Although the English-only curriculum was overturned in 2016 via Proposition 58 (Legislative Analyst's Office, 2016), the relics of California policy and the sentiments that led to easy passage of these propositions are still relevant in present-day California. Understanding the impact of historic attacks on non-English languages launched via policies and politicians such as previous California Senator S.I. Hayakawa (Dyste, 1986) is a worthwhile policy endeavor. If language is playing a role in discriminatory treatment of millions of Californians, it becomes necessary to consider policy that will safeguard against such prejudice or help alleviate English non-proficiency in communities.

As employment and labor are often necessary to provide for individuals and families, this begs the question: Does being non-proficient in English make an individual more likely to be subject to dangerous workplace conditions? More specifically: Does being non-proficient in English make an individual more likely to be subject to an "Establishment Specific Injury" as

documented by OSHA or a Wage and Hour Division violation report as documented by the Department of Labor?

This paper will provide an analysis of the relationship between English competency and labor conditions in California counties, according to 2021 data. I will compile the percentage of individuals in each county that speak English less than "very well." I will also compile the number of "Establishment Specific" OSHA violations that occurred within each county and the number of Wage and Hour Division violation reports that were initiated per county. Following this data compilation, I will perform two independent linear regressions, one to assess the relationship between English non-proficiency and OSHA "Establishment Specific Injury" reports and one to assess the relationship between English non-proficiency and Wage and Hour Division violation reports. Within these regressions I will control for two further independent variables: type of occupation and race. The independent and control variables will be measured as percentages of county residents and the dependent variables will be measured as "per 100 thousand residents" data points. This analysis will provide insight on whether lacking proficiency in English puts certain employees at an elevated risk of injury or manipulation within their workplace. It will guide conversation on the lingering impacts of previous anti-bilingual rhetoric and advise further policy on implementing protections for non-English speakers in the workplace.

Significance of Issue

Assessing the impact of language on workplace safety is highly important across the United States as a whole, but particularly in California. Out of all U.S. states, California has the highest percentage of individuals who speak English less than "very well," as of 2021 estimates (U.S. Census 2021). Additionally, in 2021, the most recent year of data, 27% of California's

population was foreign born, almost double the percentage in the rest of the country and the highest share of any state (Perez, Mejia, and Johnson, 2023). Immigrants are an important population to consider in my analysis. Although many of them attain English proficiency after arriving in the US, there are still a considerable number of individuals who struggle to learn English rapidly. 20% of immigrants in California report speaking English but not well and 10% report speaking no English. Immigrant populations commonly do not speak English at home either, lowering the hours of English practice they receive, especially if they are not enrolled in any English language courses. 45% of California immigrants speak Spanish at home and 9% speak Chinese, including Mandarin and Cantonese (Perez, Mejia, and Johnson, 2023).

Not only are immigrants a large part of the California population, they are also a substantive element of the California labor force. According to an American Immigration Council analysis of the U.S. Census Bureau's 2018 American Community Survey, there were 6.6 million immigrant workers in California, comprising 33% of the labor force. The immigrant share of industry workers for various California industries is relatively high: they make up 63% of the "Agriculture, Forestry, Fishing, and Hunting" industry, 45% of the "Manufacturing" industry, and 41% of the "Administrative and Support; Waste Management; and Remediation Services" industry, for example (American Immigration Council, 2020).

It is then significant to assess if there are any resources made available to laborers who feel more comfortable speaking a non-English language. The UCLA Labor Center conducted a review of educational resources developed by the California Labor and Workforce Development Agency and its sub-agencies, the Agricultural Labor Relations Board, Employment and Development Department, and the Department of Industrial Relations. The center specifically evaluated resources detailing workers' rights, unfair labor practices, unpaid wage recovery, and

reporting employer retaliation, among other topics. Interestingly, reviewers found that 96% of the educational resources are translated into Spanish, but none of the materials are translated into indigenous Mexican languages or considerate of oral-based indigenous languages (Rivera-Salgado et. al. 2018). This leaves a gap for a subset of workers who do not speak Spanish. The UCLA Labor Center further recommends that to improve California Labor and Workforce Development Agency resources, the texts should be "translated for comprehension." This includes facets such as having translators understand the workers' reading comprehension level and checking translated work with a native speaker from the agency and a native-speaking worker (Rivera-Salggado et. al 2018). These recommendations highlight that current translation resources are imperfect, a factor that may impact marginalization of non-English speaking workers; however, it is also a guide for policymakers and agency heads to improve resources being made available to California workers.

Background

Prior research has highlighted the barrier language non-proficiency plays in laborers or immigrants obtaining employment, specifically in European countries. According to the Italian Economic Journal, there is an hourly wage gap of more than 30% between immigrants with good proficiency in the Italian language compared to those with weak proficiency, irrespective of gender (Pieroni et al. 2022). This is an observation that is preceded by various similar findings across Europe: Dustmann and Fabbri (2003) and Gonzalez (2010) found negative effects of lack of host country language skills on employment rates. Yao and van Ours (2015) further found that language problems affect wages. These findings all point to a negative impact of host language non-proficiency on finding high-paying employment, especially for migrants.

There has also been research conducted on the impact of language training and labor market programs, again with a focus on Europe. Lang (2022) analyzed the effects of language training programs for professional purposes on the employment opportunities of participants in Germany. By using an instrumental variable approach and exploiting differences in lagged local training intensities, Lang was able to find that the employment probability of immigrants who were unemployed in 2014 and participated in the program had increased by more than nine percentage points as a result of language training. A meta-analysis of 33 empirical studies on Active Labor Market Programs, government programs that intervene in the labor market to help the unemployed and underemployed find work, across Europe, also found that wage subsidies are a strategy that can be confidently recommended to European policymakers (Butschek and Walter, 2014).

In assessing and adding on to prior research, it is important to note that research conducted in Europe is not directly comparable to the US or California, due to differing labor laws, political climates, and population demographics. However the findings still provide indications as to how language proficiency can impact employment: those non-proficient in host country languages find it difficult to obtain labor and earn the same as those with language proficiency. Finally, it leaves us with two research gaps to address: can these findings be replicable in the US and US states and do these negative impacts of language non-proficiency further translate into poorer working conditions.

Prior California policy surrounding the topic of language has been primarily focused on determining the role of English in communities and educational systems. In 1988, California residents passed Proposition 63 with a 73% majority, which amended the state constitution to declare English the official language of California and charged the legislature and state officials

with the preservation and enhancement of English as the common language of the state (MacKaye, 1990). This proposition came at a politically charged moment in US and California history, where prevalent individuals such as California Senator Hayawaka were making cautionary statements about the dividing force of bilingual education and multilingual ballots (Crawford, 1992).

California residents then passed Proposition 227 with a 61% majority, a statute which overturned Governor Ronald Reagan's 1967 mandate that eliminated the state's English-only instruction requirement and allowed bilingual education in California schools (Gullixson, 1999). This highlighted the rhetoric of the time and the conception that non-English education was dangerous and should be barred. Proposition 227 stood until 2016, with the passage of Proposition 58, which passed with a 73% majority and repealed the English-only immersion requirement by Proposition 227. Proposition 58 additionally required districts to talk to community members about their English learner programs and listen to parental demands (Legislative Analyst's Office, 2016). The role of past English language policy is two-fold. Primarily, it has established harmful rhetoric against non-English speaking communities for decades and has established the use of non-English language as a dividing force. Secondly, with the reversal of English-only education, it becomes necessary for policymakers to strike a balance between uplifting linguistic diversity and providing resources for English language classes as needed.

Theory and Argument

My research fronts the question of how county-wide English non-proficiency impacts workplace conditions in California counties. Specifically, it questions how higher rates of non-proficiency affect workplace injuries and wage violation reports. Conceptually, I propose

that higher percentages of non-proficiency in English lead to a higher likelihood of poor working conditions in California counties.

The causal mechanism I propose between my primary independent variable, percentage of individuals who speak English less than "very well" per county, and my dependent variables is: employers feel more comfortable underpaying and endangering their employees when said employees do not speak English well. The way this manifests is two-fold. Firstly, lack of English language knowledge places English non-proficient employees in positions of exploitable vulnerability. There are gaps in workplace resources, for example, that may lead to lower quality workplace development for English non-proficient workers. Via the UCLA Labor Center's report on California Labor and Workforce Development Agency resources, we can tell that various documents can be improved in clarity, visual accessibility, and comprehensive translation (Rivera-Salgado et al. 2018). This fact does provide a challenge to my hypothesis, as it is evident that non-understanding of labor rights may present a phenomenon of under-reporting labor violations. However, it can also contribute to my established causal mechanism. Precisely, I have chosen to assess injuries to mitigate some of these concerns. Injuries are more visibly evident and oftentimes far more directly life-threatening, forcing them to be logged regardless of legal or linguistic knowledge. Further, workforce violations can be reported by third party complainants, on both a federal and state level. The Department of Labor, for example, specifically accepts third party complaints for Wage and Hour Division violation reports (Department of Labor, 2023). This means if English non-proficiency and its corresponding vulnerability is leading to higher rates of violations, those violations do not have to be directly reported by the English non-proficient individual.

Secondly, there are xenophobic and racist sentiments corresponding with non-English speaking individuals which may empower employers to place them in harm's way. This may be a result of the historic English-only educational push. It may also stem from late 1900s lobbying groups such as U.S. English, who had close ties to the anti-immigrant organization Federation for American Immigration Reform (FAIR) and were partly financed by the Pioneer Fund, which promoted the use of eugenics (Hartman, 2005).

My operational hypothesis, given this causal mechanism, is that as the percentage of individuals in a California county that speak English less than "very well" increases, the number of OSHA "Establishment Specific Injury" reports and Wage and Hour Division compliance violations in a county will also increase. I believe this hypothesis will hold despite concerns of under-reporting by non-proficient individuals. To avoid repetition, I will clarify that independent and control variables were measured as percentages of county residents and dependent variables were analyzed as "per 100 thousand residents" statistics. All of the data is based on 2021 datasets.[1]

My independent variable is the number of individuals within a county that speak English less than "very well" as demarcated by Census dataset S0501. There are various other independent variables that I use as control variables. The first is type of occupation. I observe the number of individuals within the following occupations: "Service occupations," "Natural resources, construction, and maintenance occupations," and "Production, transportation, and material moving occupations."[2] I also control for race, by assessing the percentage of a county that is hispanic or non-white, again via Census dataset S0501. I assess two dependent variables:

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[1] The decision to use 2021 datasets stems from the limitations of the U.S. Census Bureau dataset S0501, which I used to evaluate rates of county English non-proficiency. The last estimates for the dataset are from 2021.
[2] Occupational categorizations are based on the U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics's 2018 Standard Occupational Code. These three categories were selected on the basis of likelihood of injury or wage violation reports.

the number of "Establishment Specific Injury" reports, as collected by the Occupational Safety and Health Administration (OSHA) and the number of Wage and Hour Division compliance violation reports, as collected by the Department of Labor.
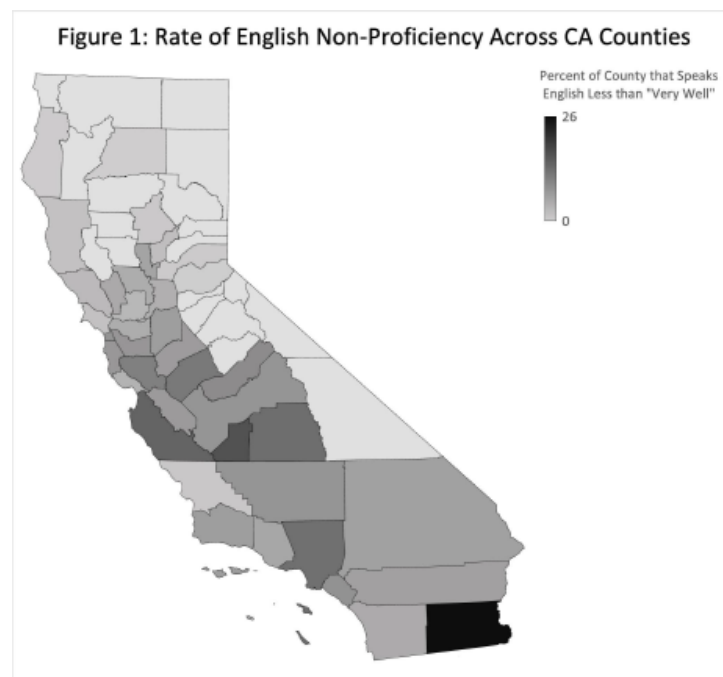
Despite controlling for various mitigating factors, there are alternate hypotheses or explanations which still exist. For one, language may have an impact on the rate of labor violations and reports due to its proximity to ethnicity. The two most common language sets spoken at home in California in 2021 other than English are Spanish and Asian and Pacific Island languages (U.S. Census Bureau, 2021). This corresponds with the fact that the top countries of origin for immigrants in California, according to 2018 data, are Mexico, the Philippines, China, India, and Vietnam (American Immigration Council, 2020). Even though these datasets do not perfectly align they conjoin to paint a possible alternate hypothesis: the higher the percentage of individuals with a Hispanic or Asian heritage, the higher likelihood of poor working conditions in California counties. Perhaps it is not the language that is causing workplace manipulation and misconduct, but the ethnicity or nationality of the individual. If certain ethnic communities are subject to workplace abuse at a higher rate and those same communities have higher rates of English non-proficiency, we will still observe California counties with lower English competency having higher workplace misconduct, as detailed by OSHA and DOL data. This would lead to a misattribution of cause to language when it is actually ethnicity and nationality; therefore, it is a factor to highly consider and an alternate explanation for the phenomenon at hand.

Research Design and Data

In order to evaluate the relationship between English proficiency and workplace conditions, I performed a large-n, cross-sectional study of the 39 California counties for which

English language data was available in 2021. The counties that data was not collected for tended to be smaller California counties, often with a population of less than 50,000. Within my study, I found and analyzed correlations coefficients and performed two independent multivariate linear regressions.

As stated, the research used was 2021 findings as that is the latest collection of data by the American Community Survey. More specifically, I utilized the ACS's 5-year estimates for U.S. Census dataset S0501 which looks at characteristics of both the native and foreign-born populations in a geographic area. I acknowledge that using 2021 data means some of my findings may be skewed by the reality of the Covid-19 pandemic. According to the Center on Budget and Policy Priorities's calculations of Bureau of Labor Statistics data, the majority of jobs lost in the crisis were in industries that pay low average wages (CBPP, 2022). These variations in industry unemployment rates play a factor in who is subject to workplace abuse and at what rate. Ideally, 2021 findings would be compared to 2022 or 2023 findings, when those are made available, to assess the scale of impact of the Covid-19 pandemic.

Figure 1: Rate of English Non-Proficiency Across CA Counties

Percent of County that Speaks English Less than "Very Well"

26

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The independent variable I considered was the rate of English non-proficiency per California county. The distribution of this variable across California can be seen in the above **Figure 1**. This was measured via the percentage of individuals who speak English less than "very well" in a county according to Census dataset S0501. This is collected as part of the American Community Survey, the annual demographics survey conducted by the U.S. Census Bureau. As I am analyzing data about English proficiency, it is important to note the American Community Survey does have a language assistance program in place designed to assist sample households with limited English proficiency in completing the ACS interview. They provide translated instruments and other survey materials, bilingual interviewers, and multiple language support by telephone (U.S. Census Bureau, 2022).

Further independent variables I considered as controls were type of occupation and race. These were both measured as percentages of county residents, via Census dataset S0501 from which English non-proficiency data also stems. The values for 'type of occupation' included were the percentage of a county that worked in "Service occupations," "Natural resources, construction, and maintenance occupations," " and "Production, transportation, and material moving occupations." I conjectured that these three occupational categories would be most prone to hazardous or manipulative workplace conditions due to the fact that industries, such as "Agriculture," "Construction," "Food Services," "Retail," and "Apparel Manufacturing" are listed as "Low Wage, High Violation Industries" by the Department of Labor (Department of Labor, 2022). These various industrial categories fit within the three occupational groupings I focused on.

In an effort to simplify the quantity of control variables being considered, I noted race as a binary category, with one variable being percentage of white, non-hispanic individuals in a

county and the other being percentage of hispanic or non-white individuals in a county. While I

tested the impact of both these variables, I decided on using the percentage of hispanic or

non-white individuals in a county as my racial control variable. This is related to the fact that

prejudices towards non-white individuals may lead to language-independent discrimination and

biases that culminate in poorer working conditions, a consideration I hoped to account for.

The two dependent variables I considered in my analysis were establishment specific

injuries and wage compliance violation reports. Both variables were analyzed as "per 100

thousand county residents" datapoints. They could alternatively be assessed as "per 100

businesses" values. This assessment would likely utilize Census datasets on County Business

Patterns in 2021, which list the number of establishments per county (ECNSVY Business

Patterns County Business Patterns, 2021). I opted against using this methodology however, as

that would require involving an additional dataset with a different collection method, the

Business Register (U.S. Census Bureau Business Register, 2023). On the other hand, evaluating

per a certain number of county residents allowed me to extrapolate solely from the American

Community Survey. However, additional work that makes use of "per 100 businesses" data

points would be helpful and supplementary in ensuring research results are consistent.

Figure 2: CA County Number of Injuries Per 100k
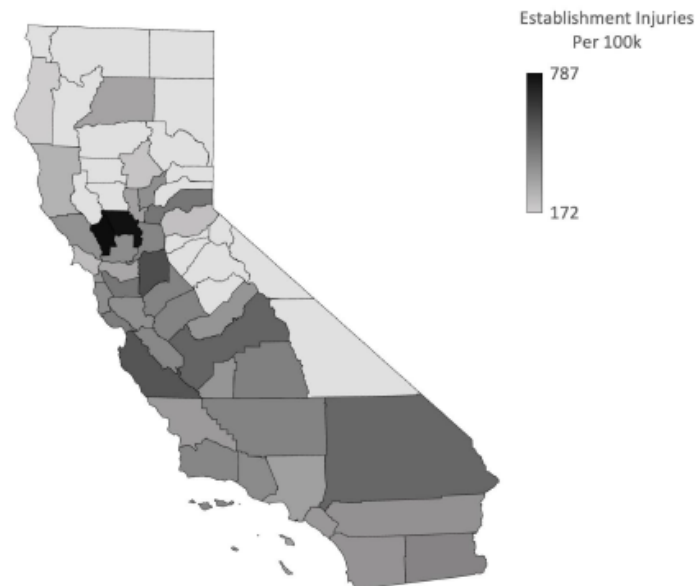
I computed establishment specific injury numbers using OSHA's Establishment Specific Injury and Illness Data from 2021. The distribution of injuries across California counties is depicted in **Figure 2**. It is important to note that OSHA only collects data from a portion of all private sector establishments in the US for this dataset. They collect that data via their Injury Tracking Application, which has certain requirements. Importantly, if an establishment's peak employment during the previous calendar year was 19 or fewer, they do not have to electronically report their information to OSHA (OSHA Injury Tracking Application, 2023). This means that the establishment specific injuries I analyzed, while comprehensive at 27,626 data points, are not wholly representative of all California employers and establishments. I gathered the raw injury reports that were available and compiled them to observe how many injuries occured per California county per 100 thousand residents in 2021.

I measured wage compliance violation reports via the Wage and Hour Compliance Action Data dataset collected by the Department of Labor quarterly (U.S. Department of Labor Data Enforcement, 2023). While the dataset also includes violation counts, I focused simply on the number of reports filed to the Wage and Hour Division about potential compliance violations. This is in part a precautionary measure against false-negatives that may arise from expedited investigations, as alleged by firms representing businesses, such as Seyfarth (Hecker and Young, 2021). As Wage and Hour compliance violation reports are relatively limited, with only 270 California data points to observe from 2021, even a few instances of wrongful "no violation" findings would greatly skew overall findings. Ultimately, this culminated in my decision to use report numbers instead. Therefore, with this dependent variable, I am assessing whether the independent and control variables of English non-proficiency, type of occupation, and race have an impact on probability to file a wage compliance violation report, not probability to be subject

to a violation directly. A final caveat is that there were various California counties with zero wage compliance violation reports in 2021. This lack of present data has the potential to skew findings and should be taken into consideration when assessing results.

Results and Analysis

The results of running correlation coefficients and two multilinear linear regressions yielded insight about the degree of relation between English competency and workplace conditions and provided slight support for my hypothesis. Additionally, they revealed the impact of control variables, with a specific focus on type of occupation. My initial hypothesis that an increase in the percentage of county English non-proficiency would lead to an increase in establishment injuries and wage compliance violation reports was supported specifically by the correlation between English non-proficiency and both injuries and wage violation reports. Alternatively, the regression analysis controlling for occupation and race did not find statistical significance for English non-proficiency in relation to injuries or wage violation reports.

The r value found between non-proficiency and workplace injuries was 0.22. As can also be seen in **Figure 3**, this indicates that there is a weak positive correlation between the two variables. The r value between non-proficiency and wage compliance violation reports was 0.29. Again, this indicates that, while the correlation between non-proficiency and wage violation reports is slightly stronger, there is a generally weak positive correlation that exists between the two variables. This is visualized via the line of best fit demarcated in **Figure 4**. In both plots, it becomes evident that there are various outliers that must be noted in my analysis of findings. In **Figure 3**, both Napa and Yolo counties have establishment injury numbers that are far greater than expected given their respective rates of English non-proficiency. I hypothesize that this is the result of industrial and occupational priorities in both counties. The correlatory plots above

do not account or control for type of occupation in the way my linear regressions do. Therefore it is likely that the primarily agricultural nature of both Yolo County (Yolo County, 2023) and Napa County (Employment Development Department, 2023) had an impact on the number of establishment injuries observed per 100 thousand residents.

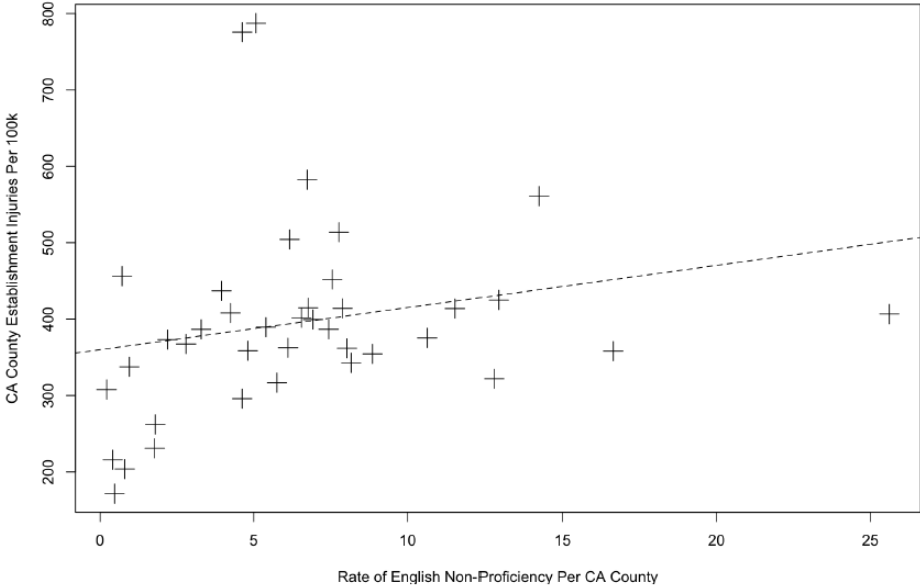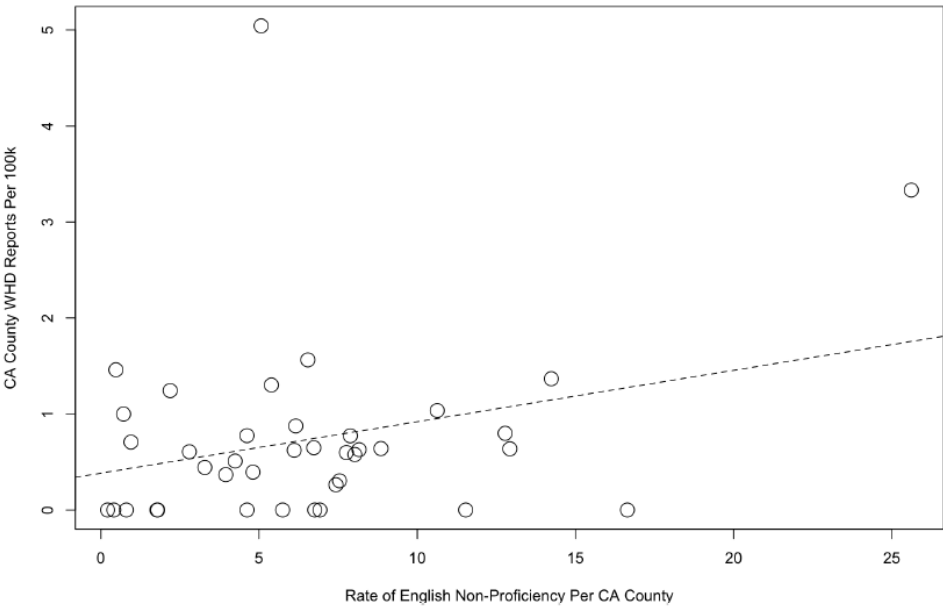Figure 3: Relationship between English non-proficiency and workplace injuries without controls

Figure 4: Relationship between English non-proficiency and wage violation reports without controls

Additionally, Napa County is once again an outlier in **Figure 4**, meaning there are more wage violation reports being filed in Napa than expected relative to its English non-proficiency percentage. Once again, I hypothesize that this is attributable to Napa's agricultural nature. However, it is intriguing that Yolo does not appear to be an outlier in this plot. This could be a result of the limited number of wage violation reports available to observe. A final outlier worth noting is Imperial County, which has a considerably higher English non-proficiency percentage than all other counties analyzed. I hypothesize that this is a result of geographic proximity to Mexico, resulting in 85.1% of residents being of Hispanic or Latino descent and 74.9% of residents speaking a non-English language at home (U.S. Census Bureau, 2021). While I chose to assess the landscape of California counties as a whole, including Imperial county, it is still crucial to realize that the high non-proficiency value has an impact on the correlations being observed.

When controlling for type of occupation and race in my regressions, I did not find statistically significant results to support my hypothesis regarding the role of English non-proficiency. This finding held true across both multivariate linear regressions for establishment specific injuries and wage compliance violation reports respectively. The outputs for the regressions can be seen in the coefficient plots in **Figure 5** and **Figure 6**. The regression coefficient between non-proficiency and WHD violation reports was 0.0077, as seen in **Figure 5,** indicating an incredibly slight positive relationship between the two variables, when controlling for type of occupation and race. However, the p-value was: $p\text{-value} < 0.90$, well above the threshold of $p\text{-value} < 0.05$, which marks statistical significance. Additionally, the standard error is substantive, meaning there is room for variation in the relationship between English non-proficiency and wage violation reports. Interestingly, in this coefficient plot it becomes

apparent that working a service occupation has a strong positive relationship with WHD

violation report rates. In fact, when I analyzed the p-value of the service occupation variable, it

was: p-value<0.008, indicating a decidedly significant relationship. In other words, as the

percentage of county residents in a service occupation increases, the number of wage compliance

violation reports made to the Wage and Hour Division also increases.

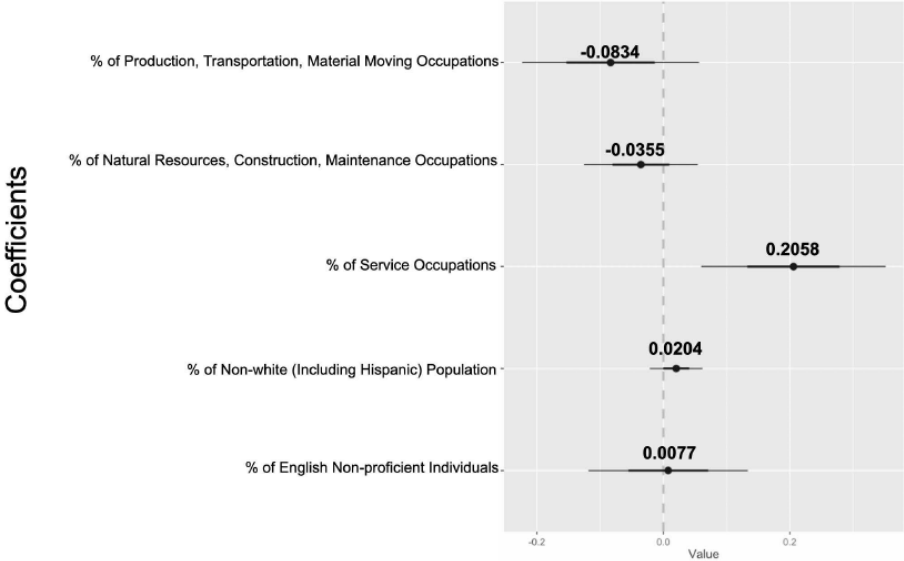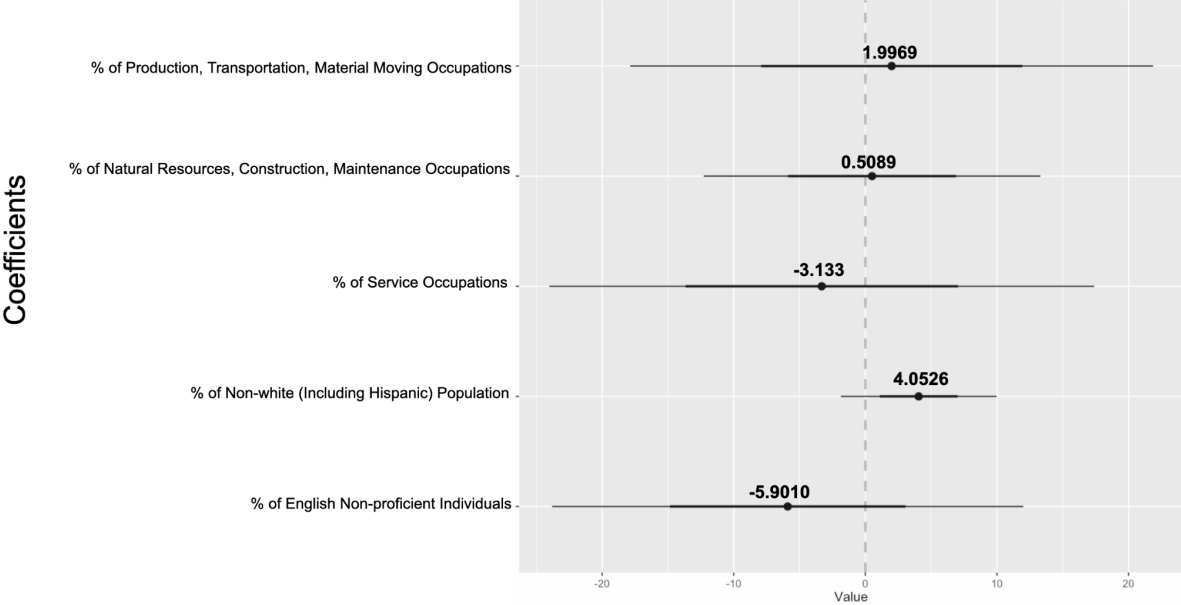Figure 5: Coefficient Plot of WHD Violation Reports

Figure 6: Coefficient Plot of Establishment Injuries

The coefficient between non-proficiency and establishment specific injuries was interestingly -5.9010, implying a negative relationship between the variables when controlling for type of occupation and race. However, these results carry little statistical significance due to obtaining a p-value of: p-value<0.52. Additionally, there is once again a large standard error, leaving uncertainty about the nature of the relationship between the variables. With establishment injuries, we do not see any of the independent variables holding statistical significance. Overall, neither regression test revealed the presence of a relationship between English non-proficiency and establishment injuries or wage violation reports, when controlling for type of occupation and race. The one statistically significant finding was a relationship between service occupations and wage violation reports. While my correlation coefficients provided slight support for my hypothesis, the regressions did not provide any support.

My findings generally suggest that English competency may have a slight impact on workplace conditions, as suggested by weak positive correlations between English non-proficiency and establishment injuries and wage violation reports. However, this relationship seems to be in tandem with factors such as race and type of occupation. My hypothesis that under-reporting by English non-proficient individuals would not have a significant impact on findings due to the use of injury statistics and presence of third party reporters may also be inaccurate and play a factor in findings being non-significant. Finally, my inability to accurately account for undocumented populations plays a significant factor in my findings. Employers often use the threat of immigration enforcement to create an atmosphere of coercion and exploitation in which undocumented workers are reluctant to report abusive employer practices (Andrea Garcia Quijano). Had data been present on this phenomenon, the statistical findings would likely have been considerably different.

Implications and Policy Suggestions

As the state with the largest percentage of English non-proficient individuals (U.S. Census, 2021), it is vital for California to ensure a safe work environment for all individuals regardless of linguistic capability. Given the confounding impacts of under-reporting and inability to account for undocumented populations, even the finding of a slight correlation between English non-proficiency and establishment specific injuries and wage violation reports could be concerning. This concern should be targeted in a variety of ways, including better translated workplace resources, more labor and wage protections across all industries, and specific English language educational resources.

Building on the UCLA Labor Center's assessment of California Labor and Workforce Development Agency training resources, it is evident that LWDA resources, such as pamphlets on "Agricultural Workers' Rights," "Remedies and Settlements," and "What happens when a union wins an election?" need updating in terms of visual aids and translations. These resources explicitly guide workers on their rights within the workforce and should be as wholly understood as possible to avoid exploitation and to remedy the under-reporting stemming from ignorance of labor laws. The Labor Center recommends checking materials with native speakers from the LWDA, understanding workers' reading comprehension levels, increasing visual accessibility through infographics and images, and following specific formats to communicate the topic and purpose of material. The LWDA itself has recommended establishing with its sub-agencies that there is a new organizational structure in which developing culturally competent educational materials is a priority. It has also encouraged facilitating relationships with community and labor-advocacy groups that work with immigrant and indigenous populations (Rivera-Salgado et al. 2018).

In terms of educational resources, it is also critical to make learning English an availability to English non-proficient communities. While retaining native language remains important, giving families and workers the option to gain English knowledge can be useful in giving them the power to advocate for themselves. In 2015, for example, there was a shortage of early childhood education and care workers that was predicted to worsen in coming years (Pompa et al, 2017). This meant that there were not enough workers who could meet the needs of diverse children and families, depriving children under 5 who were dual language learners from getting adequate language learning. The passage of policy such as the federal *Every Student Succeeds Act* in 2015 was meant to address some of these rising issues by allowing K-12 funding to be used to serve children under age 5 (Pompa et al, 2017). The continuation of such policy priorities could allow younger children in non-English speaking homes to acquire English language knowledge early.

California community colleges also play an important role in getting California adults to improve their English proficiency. While many colleges offer English as a Second Language courses, there is improvement to be made here as well. In 2019, most degree-seeking ESL students were not successfully completing transfer-level English and nearly half of colleges offered no more than five levels of ESL (Rodriguez et al, 2019). AB 705 in California in 2021 reformed ESL placement by moving away from heavy reliance on standardized assessment tests and these changes are expanding opportunities for students to meaningfully engage with the placement process (Rodriguez et al, 2022). However, there is still much work to be done in this sector. Individuals learning English require guidance and information from respective Chancellor's Offices. Additionally, more data is needed on English learners in community

colleges in order to implement programs to make their college experiences more equitable (Rodriguez et al, 2022).

Ultimately, it is important to ensure English non-proficient individuals and families are given the option, not the mandate, to grow their English knowledge, be it by providing linguistically informed education to children or broadening opportunities for English learners in community colleges. For English non-proficient individuals already in the workforce, it is important that they receive educational materials from California labor agencies that are understandable, simple, and correctly translated. Finally, it is important to note that all these recommendations are in tandem with continuing labor protections intended to protect workers in various California industries, such as garment workers, warehouse workers, and agricultural workers (Department of Industrial Relations, 2023).

Conclusion

Linguistic racism occurs when acts of racism are perpetuated against individuals on the basis of their language use (Brooks, 2021). In California, linguistic racism has a historic presence, housing various movements to have English-only signs in cities like Monterey Park and being home to U.S. Senators who headed the English-only lobbying front in the 1990s (Crawford, 1992). The lasting effects of such racism could have a significant impact on the nearly 3 million California residents who do not speak English "very well" according to the U.S. Census Bureau. With a focus on how language-based discrimination could impact labor conditions, I questioned whether English language proficiency impacts likelihood of workplace injuries or wage violation reports. I hypothesized that, based on California county data from 2021, the higher the percentage of English non-proficiency in a California county, the higher the rate of injuries and violation reports would be. To test this I examined 39 California counties

where English language data was available. I analyzed county percentages of individuals who speak English less than "very well" as my independent variable and the California Establishment Specific Injuries dataset and the Wage and Hour Compliance Action Data dataset as my dependent variables. I further controlled for type of occupation and race and proceeded to run correlations and two multivariate linear regressions.

The findings I uncovered revealed that there is a weak positive correlation between English non-proficiency and both injuries and wage violation reports. The regressions, however, did not yield any statistically significant results on the impact of English non-proficiency. Instead, I found a statistically significant relationship between county-wide percentages of those occupied in service occupations and wage violation reports. The slight support I did find for my hypothesis, despite barriers such as under-reporting and limited data on wage reports and undocumented populations, implies that there need to be more resources and protections made available to California's English non-proficient individuals. The Labor and Workforce Development Agency should continue compiling and updating their resources to be better fit for the linguistically diverse landscape of the state. Further, California institutions like preschools and community colleges should continue to ensure that their classrooms are adequately equipped and staffed to meet the needs of English language learners. In this way, policy can protect against potential linguistic racism in the state and strengthen overall workplace understanding of individual and collective labor rights.

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