



CLACLS

Center for Latin American, Caribbean & Latino Studies

IS SPANISH-ENGLISH BILINGUALISM TRULY AN ECONOMIC BENEFIT IN NEW YORK?

Lionel Chan

Ph.D. Candidate in Linguistics

Center for Latin American,
Caribbean & Latino Studies

Graduate Center
City University of New York
365 Fifth Avenue
Room 5419
New York, New York 10016

212-817-8438

clacsl@gc.cuny.edu

<http://web.gc.cuny.edu/lastudies>



The Center for Latin American, Caribbean and Latino Studies is a research institute that works for the advancement of the study of Latin America, the Caribbean, and Latinos in the United States in the doctoral programs at the CUNY Graduate Center. One of its major priorities is to provide funding and research opportunities to Latino students at the Ph.D. level.

The Center established and helps administer an interdisciplinary specialization in Latin American, Caribbean and Latino Studies in the Masters of Arts in Liberal Studies program.

The Latino Data Project was developed with the goal of making information available on the dynamically growing Latino population of the United States and especially New York City through the analysis of extant data available from a variety of sources such as the U.S. Census Bureau, the National Institute for Health, the Bureau of Labor Statistics, and state and local-level data sources.

All Latino Data Project reports are available at <http://web.gc.cuny.edu/lastudies/>

For additional information you may contact the Center at 212-817-8438 or by e-mail at clacls@gc.cuny.edu.

Staff:

Laird W. Bergad, Distinguished Professor, Latin American and Puerto Rican Studies,
Lehman College, Ph.D. Program in History, Executive Director, CLACLS

Teresita Levy, Assistant Professor, Latin American and Puerto Rican Studies,
Lehman College, Associate Director

Laura Limonic, Administrative Director

Marcela González, Research Associate

Lawrence Capello, Research Associate

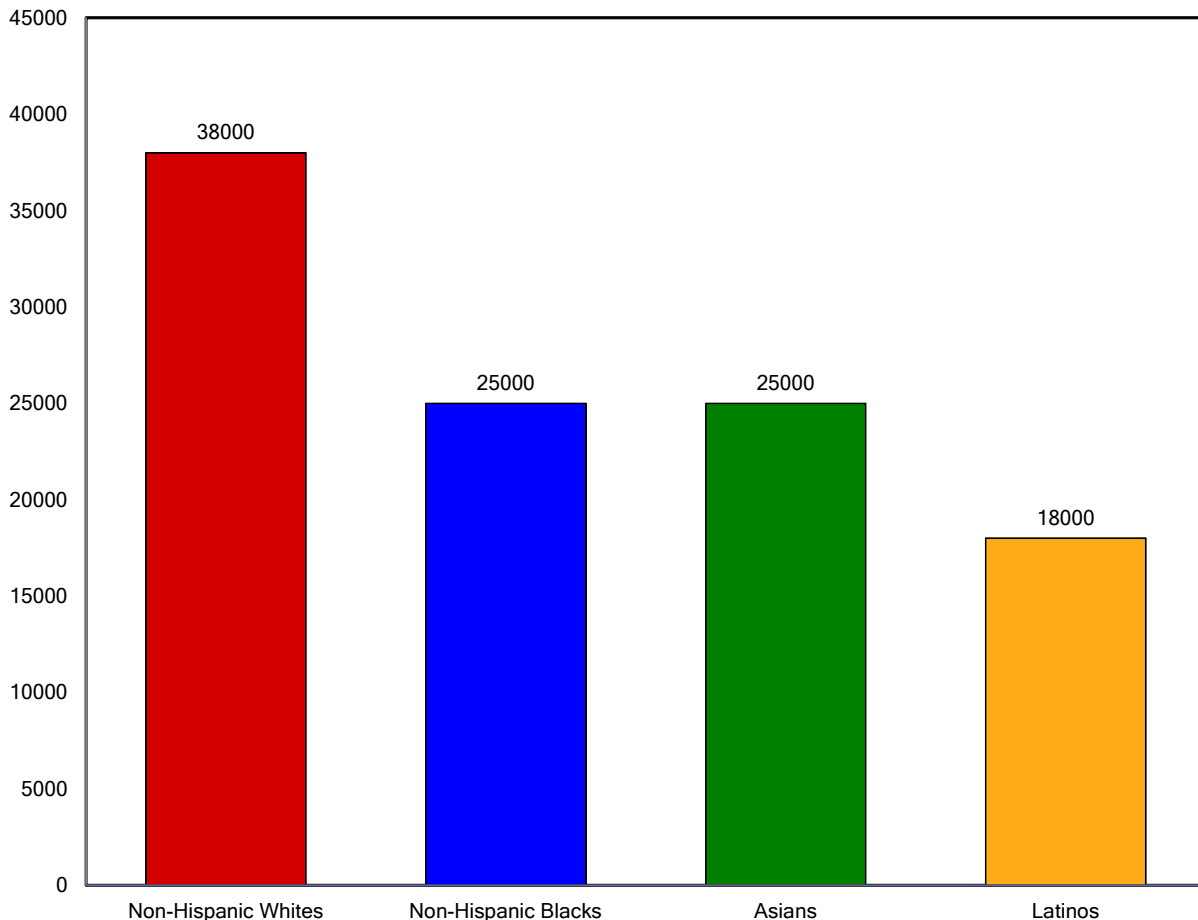
Justine Calcagno, Quantitative Research Associate

Copyright © 2012
Center for Latin American, Caribbean and Latino Studies
Room 5419
Graduate Center
City University of New York
365 Fifth Avenue
New York, New York 10016
212-817-8438
clacls@gc.cuny.edu
<http://web.gc.cuny.edu/lastudies>

Proponents of additive bilingualism in the United States often claim that maintenance of a native/home language in addition to learning English results in many benefits, one of which is economic (Tse, 2001). Under this assumption, bilingual speakers have more career opportunities and possibly higher earning-potential than their monolingual English-speaking counterparts. This report explores if there is truly a trend in income levels for Latinos who speak both English and Spanish compared to those of Latinos who speak English only. For the purposes of this report, Latinos who speak both Spanish and English are referred to as “bilingual Latinos”, while Latinos who speak English only are “monolingual Latinos”. Using the 2009 American Community Survey census data, two fundamental variables in this investigation included “Speaks English” and “Language Spoken at Home”. From these variables, “bilingual Latinos” in this report are defined as those who self-report speaking Spanish at home and rating their English ability as “well” or “very well,” while “monolingual Latinos” are those who self-report speaking “English only”. Another primary variable used in this investigation is “Total Personal Income.”

Among the major racial and ethnic groups in New York City, Latinos earned on average, the lowest income levels when compared to other ethnic and racial groups (Non-Hispanic Whites, Non-Hispanic Blacks and Asians). Specifically, the median total personal income for Latinos was \$18,000 (see Figure 1).

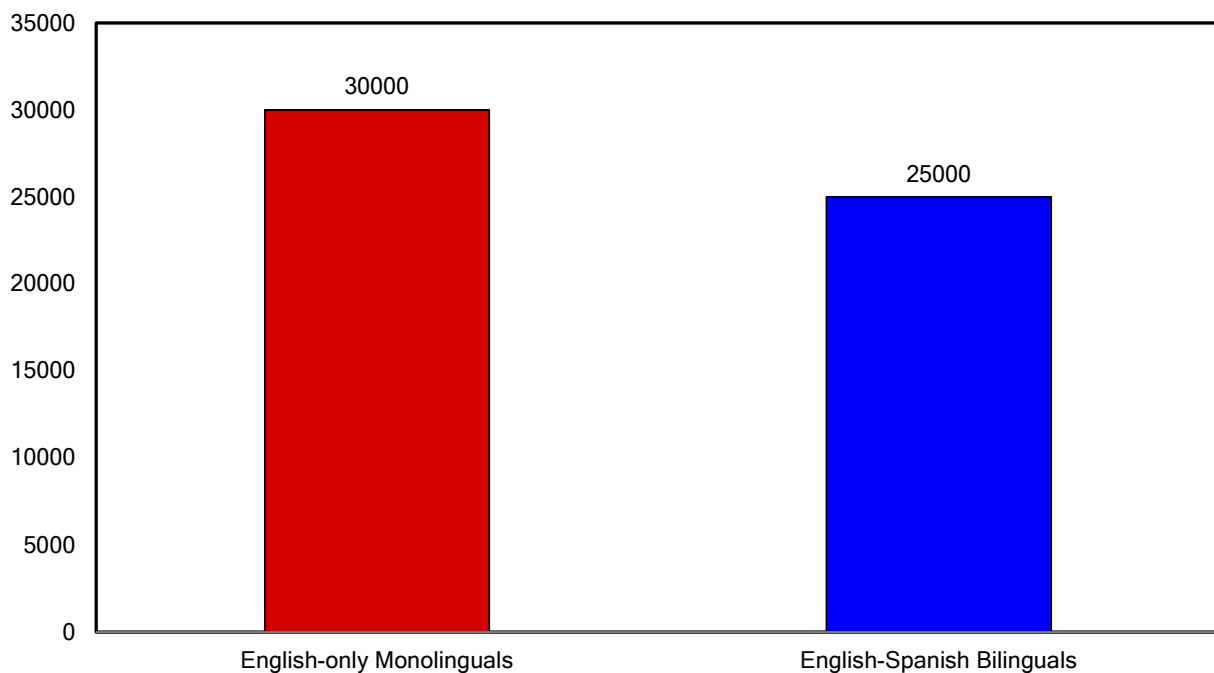
Figure 1
Median Personal Income by Race/Ethnicity (in US\$), 2009



Upon closer examination, the comparison is striking when observing that Latinos earned less in total personal income than the highest earning group (Non-Hispanic Whites) with a median difference of \$20,000.

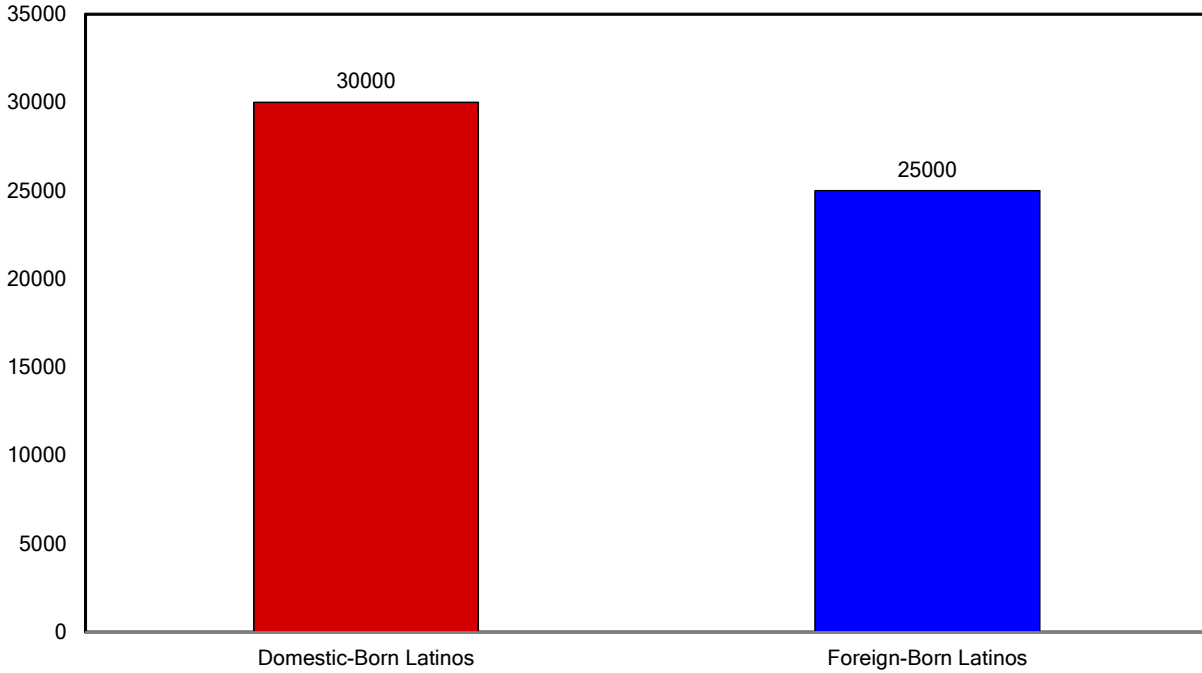
When taking into account language variables to analyze the income levels of Latinos, one notices a minor difference between bilingual Latinos and monolingual Latinos (see Figure 2). Overall, bilingual Latinos appear to have had an advantage over monolingual Latinos in terms of median total personal income: \$30,000 and \$25,000, respectively. Under this broad interpretation and without considering other variables, bilingual Latinos enjoy an economic advantage.

Figure 2
Median Income by Language, 2009



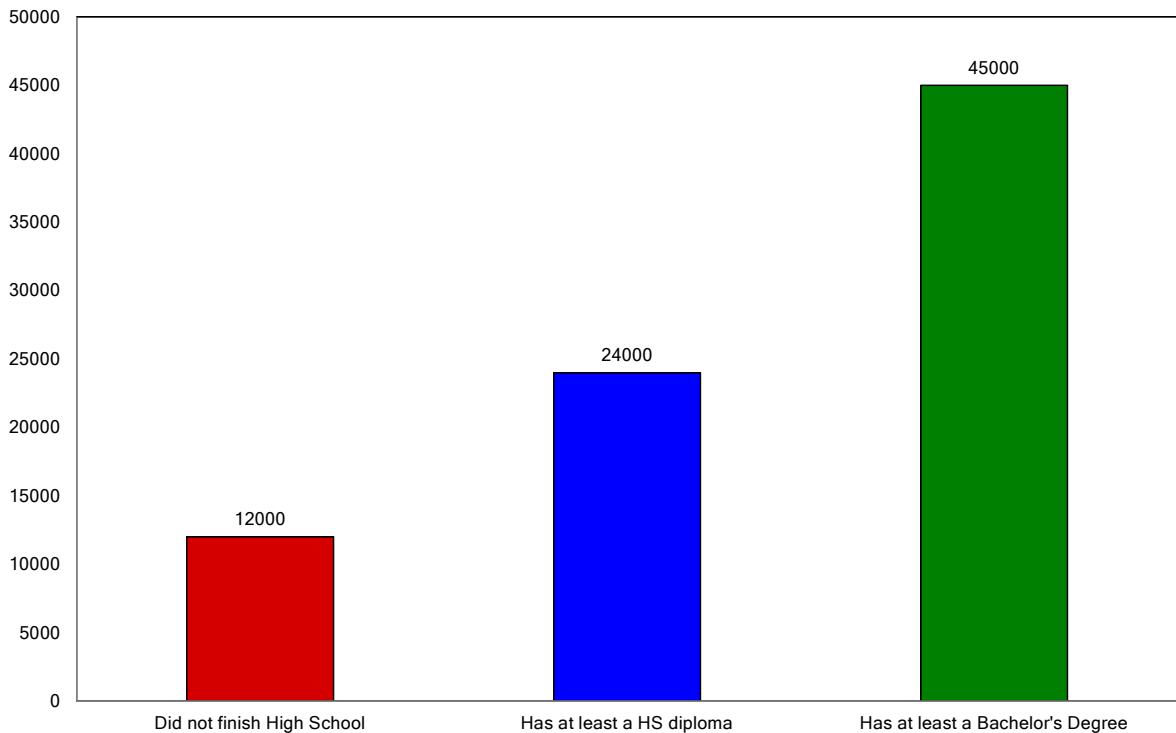
Incorporating other variables such as place of birth and educational attainment gives a clearer picture of the possible impact of language on Latino income attainment. When comparing the median total personal income of bilingual Latinos based on place of birth, we see that foreign-born bilingual Latinos earned less than domestic-born bilingual Latinos, \$25,000 and \$30,000 respectively. See Figure 3. Bilingual Latinos who were born in the U.S. appear to have an earning advantage over their foreign-born counterparts.

Figure 3
Median Income for Bilingual Latinos by Place of Birth, 2009



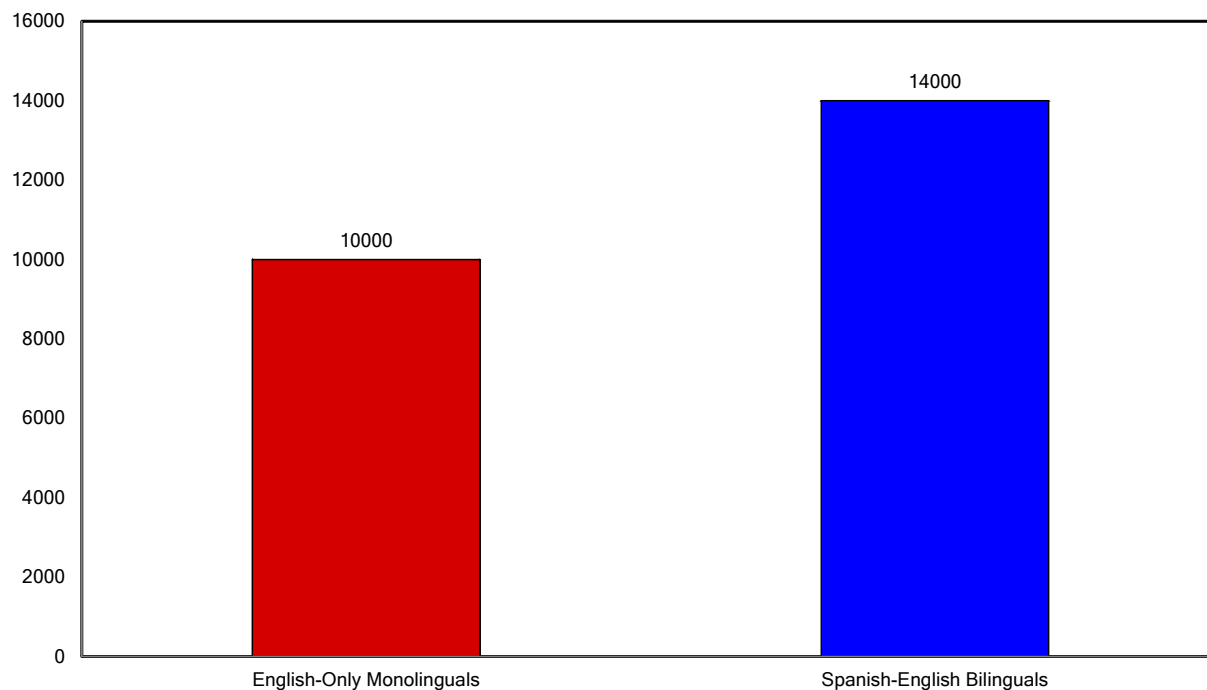
In general, educational attainment is one of the strongest predictors of income. A breakdown of Latinos bilinguals and monolinguals by educational attainments is essential to understand the income patterns of Latinos. See Figure 4.

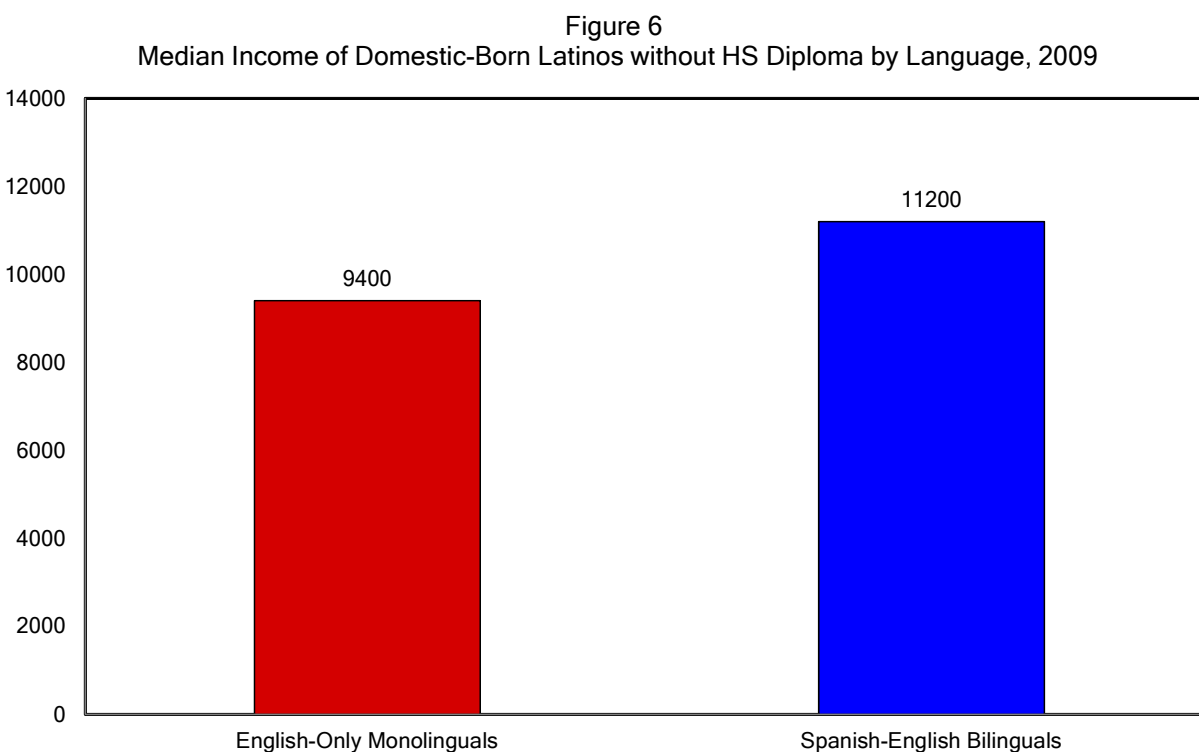
Figure 4
Median Income for Latinos by Educational Attainment, 2009



In keeping trend with general population, Latino income is positively associated with higher educational attainment. The question then becomes to what extent does bilingualism impact income with respect to educational attainment. Overall, among all Latinos who did not complete high school, monolinguals earned significantly less than bilinguals, namely \$10,000 and \$14,000. Among domestic-born Latinos specifically, this same distinction was present, although the difference in income was somewhat less substantial. See Figures 5 and 6

Figure 5
Median Income of Latinos who did not finish HS by Language, 2009





These figures suggest that for Latinos who did not complete high school, bilingualism does present an economic advantage.

In contrast, bilingualism does not appear to be an economic advantage for Latinos who do hold a high school diploma and for those who hold a Bachelor's Degree. In 2009 monolingual Latinos who completed high school earned more than their bilingual counterparts. Specifically, monolingual Latinos with a high school diploma earned \$27,400 while bilingual Latinos with a high school diploma earned \$26,000. This difference in income is even more significant for Latinos who have attained a Bachelor's degree: monolinguals earned \$52,600 while bilinguals earned \$45,000. This distinction also holds when comparing domestic-born Latinos who have completed a four-year college degree: the median total personal income for these domestic-born monolingual Latinos was \$55,000, while their bilingual counterparts earned only \$47,850. See Figures 7 and 8.

Figure 7
Median Income of Latinos who Completed High School, 2009

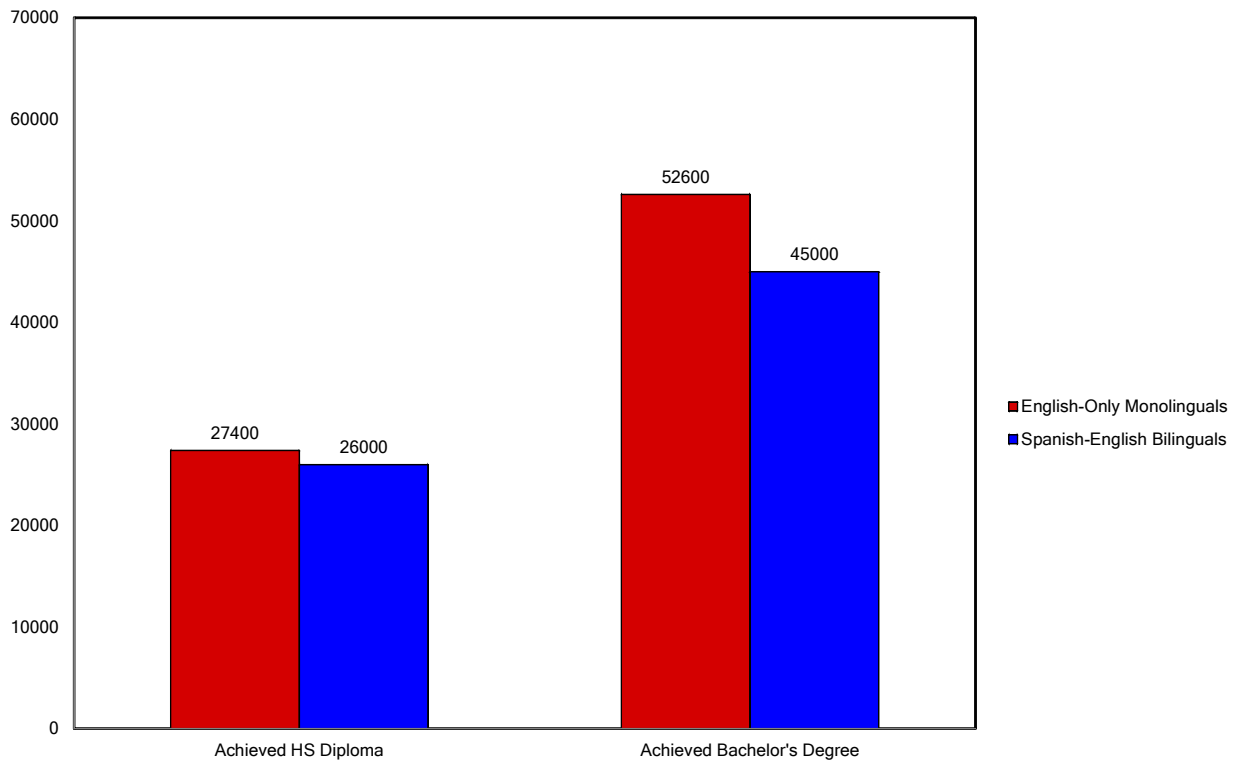
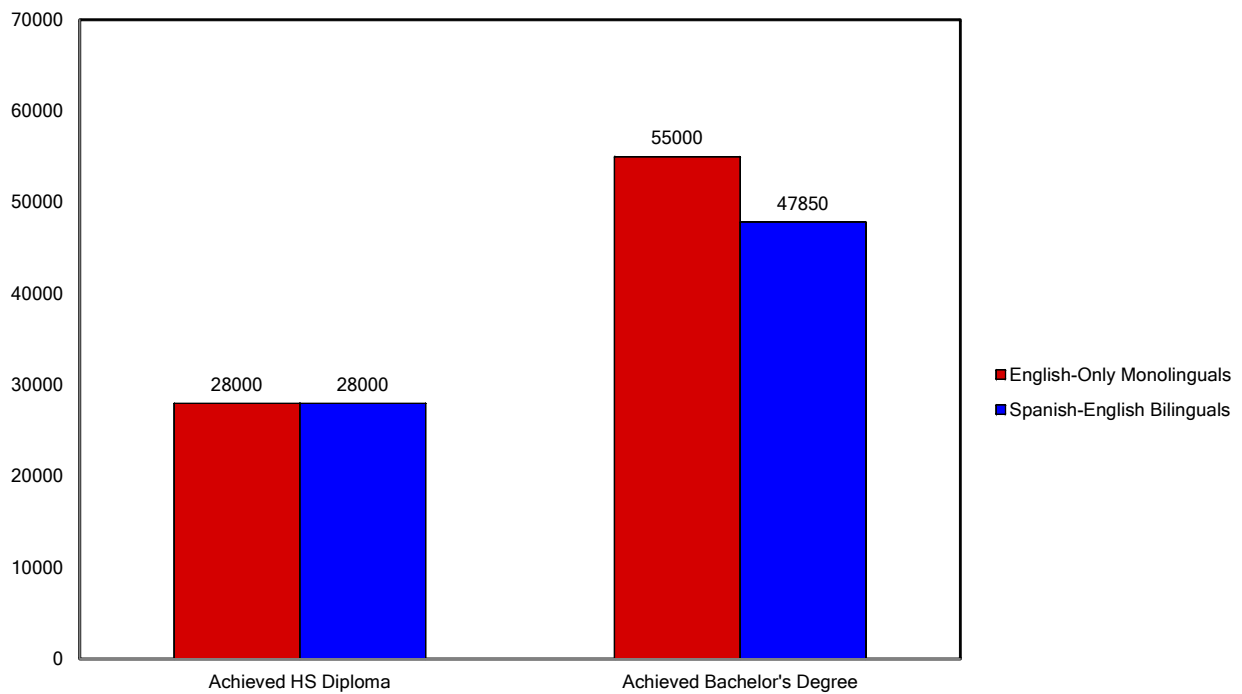


Figure 8
Median Income of Domestic-Born Latinos who Completed High School, 2009



Overall these figures suggest that in 2009 bilingualism provided higher earning potential only for Latinos who had not completed high school, regardless of place of birth. Conversely, for those who held a high school diploma, bilingualism did not seem to imply such an advantage for earning potential. In sum, educational attainment appears to be an important factor that mediates the role of bilingualism on the income of Latinos.

This finding was consistent across the three major Latino nationality groups in New York City, namely Puerto Ricans, Dominicans and Mexicans (see Figures 9 through 11). In each group, bilingual Latinos who had not completed high school outperformed their monolingual counterparts in median total personal income. For those who have achieved a Bachelor’s Degree or higher, however, the reverse was found: monolinguals earned more than bilinguals.

Figure 9
Median Income for Mexicans by Educational Attainment, 2009

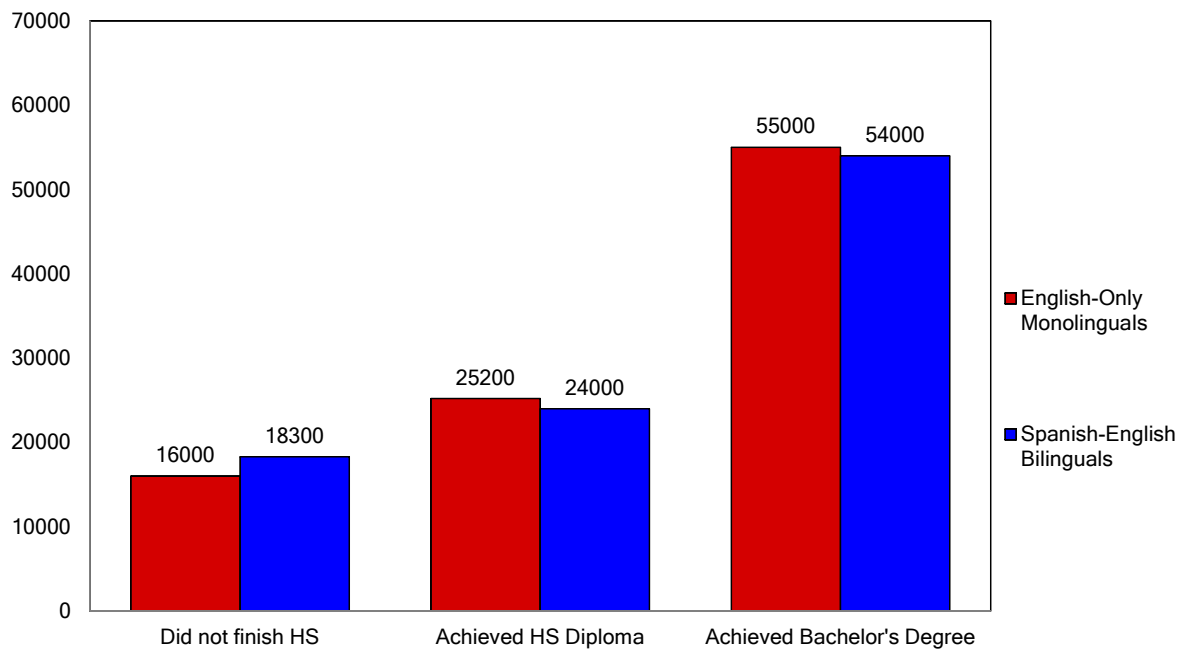


Figure 10
Median Income for Puerto Ricans by Educational Attainment, 2009

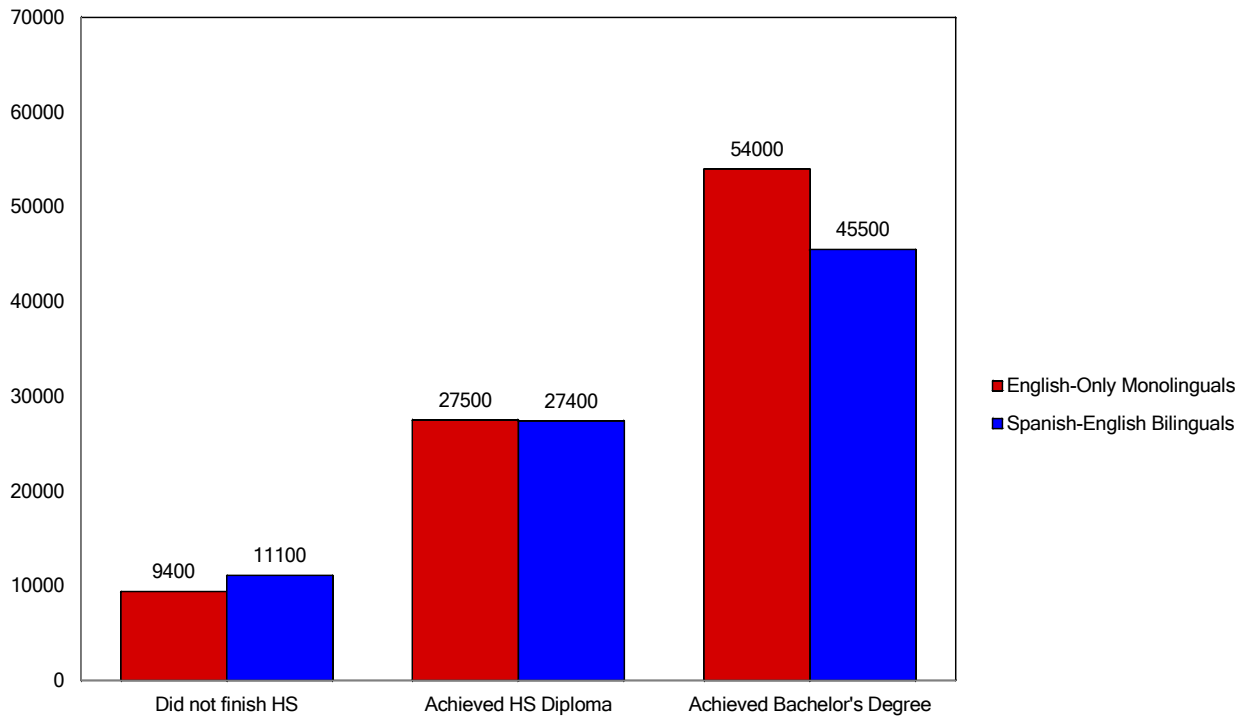
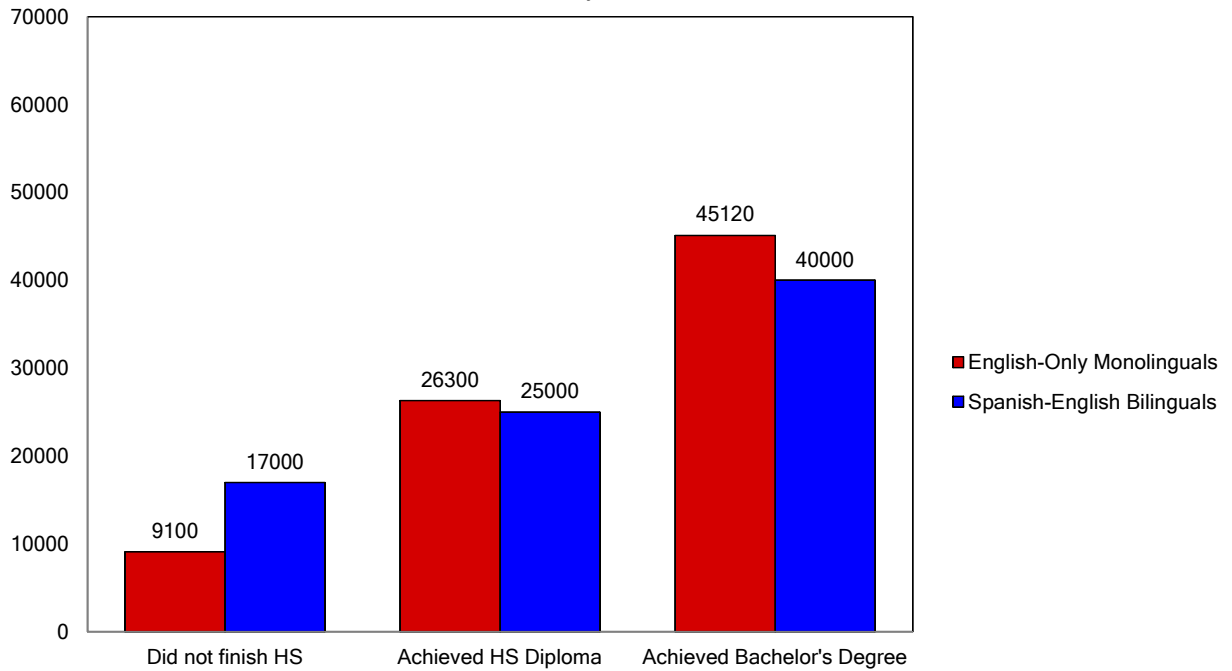


Figure 11
Median Income for Dominicans by Educational Attainment, 2009



Finally, to gain a clearer picture, it is imperative to understand the role of educational attainment with respect to occupations and income (see Figures 12 and 13). Thus, in examining median total personal income in 2009, it is necessary to separate occupations into two separate categories: those that do not require a Bachelor’s degree and those that do. Under this analysis, bilingual Latinos generally earned more than monolingual Latinos in occupations that do not require a Bachelor’s Degree (construction related-jobs, secretary/receptionist, waiters/bartenders, janitors). The only exception was waiters/bartenders: in this field alone, monolinguals outpaced bilinguals in median total personal income. On the other hand, bilingual Latinos earned less than monolingual Latinos in occupations that do require a Bachelor’s Degree (architects, civil engineers, physicians, and lawyers).

Figure 12
 Median Income for Latinos in Professions that do not Require a College Degree, 2009

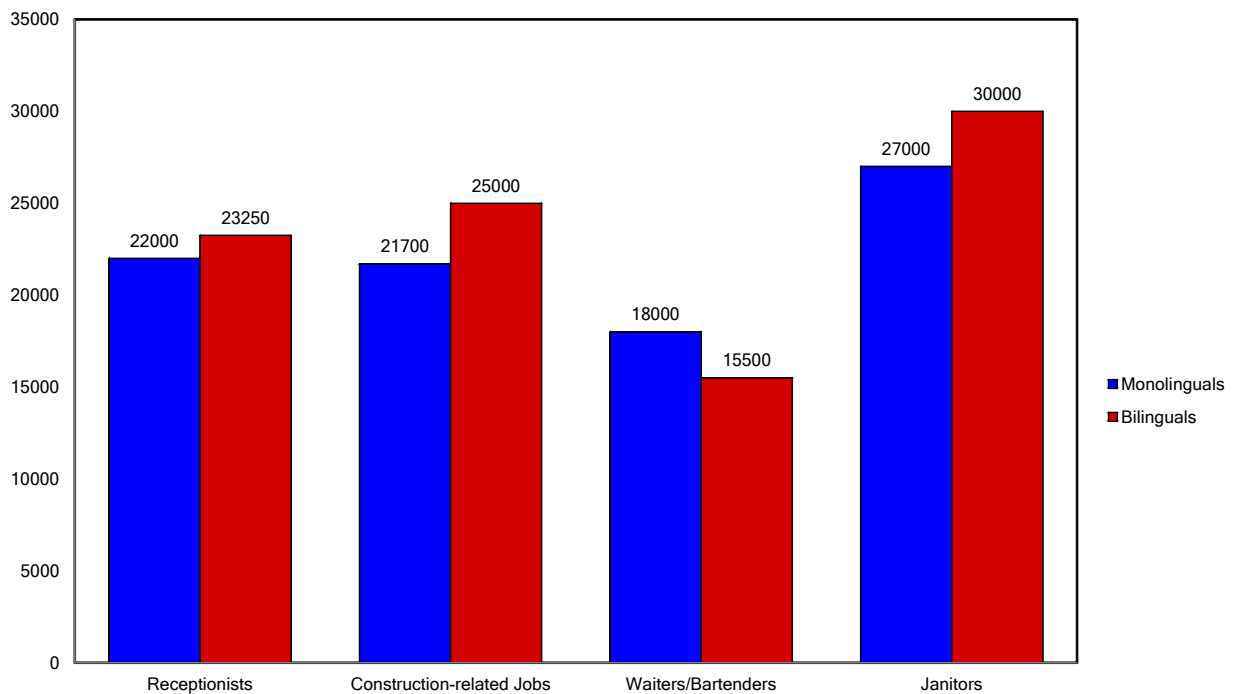
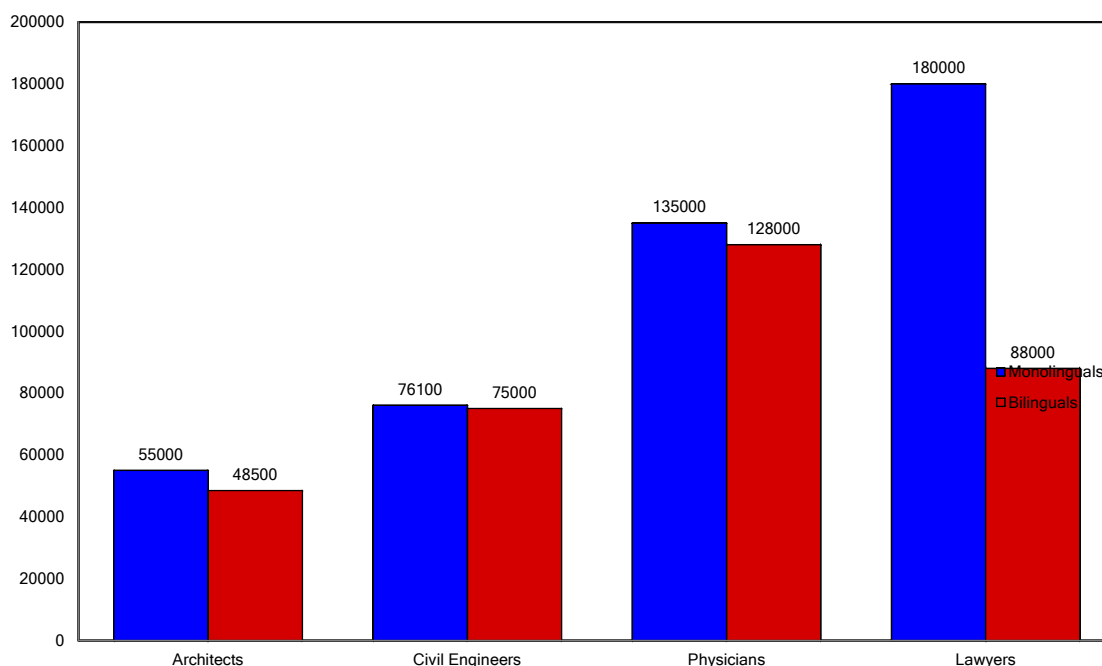


Figure 13
Median Income for Latinos in Professions that Require a College Degree, 2009



The most striking difference was found within the occupation of lawyers. Bilingual Latino lawyers earned considerably less than monolingual Latino lawyers (almost \$100,000) in 2009. In analyzing bilingualism in terms of occupations based on educational attainment, these findings further support the claim that bilingualism was an economic benefit in New York City primarily for Latinos who had not completed high school.

In conclusion, the economic benefits of Spanish-English bilingualism are highly mediated by the effects of educational attainment. For those who lacked a four-year college degree in 2009, bilingual Spanish-English Latinos generally possessed an advantage in obtaining higher incomes than monolingual English-only Latinos. On the other hand, bilingual Latinos who held at least a Bachelor's degree in 2009 earned less than their monolingual counterparts. These findings were also confirmed when classifying occupations into two categories: jobs that typically require a Bachelor's degree and those that do not. For occupations that require a four-year college degree (architects, civil engineers, physicians, and lawyers), bilingual Latinos earned less than monolingual Latinos. Conversely, bilingual Latinos earned more than monolingual Latinos for occupations that do not typically require a Bachelor's degree (janitors, construction workers, waiters, receptionists and secretaries).