

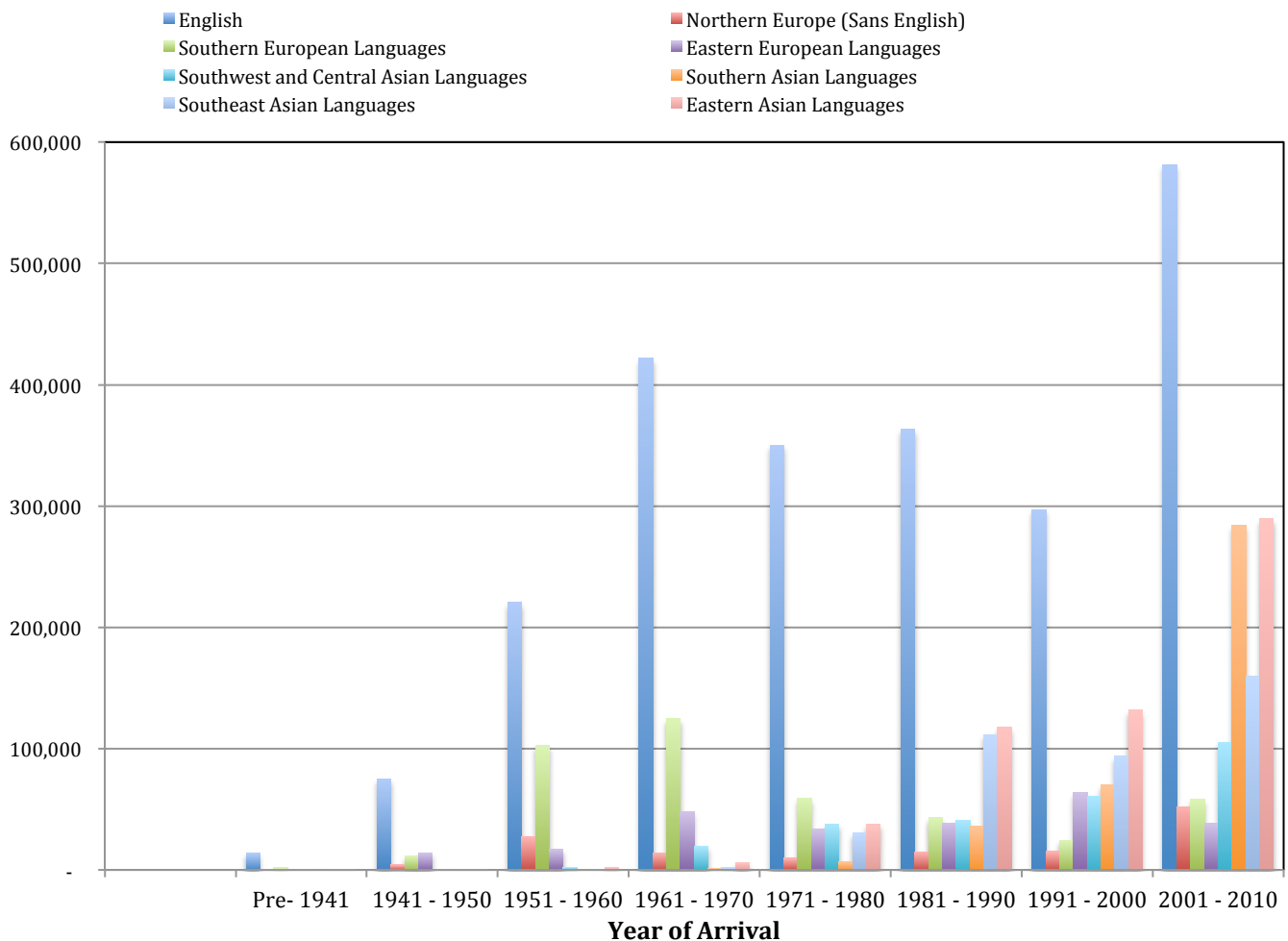


## LANGUAGES AND MIGRATION: THE AGE OLD STORY

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November 2015

Over the last half-century the languages spoken by migrants coming to Australia have changed. This increasing diversity reflects both adjustments to Australia's

migration policies and shifting patterns of migration across the world. Using responses from the 2011 Australian Census, we can see when different languages began to arrive in Australia. The Australian Census data also shows the impact this has on the age of different language groups today, with implications for older Australians.



## Years of Arrival

By examining the percentage each language group makes up of total arrivals to Australia in each decade, we can trace the changing patterns of migration that Australia has witnessed over the last century. Starting in the pre-1940s era, when migrants were overwhelmingly English speaking, the dispersion of languages widened, as more Europeans began to arrive from the 1950s onwards. From the 1970s onwards, as White Australia policy officially ended, an increasing number of different languages began to arrive in Australia.

### Pre-1940

Before 1940, migrants were overwhelmingly English speaking, representing both White Australia policy and the attachment to the British Empire. However, as the United States limited its own migration intake from Southern Europe, an increasing number of Italians and Greeks made their way to Australia. Of the 16,000 people who responded they arrived before 1940, almost 14,000 of them were English speakers, whilst Greeks and Italians made up around 1,700.

### 1941-1950

With half of the decade mired by the Second World War, the migrant intake was still dominated by English speakers who made up 74,000 of the 106,000 respondents who answered they arrived during this period. Nonetheless, there were significant increases from many European countries, particularly those in Central, Southern and Eastern Europe that had been the most devastated by the War.

This included the German, Dutch, Greek, Italian, Maltese, Baltic, Hungarian, Russian, Polish and Czech languages.

### 1951-1960

Migration rates increased dramatically into this decade as Australia embraced the migration policy of 'Populate or Perish'. English dropped to just 58% of migrants for this period (compared to 82% for the pre-1940 period). Meanwhile the Italians (17%) and Greeks (7%) made up over a quarter of migrants as Australian attitudes towards migration shifted and a wider net was cast for the migrant intake. Languages from Eastern Europe (such as Russian, Polish, Latvian, etc.) drop off as the Cold War set in and migration out of the Soviet bloc slowed.

### 1961-1970

In the final decade of White Australia policy, we see both patterns of past and previews of future migration. English speakers are still the dominant migrant language group and in fact increase as a percentage of Australia's migration intake over the previous decade. However at the same time an ever-wider net is cast for migrants with Turkish, Armenian and Arabic speakers joining the increasing numbers of Southern Europeans from Greece, Spain and Serbian speakers from Yugoslavia.

### 1971-1980

The White Australia policy officially ends and Australia's migration intake begins to diversify substantially. Fewer migrants are now coming from Europe, although English is still the most common language group.

The key increases are for language groups across Asia, including Chinese, Vietnamese, Malay, Arabic and Indian languages.

However compared to the previous decade migration numbers are down as economic hardship in the 1970s prompts the Australian Government to reduce overall numbers of migrants.

### 1981-1990

Economic, political and social turmoil prompt migration patterns, and this decade reflects this particularly well. The increasing disaffection within Soviet Bloc countries is shown with increasing numbers of Polish, Czech and other Eastern European speakers, whilst an increase in Persian speakers follows on from the Islamic Revolution in Iran and the Soviet invasion of Afghanistan. In the wake of the Vietnam War, over 60,000 Vietnamese speakers arrive in Australia, although over 20,000 had already arrived in the previous decade. Similarly, political turmoil in the Philippines prompts around 30,000 Tagalog and Filipino speakers to migrate. However the biggest increase among language groups is for Chinese speakers, with over 100,000 Chinese speakers arriving during this decade, up from 34,000 the decade previous. Chinese languages now make up the second largest language group amongst migrants after English, with 13% of those migrating to Australia speaking a Chinese language.

### 1991-2000

European languages continue to make a decreasing proportion of migrant languages coming to Australia. The major exceptions to this trend are Russian, as the collapse of the Soviet Union allows

increasing numbers of Russians to emigrate, and Bosnian, Croatian, Macedonian and Serbian speakers escaping the turmoil of the break up of Yugoslavia. Korean and Japanese are increasing, but are still well behind the number of Chinese speakers that still make up over 100,000 migrants for the decade. The number of Indian language speakers almost double from the previous decade and Pacific Islander languages increase by over 17,000 as well.

### 2001-2010

The 2000s sees the largest number of migrants arrive in Australia's history, with the total number of migrants more than the combined total for the previous two decades. Over 20,000 Indonesian, 40,000 African and 270,00 Indian language speakers arrive in Australia and the number of Chinese, Japanese and Korean speakers migrating to Australia doubles. Bucking the downward trend of the previous three decades, migration from some European languages increase, including German, Dutch, French and Spanish. However the overall numbers of European languages, other than English, remains relatively small. In the case of Dutch languages, the new migrants are actually overwhelmingly Afrikaans speakers (80% of Dutch language speakers), which shows the increasing migration rates for African language groups rather than European ones.

### Age of Language Speakers

Having explored the history of languages, as they have made their way to Australia, we can begin to consider some of the implications for the make-up of Australian

society today. As migrants from Europe migrated and settled in Australia several decades ago, we can expect many European languages to have older speakers, whilst the more recent arrivals of non-European languages will be younger. To find out whether a particular language group is older or younger, in comparison to Australia as a whole, we start with the median age for all Australians in 2011, which was 37.3 years. By then calculating the percentage within each language group that was below 37 years of age in 2011, we show which languages had much older speakers (less than 45% under 37) and which languages are made up of younger speakers (more than 55% under the age of 37). Using these results, we can see that generally older language speakers are those from European language groups, whilst non-European language groups have much younger speakers. The language groups with older populations include:

- Northern European: German, Dutch, Danish, Gaelic (Scottish), Welsh and Finnish,
- Southern European: Greek, Italian and Maltese,
- Eastern European: Latvian, Lithuanian, Ukrainian, Croatian, Slovene, Polish and Hungarian.

Particularly noteworthy are the Greek and Italian language speakers. With 66% of Greek and 78% of Italian speakers over the age of 55. This translates to over 167,000 Greek and 236,000 Italian speakers who are above the median age. In comparison, Latvian and Lithuanian speakers have a higher percentage (around 80% are over 55), but this represents only around 4,500 Australians. Not all European language speakers in Australia are older. Swedish, Norwegian, Irish and Portuguese all have

younger populations and Spanish, French, Russian, Serbian, Slovak and Romanian are comparable to English with a relatively even age split. Also of interest is the contrast between the older Dutch speakers (nearly 75% are over 37) and Afrikaans (58% are below 37) reflecting the recent increase of migration out of South Africa. At the opposite end of the scale are the language groups with a higher proportion of young speakers. These language groups include;

- Iranian: Persian, Dari, Kurdish, Pashto, Hazaraghi,
- Middle Eastern Semitic: Arabic, Hebrew, Assyrian Neo-Aramaic,
- Turkish,
- Indo-Aryan: Tamil, Bengali, Gujarati, Hindi, Marathi, Nepali, Punjabi, Urdu
- Mon-Khmer: Vietnamese, Khmer, Karen, Hmong, Thai
- South-East Asian Austronesian: Malay, Tetum, Indonesian, Burmese
- East Asian: Chinese, Japanese, Korean,
- African, and;
- Pacific Austronesian languages: Fijian.

This dispersion of younger speakers shows the diversified intake of migrants Australia has had since the 1970s, but also reflects the impact that changing circumstances in other countries has on migration patterns. Among these younger groups Dari, Pashto and Hazarghi have a particularly young population, with around 75% below the median age, which reflects the recent increase in arrivals from Afghanistan. Similarly, minority language groups from Burma/Myanmar such as Karen and Rohingya and other Indochinese minority languages like Hmong, Chin Haka and Mon-Khmer have on average around 80% of

speakers aged below 37-years. This too reflects increased migration from the region, in response to political and social instability. Overall the age of different language groups reflects changes in Australian migration patterns over time. It also means that it is the relative newcomers from non-European countries that are balancing the median age of Australians overall, offsetting the impact of the increasingly older European language speakers. What will be the impact of these ageing language groups?

### **Ageing Australia: Impact on non-English speakers**

Older people are at greater risk of social isolation and there are strong links between social isolation and an increased risk of early death. Older migrant Australians whose main language is not English are at a much higher risk of becoming socially isolated due to language barriers, and aged care facilities face problems in handling these social changes. Statistics from the Australian Institute of Health and Welfare (2012) show a disparity between the usage rates of non-English speakers in aged care and Australian-born and overseas-born English speakers. The disparity is particularly acute amongst those aged 85+, in which 192 per 1,000 in this age group were in residential care, compared to 233 per 1,000 for Australian-born and 232 per 1,000 for overseas-born English speakers. Non-English speakers may prefer to rely on families to provide aged care due to cultural norms, although this increases the pressures on second-generation migrants. However the disparity attributable to the problems that language barriers pose for older Australians whose first language is

not English. The report also found that as of 2011, 90% of residents have English as the preferred language. Overall 72% of residents were born in Australia, 10% in the United Kingdom or Ireland and 12.2% came from Continental Europe, whilst less than 5% of residents were born in countries outside Europe. Finally, the report shows that around 74% of residents were aged 80 years or older. How do these statistics fit in with what we know on languages in Australia?

We know from the figures on the year of arrival that, it was from the 1960s onwards that migration patterns diversified, whilst the proportion of migrants speaking English continued to decline. This means that going into the next decade, there will be an increasing proportion of people requiring aged care who do not have English as their preferred language. There will also be a greater diversity of languages other than English being spoken. There is already a shortage of aged care staff and support services in Australia, particularly as the population ages. To cater to the increasing numbers of non-English speakers requiring care, is an additional challenge for aged care facilities that should be considered, to ensure older Australians, regardless of language, receive adequate aged care. Languages in Australia are as diverse as the people that speak them and reflect the migration story of Australia. European language speakers who arrived in the post-Second World War period are now increasingly older, and this has key implications for aged care in Australia. More recent migrants are younger, and the wider range of languages spoken by these new groups adds to the rich mix of Australia's migrant population.

## References

Statistical data is sourced from the Australian Bureau of Statistics, primarily Census 2011, as well as the Australian Institute of Health and Welfare.