

4. English Language

Perhaps the most important determinant of the success of an immigration policy is the migrants' ability to communicate with the rest of the community to which they migrate. For new immigrants to Australia, the ability to speak, read and write English affects their communication with authorities, access to education and information of all kinds, as well as their jobs prospects.

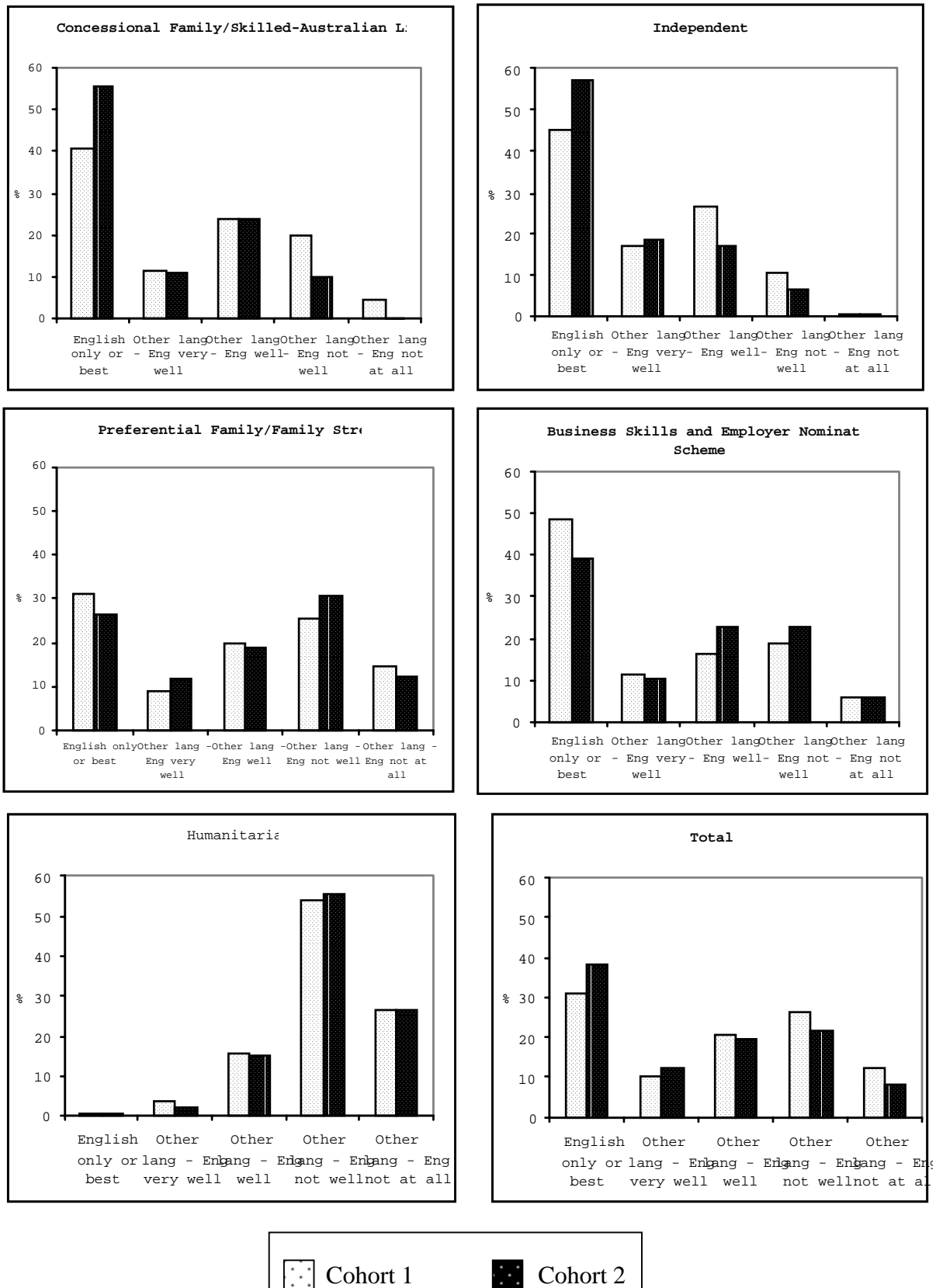
As recognition of the importance of English skills to new immigrants, the government offers subsidised English learning classes of up to 510 hours in migrants' first year of settlement. Also, migration policy has changed between the two cohorts with the intention of increasing new migrants' English language skills. This is in part a response to the evidence from the LSIA data for Cohort 1 that English language skills had a big impact on the probability of getting employment. It is also motivated by a desire to reduce the burden on the taxpayer associated with teaching English to new migrants and/or providing other services to immigrants with poor or no English skills. The main method for effecting this change has been through changing the points score for specific attributes in the different visa categories (excepting the Humanitarian category), to give higher weights to English language competence (and to youth and skills deemed to be in short supply). Below we set out the changes in the profile of migrants between the two cohorts, in terms of their English language skills according to visa category.

Figure 4.1 shows the effect of the change in policy. Overall, Cohort 2 migrants have higher levels of English skills than did those in Cohort 1. Thirty-eight per cent of Cohort 2 migrants have English as their best or only language, which compares with 31 per cent for Cohort 1. At the other end of the scale, only eight per cent of Cohort 2 migrants say that they do not speak English at all, compared with 12 per cent of Cohort 1. One reason for the greater English language skills of Cohort 2 is the change in visa group composition of the total cohort, because migrants in different visa categories have systematically different levels of English language skills. This is apparent in the Figure. But the overall higher levels of English in Cohort 2 are not entirely explained by changes in visa composition. The two visa categories that have been affected by the increased emphasis on English language competence are Concessional family/skilled Australian-linked and Independent. In these two groups there has been a clear increase between Cohort 1 and Cohort 2 in the self-reported

level of English competence. There was a 10 to 15-percentage point increase in the proportion who say they speak English as their only or best language and a slight increase in the proportion saying they speak English very well. Matching this has been the virtual disappearance of people unable to speak English and a sizeable fall in the proportion who say they have limited or modest competence in English. These changes for the Concessional family/skilled Australian-linked and Independent categories are not matched by the other visa groups. Indeed, for the Preferential family/family stream and Business skills/ENS, there has been some fall in the overall level of English competence. For the latter group, the fall is caused mainly by the higher proportion of Business skills migrants, who tend to have lower levels of English proficiency than do the employer nomination scheme migrants. On this evidence alone, it would appear that the change in migration policy has had a noticeable impact on the levels of English competence among migrants in the affected categories.

In the rest of this section, we start by comparing Cohort 2 with Cohort 1 in terms of their regions of origin and the languages they spoke well. We then compare the two cohorts in terms of their English language skills, i.e. how well they speak, read or write English six months after arrival. In doing so, we distinguish the migrants by visa categories, and whether they were the Primary Applicant, or their spouse (male or female). We also analyse separately the English proficiency of migrants who were employed, unemployed and not in the labour force six months after arrival. Finally, we survey the main methods immigrants use to learn English prior to migrating, and the ways in which they improve their English language skills after arrival. The distinction between visa categories is of primary importance to the analysis of English language skills because migrants' English skills are given different weight in their pre-migration assessment according to visa category.

Figure 4.1: English-language Competence of Migrants Six Months after Arrival, by Cohort and Visa Category (per cent)



The distinction between the Primary Applicants and their spouses is justified by the fact that the Primary Applicant's characteristics alone affect the eligibility of the migrating unit (i.e. the migrant, spouse and dependents, if any). The spouse's characteristics, such as English language skills, have no bearing. The spouse and other dependents come under the same visa category as the Primary Applicant, although, by themselves, they may not have the level of English skills required for eligibility under that category. Despite the fact that spouses do not need to meet the tests of eligibility, their own settlement experience will be affected by whether they have the English skills necessary for inclusion within Australian society. It is possible that the Primary Applicant and her/his spouse have different levels of English proficiency.

Knowledge of the English language skills of male migrants compared to those of female migrants may enable better targeting of the Adult Migrant English Program. Earlier research has argued that, in their early settlement, women have lower opportunities to learn English than men. This is thought to be due to the fact that women put family, home duties and health ahead of English skills shortly after settlement. See for example VandenHeuvel and Wooden (1999), Plimer and Candlin (1996).

While we take the information provided by the respondents at face value, it is important to keep in mind that self-reported skills or abilities cannot be taken too literally. For example, the judgement made by a new migrant from a non-English speaking background that he or she 'speaks English very well' may not be shared by his or her Australian – born potential employer. In a similar way, two new migrants may interpret 'speaking English very well' differently.

4.1 Languages Spoken Well

As well as providing information on their country of origin, the LSIA questionnaire asked respondents what languages they spoke well. For both cohorts, respondents had the option to specify multiple languages. Table 4.1 lists the languages spoken by at least one per cent of the migrants in at least one of the two cohorts. Overall, there were over 146 languages spoken well by Cohort 2 respondents while for Cohort 1, there were over 149 languages.

Table 4.1: Languages Other than English Spoken Well by Migrants, by Cohort (per cent)

Languages spoken well ¹	Cohort 2		Cohort 1	
	Count	% of cases	Count	% of cases
Mandarin	611	15	665	10
Hindi	362	9	428	6
Arabic	295	7	572	8
Cantonese, Yueh	298	7	696	10
French	234	6	381	6
German	224	5	361	5
Tagalog, Filipino	219	5	372	5
Serbian	191	5	279	4
Afrikaans	179	4	145	2
Croatian	159	4	321	5
Indonesian, Bahasa Indonesian	154	4	83	1
Bosnian	140	3	244	4
Vietnamese	117	3	549	8
Spanish	105	3	207	3
Tamil	102	3	142	2
Urdu	88	2	55	1
Russian	85	2	326	5
Japanese	73	2	119	2
Turkish	76	2	113	2
Persian, Farsi, Dari	86	2	103	2
Gujarati	57	1	21	<0.5
Assyrian	53	1	104	2
Hokkien	53	1	50	1
Dutch	56	1	58	1
Thai	50	1	73	1
Panjabi, Punjabi	49	1	80	1
Malay	45	1	104	2
Italian	43	1	92	1
Sinhalese	36	1	153	2
Khmer	24	1	99	1
Bengali	23	1	83	1
Polish	20	1	85	1
Ukrainian	12	<0.5	75	1
Chinese language, NFD	7	<0.5	199	3
Total Number of Cases	4181		6961	

Note: (1) Responses have been grouped together for multiple response analysis.

The most prominent languages spoken by migrants in Cohort 2, other than English, were Chinese languages (Mandarin, 15%; Cantonese/Yueh, 7%), Hindi (9%), Arabic (7%), the languages of the former Yugoslavia (Serbian, 5%; Croatian, 4%; Bosnian, 3%), as well as French (6%), German and Tagalog/Filipino (5% each). For Cohort 1, Chinese languages also formed the second most widely spoken language group after English (Cantonese/Yueh, 10%, Mandarin, 10%, other Chinese language, 3%). Arabic and Vietnamese were each spoken by eight per cent of the respondents. Hindi and French were spoken by six per cent each, while German and Tagalog/Filipino were spoken by five per cent each.

A comparison of the languages spoken well between Cohort 1 and 2 indicates that there was a lot of consistency in the main languages / ethnic characteristics of migrants between Cohort 1 and Cohort 2. Nevertheless, there were a few noticeable changes within these main languages. Languages that saw a significant increase in Cohort 2 are Hindi (6% to 9%), Indonesian/ Bahasa (1% to 4%), Afrikaans (2% to 4%), and Urdu (1% to 2%). The relative shift in favour of these languages was offset mainly by a reduction in Vietnamese (8% to 3%), Russian (5% to 2%) and Sinhalese (2% to 1%). The proportion speaking Chinese languages (Mandarin, Cantonese/Yueh and other Chinese languages) and former Yugoslavian languages (Serbian, Croatian and Bosnian) did not change significantly.

4.2 English Language Skills

4.2.1 Speaking English

There are various ways of capturing the ability of people to speak English, some of which are more reliable than others. The self-rated “ability to speak English” is one of the less reliable ways. One good alternative to identify people whose English is very good is to ask whether they speak English at home. All that is needed to answer this question is a yes or no (although there may be some ambiguity for households that are genuinely multi-lingual). Table 4.2 compares the two cohorts’ responses to the question ‘What is the main language spoken in your Australian home?’

Overall, 46 per cent of Cohort 2 respondents spoke mainly English at home, compared to 39 per cent for Cohort 1. There are, however, considerable differences between the visa categories. The proportion of Concessional family/skilled Australian-linked migrants from Cohort 2 who mainly spoke English at home is 14 per cent higher than was the case for Cohort 1. As noted previously, the rise in the proportion of Business skills migrants in the Business skills/ENS group has caused a fall in the average levels of English proficiency: the proportion who spoke mainly English at home is lower for Cohort 2 than for Cohort 1, by 12 per cent. Also, eight per cent more Independent migrants spoke English at home in Cohort 2 than in Cohort 1. The differences for Humanitarian and Preferential family/family stream migrants between the two cohorts are not significant. This table supports the earlier conclusion that the proportion of highly proficient speakers of English has risen between the cohorts for the targeted visa categories of Concessional family/skilled Australian-linked and

Independent migrants, and overall, but has not risen for the other categories. Note that almost none of the Humanitarian migrants spoke English at home.

Besides speaking English at home, migrants were asked whether English was the language that they spoke best. As Table 4.3 shows, on average 38 per cent of Cohort 2 and 31 per cent of Cohort 1 have English as their best-spoken language. A breakdown of the responses by visa categories shows that the differences between Cohort 2 and Cohort 1 by visa categories follow similar patterns and have comparable magnitudes to those shown in Table 4.3. Not surprisingly, those speaking English at home are likely to have English as their best language. The majority of Cohort 2's Concessional family/skilled Australian-linked and Independent migrants speak English best. There are 14 percentage points more Concessional family/skilled Australian-linked migrants who speak English as their best language in Cohort 2 than in Cohort 1. The same figure for Independent migrants is 10 percentage points, while there are eight percentage points fewer Business skills/ENS migrants in Cohort 2 than in Cohort 1, who speak English as their best language. There is a small but statistically significant difference between the two cohorts for Preferential family/family stream migrants, with 31 per cent of Cohort 1 and 28 per cent of Cohort 2 per cent speaking English best. On the other hand, almost no Humanitarian migrant speaks English best in either cohort. It is interesting to note that considerably more respondents say that English is the main language spoken at home, than say that English is their best or only language.

So far, we have focussed on whether the migrants speak English only, most or better than any other language. However, it is likely that some migrants who speak other languages better than English nevertheless speak English well. It is thus informative to know how those who do not speak English at home or best rate their English level, i.e. how well they think they speak English.

The questionnaire asked respondents whether they speak English very well, well, not well, or not at all. We combined the responses chosen by respondents on this question and their answer to the question of whether English is the only language they speak well to construct Table 4.4. Clearly, the first two rows of Table 4.4 (English only or best) correspond to the group 'English best' of Table 4.3. Here we are mainly interested in the remaining rows of

Table 4.2: Main Language Spoken in Australian Home for Migrants, during first Six Months after Arrival, by Visa Category and Cohort (per cent)

Main Language	Cohort	Concessional family/skilled Australian-linked	Independent	Preferential family/family stream	Business skills/ employer nomination scheme	Humanitarian	Total
Not English	1	56	52	55	47	98	61
	2	42	44	55	59	97	54
English	1	44	48	46	53	2	39
	2	58	56	45	41	3	46
(Significance) ¹		(***)	(***)	(n.s.)	(**)	(n.s.)	(***)

Note: (1) Pearson Chi-square test, n.s. = not significant, ** = probability < 0.01, *** = probability < 0.001.

Table 4.3: Language Spoken Best by Migrants, during first Six Months after Arrival, by Visa Category and Cohort (per cent)

Main Language	Cohort	Concessional family/skilled Australian-linked	Independent	Preferential family/family stream	Business skills/ employer nomination scheme	Humanitarian	Total
English not best language	1	60	55	69	52	100	69
	2	45	45	72	60	99	62
English best language	1	41	45	31	48	<0.5	31
	2	55	55	28	40	+	38
(Significance) ¹		(***)	(***)	(*)	(*)	(n.v.)	(***)

Note: (1) Pearson Chi-square test, * = probability < 0.05, *** = probability < 0.001, n.v. = test not valid, + = number of observations very small (n<5).

Table 4.4; that is, the English proficiency of those who do not have English as their only or best language (70% of Cohort 1 and 62% of Cohort 2). Overall, respondents who speak other languages better than English from Cohort 2 are equally divided between those who feel they speak English well or very well (32%) and those who do not speak English well or at all (30%). This contrasts with Cohort 1, where 39 per cent say that they do not speak English well or at all.

Table 4.4 also distinguishes migrants by their visa categories. As already indicated, over half the Concessional family/skilled Australian-linked and Independent migrants of Cohort 2 speak English only or best. Most of the remaining migrants, for both visa categories, speak English well or very well (35% for Concessional family/skilled Australian-linked and 37% for Independent).

For Preferential family/family stream migrants, the differences between the two cohorts on all levels of English proficiency are statistically significant, but quite small. We noted above that around 30 per cent of Preferential family/family stream migrants speak English only or best for both cohorts. For both cohorts, about 29 per cent speak English well or very well, and just over 40 per cent do not speak English well or at all. Thus there appears to be no substantial change in English proficiency between the two cohorts, for migrants who came under the Preferential family/family stream program. To the extent that there is a change, it is in the direction of reduced levels of English proficiency.

The English proficiency of Business skills/ENS migrants declined somewhat between the two cohorts: the proportion of those who speak English only or best fell from 48 to 40 per cent, while the proportion of those who do not speak English well or at all rose from 24 to 27 per cent. However, the fall in the proportion that speak English only or best was partly offset by an increase in those who speak English well or very well, from 28 to 33 per cent.

The poor English proficiency of Humanitarian migrants is apparent for both cohorts: just over 80 per cent of them, for both cohorts, do not speak English well or at all.

Table 4.4: English Proficiency of Migrants during first six months after Arrival, by Visa Category and Cohort (per cent)

Languages spoken	Cohort	Concessional family/skilled Australian-linked	Independent	Preferential family/family stream	Business skills/ employer nomination scheme	Humanitarian	Total
English only or best	1	41	45	31	48	<0.5	31
	2	55	55	28	40	+	38
English well/very well and other language	1	35	44	29	28	19	31
	2	35	37	29	33	18	32
English not well/not at all and other language	1	25	11	40	24	80	39
	2	9	7	43	27	81	30
(Significance) ¹		(n.v.)	(n.v.)	(***)	(n.s.)	(n.v.)	(***)

Note: (1) Pearson Chi-square test, n.s. = not significant, *** = probability < 0.001, n.v. = test not valid., + = number of observations very small (n<5).

4.2.2 *Writing and Reading English*

As well as speaking English, the levels at which migrants read and write English are important indicators of how well they can use the communication media to be able to interact with the rest of Australian society. The LSIA questionnaire asked both cohorts of immigrants whether they read English very well, well, not well or not at all. The same question was asked about writing English. Obviously, reading or writing English is dependent upon immigrants' ability to read and write at all. It is possible that some immigrants cannot read or write in any language. It is also possible that some immigrants who come from countries that use systems other than the Roman alphabet have not learned to read or write in the alphabet system. Here we do not take up any of these issues, instead, we just report the proportion of respondents who claim that they can write and/or read English well or very well. These questions were only asked of people for whom English was not their best or only language. 2,597 people (62%) from Cohort 2 and 3,967 (57%) from Cohort 1 answered this question.

Table 4.5 gives the percentages and counts of respondents from each cohort and visa category, who reported that they could read English well or very well. Table 4.6 does the same for those who can write English well or very well. Note that these tables exclude people for whom English is their best or only language. For both cohorts, there are about 8-10 per cent more people who can read English well or very well than those who can write it. This is normal, as usually reading any language is a prerequisite to writing it.

The tables show that between the two cohorts, the proportion of respondents who can read English well (as compared with not well or not at all) decreased from 68 to 62 per cent, while that of immigrants who can write English well fell from 59 to 55 per cent. In comparison with the results on speaking English, these results seem contradictory. In fact they are not, because here the respondents are only those who did not have English as their only or best language. Therefore, the right group to compare these results with are those who speak English very well/well and speak other languages better ("Eng very well/well + other langs" in Table 4.4). The ratio of migrants who speak English well (but not best) to those who speak it not well or not at all is substantially higher in Cohort 2 (1.04) than in Cohort 1 (0.80).

Table 4.5: Migrants Ability to Read English During First Six Months after Arrival by Visa Category and Cohort (per cent)

Main Language	Cohort	Concessional family/skilled Australian-linked	Independent	Preferential family/family stream	Business skills/ employer nomination scheme	Humanitarian	Total
Read English well/very well	1	79	91	68	73	42	68
	2	86	92	53	66	32	62
Do not read English well/ not at all	1	21	9	32	27	58	32
	2	14	8	47	35	68	38
(Significance) ¹		(*)	(n.s.)	(***)	(n.s.)	(***)	(***)

Note: (1) Pearson Chi-square test, n.s. = not significant, * = probability < 0.05, *** = probability < 0.001.

Table 4.6: Migrants Ability to Write English During First Six Months after Arrival by Visa Category and Cohort (per cent)

Main Language	Cohort	Concessional family/skilled Australian-linked	Independent	Preferential family/family stream	Business skills/ employer nomination scheme	Humanitarian	Total
Read English well/very well	Cohort 1	70	84	59	61	30	59
	Cohort 2	79	86	45	56	25	55
Do not read English well/ not at all	Cohort 1	30	16	41	39	70	41
	Cohort 2	21	14	55	45	75	46
(Significance) ¹		(*)	(n.s.)	(***)	(n.s.)	(*)	(***)

Note: (1) Pearson Chi-square test, n.s. = not significant* = probability < 0.05, *** = probability < 0.001.

While in total the proportion of respondents who can read or write English well/very well decreased between the two cohorts, one visa category behaved in the opposite way. The percentage of Concessional family/skilled Australian-linked migrants who can read English well/very well rose from 79 to 86 per cent, while for the same visa category, the proportion who can write English well/very well rose from 70 to 79 per cent. There are no significant changes in the overall English reading or writing ability of Independent migrants. They had the highest proportional English reading/writing skills of all categories for both cohorts. Just over 91 per cent of them could read English well/very well; and around 85 per cent of them could write English well/very well. The most disadvantaged category was, once again, Humanitarian. In the first wave, only 42/30 per cent could read/write English well/very well. These proportions fell to 32/25 per cent in the second cohort. The numbers who felt that they could read/write English quite well are rather higher than the numbers who felt they could speak it well.

Humanitarian migrants have lower levels of English ability overall, and this ability has declined between the two Cohorts. However, we will see below that this category of migrants also use the government sponsored English tuition (AMEP) program more than any other category. In recognition of this, AMEP service providers are required to pay particular attention to the needs of Humanitarian migrants. These migrants also have access to a special preparatory program prior to entry in the AMEP program.

4.3 English Proficiency, Applicant Status and Gender

In this section we enquire into the self-reported English proficiency levels of female Primary Applicants, male Primary Applicants, female spouses and male spouses. One of the objectives of the changes in the immigration policy, introduced between the two cohorts, was to give more weight to English proficiency for potential immigrants. This policy change was applicable to Primary Applicants. However, it is interesting to check whether it had an impact also on applicants' spouses. We would expect there to be some impact, especially where there has been an increase in the proportion of Primary Applicants who speak English only or as their best language (and speak English at home). Clearly, most couples would share a competence in the language spoken at home.

The English proficiency of male and female Primary Applicants and spouses are reported in Table 4.7. First, for all visa categories combined, there has been an increase in the proportion of migrants who speak English only or best for both genders and applicant types. The highest increase is for male spouses, for whom the proportion speaking English only or best jumped from 31 to 52 per cent. However, this increase is exclusively driven by male spouses of Concessional family/skilled Australian-linked and Independent migrants. These are the same visa categories that we found to have been most affected by the policy change with respect to English language skills. All other visa categories have almost no male spouses who speak English only or best. The numbers of male spouses of Preferential family/family stream and Business skills/ENS migrants are too small to identify any changes between cohorts.

On the other hand, from Cohort 1 to Cohort 2 overall, there are no major changes in the proportion of migrants who speak English well or very well (as distinct from best) for both genders and applicant types.

Offsetting the increase in male spouses who have English as their main or only language, the proportion of male spouses of Independent, Concessional family/skilled Australian-linked and Humanitarian immigrants who spoke English well fell respectively from 40, 36 and 19 per cent to 28, 32 and 15 per cent. Note, however, that the numbers in these categories are quite small. Other groups whose proportion of respondents speaking English well/very well as a second language fell substantially are Concessional family/skilled Australian-linked and Independent female Primary Applicants (42% to 29% and 48% to 38% respectively). In contrast, both male and female Primary Applicants of the Business skills/ENS visa category had a higher proportion speaking English well/very well as a second language in the second cohort than in the first. Their proportion rose from 30 to 37 per cent for males and from 33 to 39 per cent for females. Similar increases in the proportion speaking English well as a second language were found for female spouses of Business skills/ENS migrants (23% to 27%) and female Humanitarian Primary Applicants (14% to 19%).

Overall, a broad comparison between the four applicant types for Cohort 2 indicates that male migrating unit spouses have the highest level of English proficiency (only 21% of them cannot speak English well or at all). They are followed closely by male Primary Applicants, with just 24 per cent of them saying they are not able to speak English well/at all.

Table 4.7: English Proficiency of Migrants, by Applicant Status and Sex during first six months after Arrival, by Visa Category and Cohort (per cent)

Languages spoken by Visa Category	Cohort	Male PA	Female PA	Male SP	Female SP
<i>Concessional family/skilled-Australian linked</i>					
English only or best	1	39	40	41	43
	2	53	62	57	51
English well/very well and other language	1	37	42	36	28
	2	42	29	32	33
English not well/not at all and other language	1	24	18	23	29
	2	6	9	11	17
(Significance)		(***)	(**)	(n.s.)	(n.s.)
<i>Independent</i>					
English only or best	1	47	50	51	39
	2	54	60	70	48
English well/very well and other language	1	47	48	40	37
	2	45	38	28	28
English not well/not at all and other language	1	7	3	10	25
	2	1	+	+	24
(Significance)		(***)	(n.v.)	(n.v.)	(**)
<i>Preferential family/family stream</i>					
English only or best	1	39	24	49	50
	2	36	23	+	27
English well/very well and other language	1	29	31	+	10
	2	25	34	+	+
English not well/not at all and other language	1	32	45	51	40
	2	39	43	74	67
(Significance)		(*)	(n.s.)	(n.s.)	(**)
<i>Business skills/employer nomination scheme</i>					
English only or best	1	51	44	46	46
	2	44	23	+	39
English well/very well and other language	1	30	33	+	23
	2	37	39	+	27
English not well/not at all and other language	1	19	23	+	32
	2	19	38	+	34
(Significance)		(n.s.)	(n.s.)	(n.v.)	(n.s.)
<i>Humanitarian</i>					
English only or best	1	+	+	+	+
	2	+	+	+	+
English well/very well and other language	1	25	14	19	15
	2	22	19	15	13
English not well/not at all and other language	1	75	85	80	86
	2	77	81	85	86
(Significance)		(n.v.)	(n.v.)	(n.v.)	(n.v.)
<i>Total</i>					
English only or best	1	35	25	31	33
	2	42	31	52	39
English well/very well and other language	1	33	31	27	25
	2	34	33	27	25
English not well/not at all and other language	1	32	44	43	42
	2	24	36	21	37
(Significance) ¹		(***)	(***)	(***)	(*)

Notes: (1) Pearson Chi-square test, n.s. = not significant, * = probability < 0.05, ** = probability < 0.01, *** = probability < 0.001, n.v. = test not valid, + = number of observations very small.

It appears that, overall, the differences in English speaking ability between males and females is stronger than the differences between Primary Applicants and spouses.

On a visa category basis, almost every Independent migrant except for female spouses can speak English well, very well or only. A quarter of female spouses of Independent migrants cannot speak English well/at all. Also, over three-quarters of Humanitarian migrants are not able to speak English well/at all, regardless of whether they are male, female, Primary Applicant or spouse. In addition to English language information, Table 4.7 shows that there are a negligible number of male spouses of Business skills/ENS migrants. In other words, almost all business skilled migrants are either males or single females.

4.4 English Proficiency and Employment Status

Earlier analyses of LSIA data indicated that good English language skills are associated with a higher probability of being employed. See for example Richardson, Robertson and Ilsley (2001) p55. For Cohort 1, English language difficulties were clearly the major obstacle to getting a job reported at each wave, with about one-third of respondents indicating this problem.

There was a big fall between the cohorts in the proportion of migrants who reported that problems caused by inadequate English were an obstacle to finding work. Both a general improvement in the labour market and the effects of the changes in migrant selection criteria seem to be at work here.

The importance of competence in English for success in the labour market can be illustrated by the answers that migrants gave to a question about what language they needed to be able to read in order to be able to perform their job. The answers are set out in Figure 4.2 below.

Overwhelmingly, the Concessional family/skilled Australian-linked and Independent migrants report that the only language they need in their job is English, and this is little changed between the cohorts. About 10 per cent say they need to be able to read both English and another language. Among the Preferential family/family stream and Business skills/ENS,

the exclusive need for English literacy is less pronounced and has declined slightly for Cohort 2. Less than two-thirds of Business skills/ENS migrants report that they only need English: by Cohort 2, a quarter say that they need to be able to read English plus another language. In the light of Figure 4.2, we would expect that high level proficiency in English would be a less powerful factor in labour market success for Business skills/ENS and Preferential family/family stream migrants than it is for Concessional family/skilled Australian-linked and Independent migrants.

The views of migrants about the importance of English skills for getting a job is reinforced by multivariate analysis that predicts the probability of being employed. Here we report just the conclusions of this analysis. A full discussion is to be found in Richardson et al, 2001.

English language competence is an important predictor of the probability of being employed for the main visa groups, other than Humanitarian (very few of whom were employed so were excluded from the analysis) and Preferential family/family stream. The effect of less than perfect English reduces the probability of employment substantially. For example, for Independent migrants, those who do not speak English well have a one in four chance of being employed compared with those who speak English fluently, all other measured attributes being the same. It is interesting to note that even after controlling for English language ability, being born in the United Kingdom, Ireland or North America confers still greater chance of being employed. This is best interpreted as indicating unobserved qualities in the migrants—because these are high-income places of origin, people are not likely to migrate to Australia unless they anticipate good employment prospects. This self-selection interpretation is reinforced by the fact that English language ability is not a significant predictor of employment for Preferential family/family stream migrants, many of who come to Australia for reasons other than work opportunities.

We next present and comment on cross tabulations of migrants' self-reported English speaking skills and their employment status (employed, unemployed or not in the labour force) at the time of interview, six months after arrival. In doing this, we distinguish visa categories and make comparisons between Cohort 1 and 2.

Table 4.8 below shows, separately for people in each employment status, the self-reported English speaking level. The association between English skills and employment outcome is clear. People with the best English are most likely to be employed and least likely to be unemployed or not in the labour force. Conversely, people with the least English skills are most likely to be out of the labour force or unemployed and least likely to be employed. The probable explanation of this is that migrants who cannot speak English well or at all stay out of the labour force while their English skills are low, probably because they realise that they have little chance of employment until they can improve their English. Between Cohort 1 and Cohort 2, there is a sharp increase in the proportion of unemployed migrants whose first or only language is English from 21 to 40 per cent, and a corresponding fall in the proportion of unemployed migrants who do not speak English well or at all from 41 to 23 per cent.

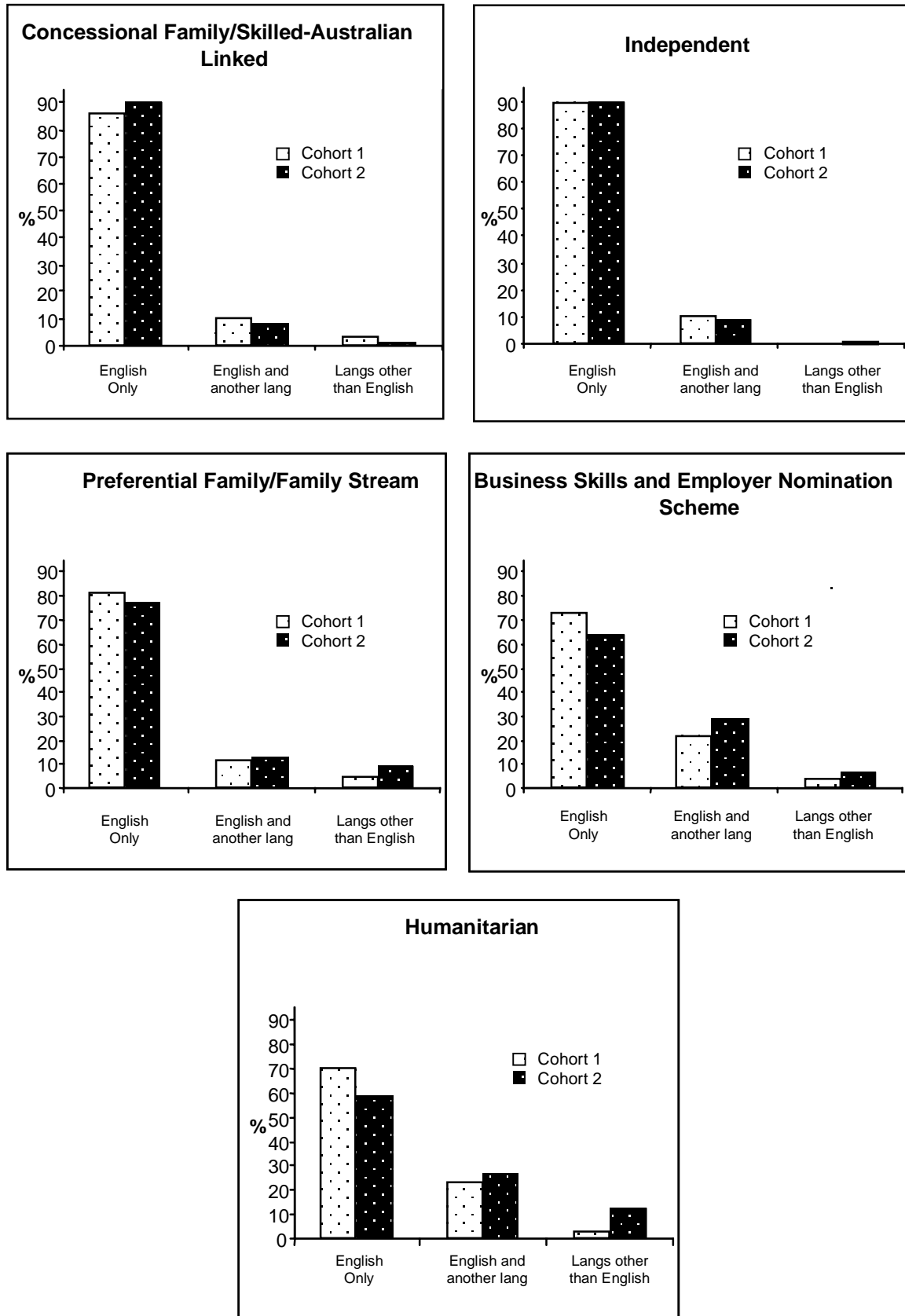
The picture varies slightly for each visa category, but generally, speaking English well is associated with high chances of being in the labour force and an even higher probability of being employed. For all visa categories, for employed migrants, the proportion of those whose first or only language is English is higher than that of those who speak English well/very well as a second language, which is in turn higher than that of those who do not speak English well/at all. The Humanitarian category is an exception to this as there are very few of them who have English as their first or only language. The reverse is true for migrants not in the labour force.

Table 4.8: English Proficiency of Migrants by Employment Status, during first Six Months after Arrival, by Employment Status and Cohort (per cent)

English Proficiency	Cohort	Employed	Unemployed	Not in labour force
English only or best	1	52	21	20
	2	53	40	19
English well/very well and other language	1	33	38	26
	2	35	37	26
English not well/not at all and other language	1	15	41	55
	2	12	23	55
(Significance) ¹		(*)	(***)	(n.s.)

Note: (1) Pearson Chi-square test, n.s. = not significant, * = probability < 0.05, *** = probability that the difference occurred by chance < 0.001.

Figure 4.2: Languages Recent Migrants need to Read to do Main Job or Business by Cohort and Visa Category (per cent)



4.5 Methods of Learning English

4.5.1 Pre-migration

The question of what strategies migrants used to learn English before and after arrival is relevant only to those who were not already fluent in the language. Migrants who did *not* respond ‘English’ to the question ‘What language do you speak best?’ were asked a series of questions about how well they spoke English and how they acquired such skills as they had. The discussion that follows refers only to this group of people who were not primarily speakers of English. For Cohort 2, this comprised 2597 respondents, or 62 per cent of the sample. The comparable figure for Cohort 1 is 4826 (69%).

The two cohorts were asked different questions about the ways in which they learned English prior to coming to Australia. Cohort 1 was asked “Did you learn English before immigrating?”, whereas Cohort 2 was asked “Did you attend any English *language* classes before migrating to Australia?” [italics in original] There is a difference between learning English and attending English language classes. Respondents in both cohorts who said yes to these questions were then asked to choose an option that best described how they learned English. The options were the same for both cohorts (despite the different prior question), and included being self-taught from books or tapes, learning from family, friends and work colleagues and from television. None of these options would be relevant to a person who was asked whether they had attended an English language class, whereas they are relevant to respondents asked simply whether they had learned English. Table 4.9 reports the methods used by respondents to learn English prior to their arrival in Australia, if they used any method. For the reasons just discussed, the answers for the two cohorts are not comparable (and hence no significance tests are performed). What we can compare are the methods used by migrants in the different visa categories.

Forty-two per cent of migrants (whose best language was not English) in Cohort 2 said that they did not attend any English language classes prior to arrival, while 25 per cent of Cohort 1 said that they did not learn English prior to arrival. Fifty-four per cent of relevant Cohort 2 respondents said that they had attended formal English language classes and a further four per cent used informal methods. The propensity to take a formal course in English was broadly similar across the visa categories for both cohorts, with the exception of

Humanitarian migrants who were the least likely to do so. The other group who were less keen on formal courses were migrants in the Preferential family/family stream. For both cohorts, informal methods or prior stay in an English speaking country were minor sources of English language capacity.

4.5.2 Post-migration

The Australian Commonwealth Government provides sponsored English language tuition to newly arrived migrants who are assessed as not having adequate English language ability. This program is commonly known as the Adult Migrant English Program (AMEP). To be eligible for the AMEP program, migrants need to register in the first three months after arrival and they must start the course within one year of settlement.

The LSIA questionnaire included a series of questions related to migrants' methods of learning English after arrival in Australia, as well as their information about and use of the AMEP. For the second Cohort, 49 per cent of respondents (who did not have English as their best language) said that prior to migrating to Australia, they were aware of specific English language courses available in Australia. However, only 43 per cent remember receiving information on the AMEP entitlement when they were given their visa. Six months after arrival, 33 per cent of respondents had commenced their English course with AMEP, and 31 per cent stated that AMEP was their main way of learning English since arriving in Australia.

Table 4.10 shows in detail the main methods of learning English used by migrants after arrival in Australia, for both cohorts by visa categories. Again, the percentages refer to the sub-set of migrants who did not have English as their best language. Overall, the proportion that had not yet commenced some study of English was the same for both cohorts, at 37 per cent. For Cohort 2, this was true of a majority of migrants in each visa category except Preferential family/family stream and Humanitarian migrants.

Table 4.9: Migrants Method of Learning English prior to Arrival in Australia, by Visa Category and Cohort (per cent)

Method of learning English	Cohort	Concessional family/skilled Australian-linked	Independent	Preferential family/family stream	Business skills/employer nomination scheme	Humanitarian	Total
Formal course	1	80	89	65	80	44	66
	2	64	65	53	62	33	54
Informal methods	1	6	7	10	8	11	9
	2	5	2	2	4	2	3
Have had previous stay in English speaking country	1	+	+	+	+	+	+
	2	+	1	2	+	+	1
Not attending English language class	1	14	4	25	11	46	25
	2	30	32	43	34	65	42
Significance ¹		(n.v.)	(n.v.)	(n.v.)	(n.v.)	(n.v.)	(n.v.)

Note: (1) Pearson Chi-square test, n.v. = not valid, + = number of observations very small (n<5).

Table 4.10: Migrants Method of Learning English in Australia during first Six Months after Arrival, by Visa Category and Cohort (per cent)

Method of learning English	Cohort	Concessional family/skilled Australian-linked	Independent	Preferential family/family stream	Business skills/employer nomination scheme	Humanitarian	Total
AMEP	1	30	17	23	22	51	29
	2	19	13	42	22	78	38
Other formal course	1	15	13	16	6	15	15
	2	11	11	5	7	5	7
Informal methods	1	16	20	25	18	11	20
	2	19	20	20	16	4	17
Not studied/learnt English yet	1	39	50	37	54	24	37
	2	52	56	33	54	14	38
Significance ¹		(***)	(n.s.)	(***)	(n.s.)	(***)	(***)

Note: (1) Pearson Chi-square test, n.s. = not significant, *** = probability < 0.001.

Over three-quarters of Humanitarian migrants used AMEP as their main method of learning English, while this is the case for 42 per cent of Preferential family/family stream migrants. The use of AMEP by these two categories has substantially increased since Cohort 1, at the expense of other methods of learning English and of not learning English at all. Indeed it is remarkable that only 13 per cent of Humanitarian migrants in Cohort 2 said that they had not started to learn English. The big increase in the proportion of Humanitarian and Preferential family/family stream migrants (the two visa groups with the lowest prior English skills) who were using the AMEP suggests that this is an important and increasingly well-targeted program. Independent migrants are the least likely to use the AMEP for both Cohorts, and their use of it has decreased from 17 per cent in Cohort 1 to just under 13 per cent in Cohort 2. However, the differences in Independent migrants' methods of learning English between the two Cohorts are not overall statistically significant. Similarly, there are virtually no changes in the way Business skills/ENS migrants learn English after arrival in Australia: the majority of them (54% for both Cohorts) had not started studying English at the time of interview.

4.6 Conclusion

The LSIA surveys provide a great deal of information about the English language skills of migrants. Quite a detailed account of this information has been presented in this section, from which it is possible to draw some broad conclusions.

English language skills were higher in the second cohort than they were in the first. This difference arose almost entirely from the improved English of Independent and Concessional family/skilled Australian-linked migrants. English proficiency was higher because more migrants had English as their best or only language, and fewer had very low levels of English competence. Indeed, by Cohort 2, fewer than 10 per cent of migrants reported that they spoke no or little English, among the Independent and Concessional family/skilled Australian-linked migrants.

In addition to English, migrants brought with them a capacity, between them, to speak almost every main language in the world. In a period of greater integration of the world economy and society in general, this rich language capacity should be a considerable economic and cultural resource for Australia.

Where people took steps to learn English prior to migrating, this was done almost entirely in the form of formal courses. On arrival in Australia, many migrants have taken up the opportunity of English language instruction provided by the Adult Migrant English Program, most particularly so if they are Humanitarian migrants. Since this group is the one that has by far the lowest levels of English proficiency, and probably as a consequence also the lowest levels of employment, this provides encouragement to focus AMEP on the needs of Humanitarian migrants. This conclusion is reinforced by the fact that Humanitarian migrants have little opportunity to learn English informally at home: only two per cent lived in homes where English is the main language spoken. This contrasts with the experience of the other main visa group to have relatively low levels of English proficiency, namely the Preferential family/family stream. Here, 28 per cent of migrants in Cohort 2 had English as their best language, but fully 45 per cent lived in homes where English was the main language spoken. This difference was not apparent for any of the other visa groups.

In the main, men had higher levels of English skills than did women, and there was little difference in proficiency between Primary Applicants on the one hand and migrating unit spouses on the other.

English language proficiency is strongly associated with, and almost certainly a cause of, higher employment, higher participation in the labour force and lower unemployment. In all these respects, the outcome for Cohort 2 is distinctly better than that for Cohort 1.