

## TRENDS IN THE SHIFT FROM COMMUNITY LANGUAGES: INSIGHTS FROM THE 2001 CENSUS

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*Analysis of language data from the 2001 Census reveals an increasing shift to the sole use of English in the home for most, but not all, of Australia's community language groups. The ageing of post-war language communities is having an escalating effect on language-shift rates for these groups; and language shift rates are significantly higher for communities and families outside the capital cities. Intra-group diversity is highlighted by the differential in language shift according to religious affiliation among those born in Lebanon, Egypt, India and Sri Lanka. While the reintroduction in the 2001 census of an ancestry question has enabled the closer identification of groups such as the Viet Nam-born (of both Chinese and Vietnamese ancestry), the removal of a question eliciting the birthplace of parents has made it impossible to provide an estimate of language shift in the second generation that is comparable to the first generation data or that is comparable to work on previous censuses.*

We have already<sup>1</sup> discussed the language data from the 2001 Census in terms of the numbers and residence of speakers of community languages, and the ways in which Australia's language demography is changing and diversifying. Such change is brought about to a large extent by changing patterns and sources of migration, but is also significantly affected by patterns of language maintenance and language shift in this country. In this article we explore these issues of language maintenance and shift, particularly with regard to the metropolitan/non-metropolitan divide and to factors such as age, religion and geographical concentration.

### ESTIMATING LANGUAGE SHIFT

Since 1986, the census has elicited information on languages other than English spoken *in the home*. In the absence of census data on language(s) first acquired, the language-shift rate for the first generation (see Table 1) is calculated as the proportion of speakers born in a particular country who now speak 'English only' in the home.

### DIFFERENTIAL LANGUAGE SHIFT RATES

As a result of analysis of previous censuses,<sup>2</sup> we have identified two groups which record a low rate of language shift — those originating in the Mediterranean region, notably speakers of Macedonian, Turkish, Arabic, and Greek, and more recent migrants from some east and south-east Asian countries, especially speakers of Chinese varieties. The highest shift rates are recorded from long established European groups who migrated at a time of assimilationist policies and attitudes in Australia, such as Dutch, German, French and Hungarian speakers as well as Maltese speakers, for whom English was the language of formal domains during the British colonial era. People of southern and eastern European background, such as speakers of Spanish, Italian, and Polish, occupy the area between the high and low shift groups. The same pattern continued in the second generation, except that there was a massive inter-generational discontinuity in Chinese families and, to an increasing extent, also in the longer established Italian and Greek communities.

**Table 1: Language shift in the first generation, 2001**

<b>Birthplace</b>	Using only English at home, 2001, per cent	Using only English at home, 1996, per cent	Using only English at home, 1991, per cent
Viet Nam	2.4	2.7	na
Eritrea	3.0	na	na
Somalia	3.4	na	na
Iraq	3.6	4.9	na
Taiwan	3.8	3.4	2.9
Cambodia	4.0	2.8	na
China (People's Republic)	4.3	4.6	5.3
Republic of Macedonia <sup>1</sup>	4.7	3.0	na
El Salvador	4.8	na	na
Lebanon	6.2	5.5	na
Greece	7.1	6.4	4.4
Turkey	7.1	5.8	4.0
Hong Kong	10.3	9.0	6.6
Republic of Korea	11.1	11.6	na
Chile	12.2	9.8	na
Ukraine	13.5	na	na
Ethiopia	14.9	na	na
Italy	15.9	14.7	11.7
Indonesia	16.4	15.4	na
Japan	16.9	15.4	na
Argentina	17.0	na	na
Portugal	17.4	na	na
Poland	22.3	19.6	18.7
Brazil	24.1	na	na
Spain	25.1	22.4	14.7
Mauritius	27.3	na	na
Philippines	27.4	24.8	na
Hungary	35.0	31.8	27.7
France	36.8	37.2	30.1
Latvia	38.2	na	na
Malta	38.2	36.5	30.7
Lithuania	41.7	na	na
Germany	54.0	48.2	43.5
Austria	54.4	48.3	42.5
Netherlands	62.6	61.9	57.8

na: not available from our data

<sup>1</sup> Referred to by the Australian Government as the Former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia

### **LANGUAGE SHIFT IN THE FIRST GENERATION, 2001**

The trends evident from previous censuses are continued in 2001. We have, however, been able to identify groups with very low

shift rates for which we have not previously had data. The smallest language shift rate is for the Viet Nam-born, followed by those born in Eritrea (speakers of Tigrinya, Amharic, Oromo and some

other languages) and Iraq (Arabic-speaking), while the highest shift rates continue to be for those born in the Netherlands, Austria, and Germany. The introduction of a question on ancestry has enabled us for the first time to identify Vietnamese as the best maintained of Australia's community languages — previously it was impossible (on the basis of birthplace alone) to separate Viet Nam-born speakers with 'Vietnamese' ancestry (with a shift rate of 2.1 per cent) from Viet Nam-born speakers with 'Chinese' ancestry (with a shift rate of 2.2 per cent). While some more recently arrived Asian groups (from Cambodia, Taiwan, People's Republic of China) are in the low shift category others, such as Indonesia- and Japan-born, are not. Reasons for this could include a high proportion of students (living in shared accommodation with speakers of other languages) or, in the case of Japanese (with the second highest female to male ratio in the 2001 Census after the Philippines-born), a high rate of exogamy. Among the high language shifters are the Latvia- and Lithuania-born. We have not previously collected information on these groups, and the findings are somewhat surprising in light of the strong language maintenance efforts undertaken by the communities in their homelands during the period of incorporation into the Soviet Union. The same degree of shift has not occurred in people from the Ukraine (see below).

The predisposition of members of an ethnolinguistic group to shift to English can usually be explained by the pre- and post-migration experiences of groups and individuals.<sup>3</sup> Other factors include cultural similarity to the dominant group and the relative importance of language in the core value systems of different language communities. Demographic factors, such

as the relative size and dispersion of the group, also play a role. Some of these factors are discussed below, within the limitations of the available space.

In terms of patterns of language shift over the past decade, most ethnolinguistic communities for which we have data have experienced a slow but steady increase in the rate of language shift in the decade since 1991. This applies both to groups with low base shift rates (Lebanon, Turkey) and those with medium to high shift rates (Philippines, Hungary). Both 'older' (Poland, Hungary)<sup>4</sup> and 'newer' (Taiwan, Philippines) vintages are also represented. German (from both Germany and Austria) has experienced a somewhat faster increase in language shift, and this is reflected in the significant overall decrease (23 per cent since 1996) in home users of German in 2001.<sup>5</sup> An explanation for this may be found in a number of interrelated factors, including lack of significant new migration, length of residence (and ageing of the population), lack of geographical concentration, and the particular post-migration experiences of German speakers in a post-war Australia with a strong assimilationist ideology. The latter factor is reflected in a consistently larger than usual shift among those born in German-speaking countries who migrated as children and adolescents and who are now entering the older age brackets (who have traditionally been the 'custodians' of language for the community language groups). With the exception of the France-born (who did, however, experience a particularly large increase in language shift between 1991 and 1996), the groups showing a decrease in language shift in 2001 are all prominent within the immigration program in different ways and to different extents. While the hu-

manitarian program is a small component of overall immigration, Iraq has been an important source country during the 1990s. Mandarin is one of the most rapidly growing community languages and, although the increases in speakers of Vietnamese (up 19.2 per cent) and Korean (up 32.1 per cent) between 1996-2001 are not as great as that for Mandarin (up 51.3 per cent), they are still considerable, and much of the increase is still due to continuing migration (largely through the business and family reunion programs). The decrease in the shift rate of the overseas-born for these groups may be due to a short period of residence for a growing sector of the community, increasing mobility (with corresponding frequency of return visits to the source country) and the revitalisation that continuing migration provides for the established community.

A question raised by the large-scale decrease in the number of home users of German, and the accelerating language shift from German, is whether the pattern will be repeated for Italian, where the majority of speakers arrived only a decade after the post-war German wave.

#### **SECOND GENERATION**

Up until the 2001 Census, language shift in the second generation has been calculated as the proportion of the Australia-born with parents born in a particular country who now use only English at home. This is no longer possible because of a change to the census question regarding parental birthplace in 2001 (there are now only two options: 'In Australia/outside Australia'). Although the introduction of a question on ancestry has enabled us to 'disaggregate' overseas-born from countries with diverse ancestries, such as Viet Nam (Vietnamese, Chinese), Greece (Greek, Macedonian) and Egypt

(Arabic, Greek, Italian, French), the removal of a direct question on parental birthplace has made it impossible for us to continue to provide comparable data for the second generation, particularly those from mixed marriages. We have no way of knowing through which parent the preferred ancestry (or ancestries — two are recorded) is/are conferred, we cannot tell whether there is in fact a match between ancestry and the language usually associated with that ancestry, and if the preferred ancestry is 'Australian' we have no way of connecting an Australian-born sole user of English with any other language at all. While using birthplace as a surrogate for 'language first used' is far from problem-free (for example the difficulties with the Viet Nam-born, discussed above) it did have the benefits of objectivity, applicability to families of mixed ethnic/language background and comparability over a number of censuses.

#### **THE EFFECTS OF THE METROPOLITAN/ NON-METROPOLITAN DIVIDE ON LANGUAGE SHIFT**

Some 88 per cent of all speakers of LOTES (languages other than English) in Australia live in the capital cities, the majority in Sydney and Melbourne.<sup>6</sup> The most urbanised communities are those born in Somalia, Eritrea, Cambodia, Viet Nam and Lebanon, while the least urbanised are those born in the Netherlands, Germany, Switzerland and Austria. Table 2 is organised according to the proportion of a group residing outside the metropolitan area.

Table 2 shows that the overwhelming tendency is for languages to be less well maintained in rural areas and regional centres than in capital cities. It also indicates that concentration of the population is one of the determining factors in lan-

**Table 2: Metropolitan versus non-metropolitan language shift, 2001**

Birthplace	Per cent of group living in non-metro area	Non-metro shift, per cent	Metro shift, per cent	Total shift, per cent	Per cent differential
Somalia	1.4	17.3	3.2	3.4	440.6
Eritrea	2.1	9.1	2.9	3.0	213.8
Cambodia	2.4	14.9	3.7	4.0	302.7
Viet Nam	2.7	9.6	2.2	2.4	336.4
Lebanon	2.9	18.2	5.8	6.2	213.8
China	5.0	13.5	3.8	4.3	255.3
Hong Kong	5.7	28.8	9.2	10.3	213.0
Iraq	5.7	3.4	3.6	3.6	-5.6
El Salvador	6.0	9.6	4.5	4.8	113.3
Sri Lanka	6.0	54.6	39.5	40.4	38.2
Mauritius	6.3	40.6	26.4	27.3	53.8
Egypt	6.5	46.3	20.0	21.7	131.5
Greece	6.8	15.9	6.4	7.1	148.4
Ethiopia	7.1	56.5	11.6	14.9	387.1
Taiwan	7.9	6.8	3.5	3.8	94.3
Republic of Korea	8.0	31.0	9.3	11.1	233.3
Chile	8.1	23.6	11.2	12.2	110.7
Indonesia	9.0	37.7	14.3	16.4	163.6
Argentina	9.1	27.7	15.9	17.0	74.2
Turkey	10.4	10.8	6.7	7.1	61.2
Ukraine	12.8	27.9	11.4	13.5	144.7
Malta	13.3	55.7	35.5	38.2	56.9
Poland	14.4	34.1	20.3	22.3	68.0
Italy	15.7	22.7	14.6	15.9	55.5
Philippines	16.8	45.0	23.9	27.4	88.3
Republic of Macedonia	18.8	6.0	4.3	4.7	39.5
Hungary	19.4	44.8	32.6	35.0	37.4
Lithuania	20.4	54.0	38.6	41.7	39.9
Latvia	20.7	54.1	34.0	38.2	59.1
France	22.5	40.0	35.8	36.8	11.7
Japan	23.0	14.7	17.6	16.9	-16.5
Spain	25.0	27.0	24.5	25.1	10.2
Austria	29.9	57.6	53.1	54.4	8.5
Germany	33.0	56.9	52.5	54.0	8.4
Netherlands	37.8	66.3	60.4	62.6	9.8

guage shift, with the most urbanised languages showing the greatest differential in language shift between metropolitan and non-metropolitan areas. Groups behaving in slightly unexpected ways within this pattern are:

- Those born in Korea, Ethiopia, and the Philippines. These demonstrate a slightly higher language shift differential than would be indicated by the respective proportions of rural and regional population. In the case of

the Philippines, this may be partly explained

- by the relatively high incidence of Filipinas in exogamous partnerships in remote areas.<sup>7</sup> Only 250 Ethiopia-born live outside the capital cities (spread over all states) and the group is also very diverse, encompassing several languages. Behaviour may thus be less predictable. Although a high proportion of the Korea-born in Queensland live on the Gold Coast, non-metropolitan Korea-born in NSW tend not to be concentrated in regional centres, and may be more vulnerable to language shift as a result of their dispersion.
- The Iraq-born are an anomalous group in that they show an increased language maintenance rate in non-metropolitan areas, although they are one of the most urbanised birthplace groups. This may be due to the concentration of refugee populations in small towns such as Shepparton. Table 1 also indicates that Iraq is one of the few birthplaces for which the overall language shift (LS) is actually decreasing, probably due to new arrivals. The Japan-born, the other group for whom the LS rate in rural areas is lower than that for the capital cities, has 23 per cent of its population outside the capital cities, much of this concentrated in the Gold and Sunshine Coast areas of Queensland. Other birthplace groups which have concentrations in regional centres (Former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia, Italy) also have relatively low differentials in language shift.

Some of the factors leading to increased language shift outside of the capital cities are: smaller numbers and decreased concentration; consequent lack

of access to language maintenance institutions such as schools and social events (although media input should be available); attitudinal factors; and community support.

#### RELIGION

One of the factors that our Census data allows us to consider is the impact of religion on language shift from a number of birthplaces. It was one of the factors considered in our in-depth study of the Lebanon- and Egypt-born speakers of Arabic in Melbourne<sup>8</sup> where we concluded that Muslims from both birthplaces displayed a lower shift away from Arabic than did Maronites (from Lebanon) or Copts (from Egypt), particularly in the second generation. This finding is confirmed by the census data in the first generation for the Lebanon-born (2.4 per cent language shift for 'Islam', 3.3 per cent for 'Other Catholic'), but not for the Egypt-born (9.4 per cent language shift for 'Islam', 7.1 for 'Other religion (including Coptic)'. However, in the second generation (or subsequent generations, as we have no way via the ancestry question of identifying *only* the second generation), the difference is very marked indeed, with Australia-born of Lebanese ancestry showing language shifts of 4.9 per cent (Islam) and 17.1 per cent ('Other Catholic'). For Egypt, the figures were 18.1 per cent (Islam) and 25.3 per cent ('Other'). We have suggested that this may be at least partly due to the increased incentive for the development of literacy beyond the first generation among Muslims of both groups, as well as the more symbolic status of Arabic within Islam as the language through which Allah has spoken to his prophet and, through the Koran, to his people.

In the case of the Sri Lanka-born, with an overall shift rate of 40.4 per cent, there

is a language shift in the first generation of 7.4 per cent (Hindu), 65.8 per cent (Western Catholic) and 73.9 per cent (Protestant). With the India-born there is an overall shift rate of 47.6 per cent but the division is even more marked, with shifts of 8.9 per cent (Hindu), 89.4 per cent (Western Catholic) and 85.4 per cent (Protestant). While in both cases many of the English speakers would have used English as their home language prior to migration,<sup>9</sup> both cultural distance (promoting language maintenance for Hindus) and integration into mainstream churches in Australia (promoting language shift for Christians) are factors that must be taken into account.

#### **GEOGRAPHICAL CONCENTRATION AND LANGUAGE SHIFT**

We have noted on the basis of the 1996 census<sup>10</sup> that languages are maintained best in the State in which they are best represented — that is, in which their number of speakers forms the highest proportion of the total population of the State. While the general pattern still holds in 2001 (see Table 3), the ‘smaller’ languages added to our data (such as Latvian, Lithuanian, Ukrainian and Somali), whose populations barely register in any state, clearly do not lend themselves particularly well to this sort of analysis. For these ‘small population’ languages, however, Victoria and South Australia show consistently (and significantly) lower shift rates. Where the pattern (higher representation per head of population = lower shift rate) does not hold for the 2001 data (for example Iraq-born, Poland-born, Cambodia-born, Taiwan-born) it is generally also Victoria and South Australia where there is a lower-than-expected rate of shift. The very low rate of language shift for the Taiwan-born in Queensland may be due

to the very high concentration of Taiwan-born in one area of metropolitan Brisbane (Sunnybank). Victoria is still the State where the largest number of community languages are maintained best, reflecting the presence of a broad base of languages over a number of decades. Notable are the relatively high shift rate for Spanish in NSW (given its population share), and the relatively low shift rates for Japanese, Korean and Mandarin (Taiwan) in Queensland: these are all languages brought to Australia primarily under the ‘Skills (business)’ migration category. There is no ‘state of highest representation’ given for Netherlands- or France-born, as they are extremely evenly distributed (and the language shift rates are also remarkably uniform).

In general terms, languages which are more highly concentrated in particular local government areas (LGAs) within municipalities tend to be better maintained than those which are more dispersed across the metropolitan area. Close proximity to other speakers, together with the clustering of language-specific facilities, work in the interest of intergenerational transmission of the language, and Fishman’s<sup>11</sup> notion of family-neighbourhood-community based transmission of language is dependent on this sort of concentration. For example, Khmer, Vietnamese, Macedonian and Turkish, which are very highly concentrated within particular LGAs in Melbourne, Sydney, Adelaide and Perth, are among the languages with the lowest overall shift rates. German, which is one of the most dispersed community languages across all States, has one of the highest rates of shift. However, concentration alone is clearly not enough to guarantee the future of a community language, as is attested to by

**Table 3: Language shift by State and Territory, 2001**

Birthplace	NSW	VIC	QLD	SA	WA	ACT	TAS	NT
Argentina	<b>15.3</b>	16.4	23.9	23.3	21.2	23.7	33.3	50.0
Austria	57.3	52.3	53.0	<b>53.2</b>	58.2	54.1	66.5	64.6
Cambodia	3.7	<b>3.9</b>	8.8	<b>3.5</b>	6.8	11.2	0.0	0.0
Chile	<b>11.8</b>	10.8	20.7	14.0	15.0	11.3	15.0	17.0
PRC	<b>3.6</b>	3.8	9.5	8.0	6.2	7.3	17.1	11.1
France*	34.1	39.7	37.9	40.4	37.9	37.1	42.2	44.8
Germany	55.7	53.1	54.9	<b>52.9</b>	56.1	57.5	57.4	54.7
Greece	6.9	<b>6.2</b>	16.1	6.7	14.5	9.7	11.1	6.0
Hong Kong	<b>7.9</b>	8.8	17.2	16.2	20.8	22.4	30.9	23.8
Hungary	37.2	<b>30.4</b>	37.1	35.0	39.9	40.3	57.0	48.5
Iraq	<b>3.4</b>	3.2	11.6	5.0	5.7	11.4	8.3	0.0
Italy	16.6	<b>13.9</b>	23.8	14.6	17.5	21.0	27.8	21.8
Japan	<b>17.1</b>	18.6	<b>13.6</b>	20.6	18.3	29.8	22.3	27.0
Republic of Korea	<b>7.2</b>	18.0	13.2	50.2	28.6	22.3	40.3	58.4
Latvia*	38.4	32.8	50.1	36.6	48.6	42.9	58.5	54.5
Lebanon	<b>5.5</b>	6.1	22.1	11.7	16.5	9.9	27.3	33.3
Lithuania*	48.7	33.4	54.5	35.9	59.3	40.9	40.2	66.7
Republic of Macedonia	4.8	<b>4.1</b>	10.4	10.9	4.2	11.8	25.0	50.0
Malta	38.3	<b>33.6</b>	59.3	49.1	68.2	60.0	86.5	82.4
Netherlands*	64.2	63.8	63.2	64.0	59.9	62.4	61.1	71.0
Philippines	<b>22.7</b>	25.4	40.5	34.6	40.1	31.1	51.4	29.6
Poland	24.1	<b>22.2</b>	27.9	17.4	19.4	22.6	28.5	35.7
Somalia*	5.8	2.6	1.8	0.0	5.6	16.7	33.3	0.0
Spain	<b>23.2</b>	24.7	27.7	33.9	30.6	22.0	35.6	24.1
Taiwan	<b>4.2</b>	4.3	2.2	7.0	7.9	13.5	5.3	23.1
Turkey	7.4	<b>5.3</b>	19.7	13.8	16.2	27.9	37.5	25.0
Ukraine*	13.2	9.9	27.1	16.5	24.7	12.7	34.1	0.0
Viet Nam	2.2	<b>1.8</b>	3.9	3.1	3.3	6.2	19.4	8.9

**Notes:** **Bold**, State with the highest proportion of speakers per head of population; *Language shift* refers to the per cent using only English at home.

\*See text above.

the case of Maltese. Maltese is very highly concentrated at the LGA level in both Melbourne and Sydney, but nevertheless has one of the higher rates of shift (see Table 1). If a community typically uses English for intra-group communication, then a high degree of concentration will clearly reinforce this pattern. Greek, on the other hand, has become increasingly dispersed and continues to be one of the better maintained languages.

## CONCLUSIONS

Data from the 2001 census have confirmed the lower shift rate noted in previous censuses for recently arrived groups (this time from Eritrea, Somali, Iraq), and those from the Mediterranean region (notably speakers of Macedonian, Turkish, and Arabic), and the higher rates from long established groups from northern and western Europe. With the help of the ancestry question, the 2001 census has established for the first time the particularly low shift rate of both

Vietnamese and Chinese speakers from Viet Nam; it has also documented the rapidly accelerating shift for German. While the shift rate for most community languages is continuing to increase, for some languages it is reversing — languages that have decreased their shift rate are the ones for which there is significant and ongoing revitalisation from their source countries.

We have highlighted the increased rate of language shift outside of the capital cities, and the differential in language shift between States, reflecting the differing ‘concentration’ of community languages across and within States. Population distribution, rather

than raw numbers, has been shown to be a key factor in successful language maintenance, although strong concentration of a community language, even at LGA level, does not in itself guarantee such maintenance. The effect of religion on language maintenance is clearly a highly complex one, depending not only on issues of language use specific to religion, but also on other factors such as cultural distance.

#### Notes

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#### References

- <sup>1</sup> M. Clyne and S. Kipp, ‘Australia’s changing language demography’, *People and Place*, vol.10, no.4, 2002, pp. 19-27
- <sup>2</sup> See for example, M. Clyne, *Community Languages: The Australian Experience*, Cambridge University Press, Cambridge, 1991; M. Clyne and S. Kipp, ‘Trends and Changes in Home Language Use and Shift in Australia’, *Journal of Multilingual and Multicultural Development*, vol.18, 1997, pp. 451-73.
- <sup>3</sup> M. Clyne, *Dynamics of Language Contact*, Cambridge University Press, Cambridge, 2003
- <sup>4</sup> We recognise that both of these groups comprise a mixture of ‘vintages’.
- <sup>5</sup> Clyne and Kipp, op. cit., 2002
- <sup>6</sup> *ibid.*
- <sup>7</sup> D. Cahill, ‘Intermarriages in International Contexts’, *A Study of Filipina Women Married to Australian, Japanese and Swiss Men*, Scalabrini Migration Centre, Quezon City, Philippines, 1990
- <sup>8</sup> M. Clyne and S. Kipp, *Pluricentric Languages in an Immigrant Context*, Mouton de Gruyter, Berlin, 1999
- <sup>9</sup> Of the three groups who have migrated from Sri Lanka, for example — Burgers, Sinhalese and Tamils — the first-mentioned tended to be monolingual English speakers, while English was commonly used as a medium of inter ethnic communication among the others, even after independence.
- <sup>10</sup> Clyne and Kipp, op. cit., 1997
- <sup>11</sup> J.A. Fishman, *Reversing Language Shift*, Clevedon, Multilingual Matters, 1991