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Learning the Lingo:

The Challenge of Gaining English Proficiency

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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

This study reports on the English language acquisition of skilled migrants to New Zealand using findings from the Longitudinal Immigration Survey: New Zealand (LisNZ) and the qualitative Five Years On study. Understanding the challenge of gaining English language proficiency is important as language acquisition is known to be a critical factor in a migrant's ability to 'integrate' into a host community and in determining labour market outcomes.

Analysis of LisNZ data showed that skilled migrants from North Asia rated their English ability as lower than other skilled migrants six months after gaining residence in New Zealand. They were also less likely to report improvement over time. This was true irrespective of whether North Asian migrants transitioned to residence from a student permit.

The qualitative study was able to explore the reasons for this trend in more depth and showed exposure to English language prior to departure to New Zealand as being important for English language acquisition on arrival. In addition, the degree to which migrants were immersed in English within their educational, social, and work interactions was important in developing and maintaining English language proficiency. These were areas where North Asian participants seemed to differ consistently from other study participants.

The findings from this research will contribute to discussions about how best to facilitate acquisition of English language among migrants to New Zealand to improve migrants' ability to participate fully in the New Zealand labour market and in New Zealand society more generally.

1 INTRODUCTION

Migrants' acquisition of the destination language is known to be an important factor in their social and political 'integration' and in determining their earning power in a destination country (Chiswick and Miller, 2001; Chiswick, Lee et al., 2004; Chiswick, Yew Liang Lee et al., 2004; Chiswick, Lee et al., 2005; Chiswick, Lee et al., 2006; Chiswick, Yew Liang Lee et al., 2006; Esser, 2006a; Esser, 2006b). Acquisition of destination language is commonly modelled in terms of efficiency and *exposure* factors, and of economic incentives for learning the language. Efficiency factors are in part personal attributes – age and education – and in part structural – the *language distance* between destination language and migrant's language (Chiswick and Miller, 2004). *Exposure* is assessed in terms of neighbourhood (for example, whether migrants live in an area where language of origin is widely spoken) and family (for example, whether English is spoken in the home) (Chiswick, Yew Liang Lee et al., 2005).

Despite recognition of the importance of English language skill among migrants, there has been very limited systematic study of English language acquisition among migrants in New Zealand in contrast to Australia and Canada (Chiswick and Miller, 2001; Chiswick, Lee et al., 2004; Chiswick, Lee et al., 2005; Chiswick, Lee et al., 2006) or Europe (Esser, 2006a; Esser, 2006b). In 2000, Winkelmann drew on pre-1980 experiences of migrants in New Zealand to suggest that about 20 percent of non-English speaking non-European migrants would learn English in 5 years and just over half within 15 years. He argued that 'the improvement is relatively slow for non-Europeans, and a lack of English proficiency might be a major handicap for those migrants' (Winkelmann, 2000). Acquisition of English is regarded as important by New Zealand employers, migrants and migrant businesses (Buchan, 2005; Henderson, Trlin et al., 2006; Spoonley and Meares, 2009).

1.1 Purpose of this report

This exploration of English language acquisition among skilled migrants is intended to help understand the challenge of gaining proficiency in English. The research will contribute to discussions about how best to facilitate acquisition of English language among migrants to New Zealand.

1.2 Context of this report

The importance of English language skills in migration are recognised in the English language requirements of New Zealand's immigration policy, particularly in determining entry under the Skilled Migrant Category (SMC). The SMC is a points-based category that allows people to gain permanent residence if they have the skills, including English skills, qualifications and experience to contribute

to New Zealand economically and socially.[1] This category comprises the largest group of permanent migrants to New Zealand.[2]

1.3 English language among migrants

Policy settings for English proficiency among SMC principal applicants[3] are high. In general, they must either have a minimum standard of English of at least 6.5 on an IELTS[4] test within the last two years, or be able to show evidence of English language proficiency, for example through achieving a recognised qualification taught in English, or through ongoing skilled employment in New Zealand.[5]

As a consequence of the policy settings, the overall level of English proficiency is high. The LisNZ showed that 70 percent of skilled principal migrants spoke English as a best language and 29 percent had good or very good English (Masgoret, Merwood et al., 2009). A proportion of skilled principal migrants who transitioned from a student visa would have already met further English language requirements imposed by the education provider[6] as a condition of admission for study.

Many permanent migrants have opportunities to acquire English skills before gaining residence. During 1997-2006 just over 23 percent of international students transitioned to work visas enabling them to work in New Zealand. Over half of these subsequently transitioned to permanent residence. A further 8 percent made a direct transition from study to residence. Transition rates from study to residence are highest among international students from India (46.7 percent) and China (22.9 percent) (Wilkinson, Merwood et al., 2010).

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[1] For more information on SMC see: http://www.immigration.govt.nz/migrant/stream/work/skilledmigrant/questionsandanswers/default.htm

[2] In 2011/10, 21,212 people were approved for residence through the SMC (52 percent of the New Zealand residence programme). http://dol.govt.nz/research/migration/trends-statistics.asp

[3] The principal applicant is the person making the application. Partners and dependent children may also be included in the application.

[4] International English Language Testing Systems (IELTS)

[5] For a full description of the policy see Appendix 1

[6] For example, the University of Auckland requires English language proficiency equivalent to IELTS scores of at least 6.0 and 6.5 for undergraduate and postgraduate study respectively see: http://www.auckland.ac.nz/uoa/home/for/international-students/is-entry-requirements/is-english-language-requirements

2 ANALYSIS

2.1 Data sources for the study

All quantitative data are taken from the Longitudinal Immigration Survey: New Zealand (LisNZ), and are weighted to be representative of all migrants aged 16 years and over who were approved for permanent residence in New Zealand from 1 November 2004 to 31 October 2005. The LisNZ was a partnership between the Department of Labour and Statistics New Zealand, and was designed to produce detailed information on the settlement outcomes of migrants over time. Migrants were interviewed at six, 18, and 36 months after taking up permanent residence in New Zealand (Waves 1, 2 and 3 respectively). Over 5,000 completed interviews were achieved at Wave 3.

Within the LisNZ, the largest regions of origin for SMC principal applicants were the United Kingdom and Irish Republic (41 percent), North Asia (15 percent) and South Africa (11 percent). Of those from North Asia, the majority (71 percent) were from mainland Peoples' Republic of China (China) with only small proportions from Hong Kong, Japan, South Korea and Taiwan. Smaller numbers of migrants came from South Asia (10 percent), South East Asia (5 percent) and North America (5 percent).

All qualitative data are taken from the Five Years On study. The Five Years On study is a small qualitative study with people who took part in the LisNZ and agreed to a further in depth interview approximately five years after taking up residence in New Zealand. The Five Years On study focussed specifically on Skilled Migrant Category principal applicants. In order to protect the privacy of individuals' information, participants were not selected on the basis of their previous survey interview data. Instead, participants were sampled on the basis of location of residence and region of origin in order to reflect the distribution and character of the Skilled Migrant Category principal applicant population.

In total 64 people participated in the study, 19 from Auckland, 22 from Wellington and 23 from Dunedin, Nelson and Napier. There were 18 participants from the United Kingdom, 2 from the Pacific, 13 from South East Asia (mainly the Philippines), 13 from North Asia (mainly from China), 9 from South Asia (India), 3 from South Africa and Zimbabwe, 4 from North America and 2 from other regions.

2.2 English ability among principal skilled migrants

LisNZ participants were asked to rate their English skills at all three waves. Table 1 shows the level of English language ability reported by respondents at Waves 1 and 3 by region of origin. It also shows the changes in language ability between the two waves. Percentages reflect the proportion of migrants in each English language ability level at Wave 1 who report the same and different levels at Wave 3 (i.e. percentages add to 100 across the rows). Shaded cells represent unchanged levels of ability, while percentages to the left and right of these show reported reduced and increased ability respectively.

Asian skilled migrants reported lower English ability than other skilled migrants, and North Asians rated themselves lower than other Asians. Around half of North Asian skilled principal migrants (870 out of 1,770 or 49 percent) reported English language ability which was classified as being poor to good at Wave 1; while fewer than one in ten other Asian migrants did so (9 percent). Only around 2 percent of people from regions outside of Asia reported a poor to good level of English at Wave 1, while for 84 percent, English was a main language spoken (compared to 15 percent of North Asians, and 57 percent of other Asians).

Table 1 shows that North Asian migrants were not only more likely to report lower language ability at either wave, but those who did so were less likely to report improvement between waves. Only around a third (32 percent) of North Asian migrants whose ability was regarded as 'poor to good' at Wave 1 reported an improvement to 'very good' by Wave 3, while more than half of other migrants who reported this level of English language reported an improvement (57 percent of those from elsewhere in Asia, and 65 percent of those from other regions).

Similarly North Asian migrants who reported a language ability of 'very good' at Wave 1 were more likely than other migrants to report a lower level at Wave 3 (27 percent of North Asians reported a decline from 'very good' to 'poor to good', compared with 20 percent of other Asians, and 6 percent of migrants from other regions).

Table 1.Skilled principal applicants' reported English language ability at Wave 1 and Wave 3 by region of origin

Wave 1 English language	**Wave 3 English Language**			**Wave 1 Weighted Responses**
	Poor to good	Very good	A main language spoken	
North Asia				
Poor to good	68%	32%	0%	870
Very good	27%	73%	0%	630
A main language spoken	0%	0%	100%	270
Other Asia				
Poor to good	43%	57%	0%	140
Very good	20%	82%	0%	560
A main language spoken	0%	0%	100%	930
Other Regions				
Poor to good	35%	65%	0%	170
Very good	6%	94%	0%	1,130
A main language spoken	0%	0%	100%	7,080

Note: Due to rounding, percentages may not sum to 100.

Source: Longitudinal Immigration Survey: New Zealand (LisNZ).

During the period of recruitment to LisNZ, larger numbers of migrants from North Asia transitioned to residence from a student permit than entered New Zealand directly as residents under SMC; the latter are therefore proportionally smaller in number within the LisNZ. Table 2 shows the level of English language ability

reported by North Asian respondents at Waves 1 and 3, broken down by whether or not they had been an international student at some stage prior to gaining residence.

Those North Asian migrants who had not been international students were more likely to report lower levels of English at Wave 1 (for example, 79 percent reported poor to good English at Wave 1, compared to 41 percent of those who had held a student visa). Former international students were also more likely than other North Asian migrants to report an improvement in English language ability (almost half of those who reported a poor to good level at Wave 1 reported an improved level at Wave 3). This improvement was only a little lower than that reported by migrants from other regions, as shown in Table 1 (57 percent for other Asians, and 65 percent for those from other regions).

By Wave 3, 34 percent (570 out of 1,380) of former international students from North Asia were still reporting a poor to good level of English however. The issue of poorer levels of English and lower levels of improvement in English characterised migrants from North Asia, irrespective of whether or not they had previously been international students in New Zealand. This was the case even though international students had been required to achieve good formal English before being admitted to study courses, and had gained tertiary qualifications studying in English. Furthermore, the tertiary qualifications gained by North Asian migrants as a group were more likely than other Asian groups to be a Bachelor's or an advanced degree which have high entry level English requirements (Wilkinson, Merwood et al., 2010).

Table 2. North Asian Skilled principal applicants' reported English language ability at Wave 1 and Wave 3 by whether or not they have held a student visa

Wave 1 English language	**Wave 3 English Language**			**Wave 1 Weighted Responses**
	Poor to good	Very good	A main language spoken	
Did not hold a student visa				
Poor to good	93%	10%	0%	300
Very good	..c	100%	0%	50
A main language spoken	0%	0%	100%	30
Held a student visa				
Poor to good	54%	46%	0%	570
Very good	28%	72%	0%	580
A main language spoken	0%	0%	100%	230

Note: ..c = suppressed for confidentiality reasons. Due to rounding, percentages may not sum to 100.
Source: Longitudinal Immigration Survey: New Zealand (LisNZ).

Overall the quantitative data shows that North Asians have poorer English language skills than other migrants, irrespective of whether they have studied and gained a qualification in New Zealand. While the quantitative data highlights trends in the data, it is the qualitative '*Five Years On'* study of individuals' experiences which enables a further examination of the reasons for this trend.

3 FIVE YEARS ON: ENGLISH ABILITY AMONG PARTICIPANTS

In the Five Years On sample, as in the general LisNZ cohort, North Asians were more likely than other participants to report lower English proficiency. Of the 64 people interviewed, all those from the United Kingdom, North America, South Africa or Zimbabwe, and the Pacific, spoke English as a main language. They reported no problems with using English in New Zealand.

Another 21 participants had English as a language of instruction or as a family language. These people were from India, the Philippines, Malaysia, South America and Indonesia. This group reported soon overcoming any difficulties with New Zealand English, which usually related to issues like accent. As one woman recalled with laughter, 'initially just listening to the accent of the people such as the teacher … We can't catch up'. Small residual problems might remain: 'oh pronunciation (laughter) I think it's the accent because you put the accent on the other part of word and I put it at the end … I feel sorry for my husband … my kids tease him "Dad, that's not the word to say" - it's really funny'.

In contrast, the 13 North Asian participants (11 from China, one from Taiwan and one from Japan) reported that English had been a major problem. As one said, 'it was really hard … everything was really difficult … going to town's difficult … going to banks, dealing, opening accounts. Shopping … hardest time ever in my whole life'. By the time they took part in this study, the participants from North Asia had all been resident in New Zealand for at least 5 years. A few considered themselves completely fluent, some considered that they adequately managed all practical problems communicating in English, but a few reported that their English skills had deteriorated and presented an ongoing problem.

3.1 Reasons for lower English ability among North Asian participants: cumulative factors

In this study, North Asian participants differed from other migrants in regard to their exposure to English prior to migration and their immersion in English after migration while studying, in social life and in employment.

Exposure to English prior to migration

For all North Asians in the study, exposure to English prior to migration had been at best a school classroom subject - taught rather than used. Only one study participant, who came to complete her secondary schooling in New Zealand, managed with this schoolroom learning with English that 'was all right' but 'had a pretty heavy American accent'. All other participants needed extramural English language training. An older graduate did extramural study because 'after the second year in university in China we don't study English any more'. She had enrolled in special English language training to get the adequate minimum IELTS score for admission to a New Zealand university. Several other participants attended language schools run by the immigration businesses that organised their travel. As one explained, her family had joined with friends' families and 'all approached to the same agent' to attend a 'school associated to that business'

and take formal English examinations. But participants generally felt English preparation was insufficient. As one man argued, any amount of 'English teaching in China is not really enough … even if you study English for about 5 or 6 years … you still couldn't speak fluent English'.

Individuals differed in their attitudes towards learning English prior to migration. Some showed great determination. One woman explained, 'I always prepare myself very well if I determine to do something . I just think preparing yourself well, that's the basis for success'. Several undertook short but intense immersion English courses. On the other hand some participants had not prepared intensively. One participant undertook up to two years English language study in New Zealand before undertaking tertiary study.

Chinese participants reported that in general, Chinese people intending to migrate did not foresee or prepare for 'the language barrier'. One explained this was due to the fact that 'you don't need to speak English in China actually' and even foreigners there 'tended to speak Chinese anyway'. Another believed many of his countrymen just did not worry about foundation skills in English language: 'their English foundation is not very good ... it's lack of the spelling skill … before they come here they must learn spelling. Lack of preparation meant that some Chinese arrivals spoke English as 'just … one word after one word' rather than as components of a sentence, or arrived without English adequate for everyday life. One study participant reported how she met 'one kid' who 'went to the supermarket and [bought] the big dog sausages … thinking *that was eating one.* I said, "No, that's not what it was, that, you need to buy the chicken sausages." And they said "Oh really?"'. Chinese people ought to understand that 'when you don't have English you can't come here' she concluded.

Immersion in English after arrival in New Zealand: during study

All of the North Asian participants in the Five Years On study came as international students, but on arrival they fell into one of two groups. Either they ensured they mixed on a daily basis with native-English speakers or they largely insulated themselves from native-English speakers.

Those who ensured they mixed with English-speakers were a minority. As one said, 'I know most Chinese students like to get with Chinese students but I like to actually get with Kiwi students'. This was not necessarily easy since 'in the … lectures they just say hi and that's it, it's not much involvement'. Extra steps were needed. One woman did group assignments when 'you have to deal with other classmates [and] … they all speak English like because they all come from different places', one man took campus ESOL classes 'that's where I found I get involved with Kiwis' and one woman hired a private tutor and attended on-campus English courses.

All participants reported that staying in international accommodation on campus was 'really not so helpful with … English because … when you're with your own people then just talk your own language'. Some said students in such accommodation had no commitment to speaking English: 'no way I can improve my English just among bunch of Chinese friends and they're all rich and so they

just get spoiled and they don't, they don't have any attitude to improve their English at all, just here for fun'.

Those determined to speak English took steps to live with native speakers. Some participants' families organised home-stay billets with Kiwi families as part of a 'package' in advance of leaving for New Zealand, so 'you can speak English all the time, instead staying with a friend [when] you speak Chinese all the time …really no good for you'. Others sought out their own home-stay after arrival in New Zealand. One woman declared her decision to live with a Kiwi mother and daughter had been 'really good, I had the chance to talk'. Another said her decision to live with a Kiwi family went 'really well … because there was no way I could escape!'

Living independently off campus and fraternising intensively with students from many other countries also reinforced English. One man considered he was 'quite lucky' because he found 'a small accommodation' (a room without a window in a large tenement), 'and I have a very good relationship with everybody … it's like a big family'. English was a lingua franca in this cheerful poverty. Another man considered his English was 'I think okay' because he lived with 'about 11 tenants in a big house [with] … just all sorts of different people. Yeah, you have to communicate with each other'. English was obligatory, 'every time'.

Immersion in English after arrival in New Zealand: social life

Only a few of the North Asian participants in the study reported specific social activities as a means of mixing with English speakers. Three joined Christian church congregations, two while at university and one through his work since 'the boss encourages us to go to the church. He supported me for that'. These congregations were English speaking and none of the three had attended Christian churches before migration.[7] Two other women had New Zealand partners and one had married a New Zealander. Only one woman explained where she had met her fiancé: after her Chinese partner returned home, the new relationship developed through her workplace.

Where possible, most Chinese participants decisively sought out Chinese social networks; as one woman declared 'I'm kind of a traditional … I prefer the way, you know, social life with Chinese people'. There were good reasons for this strong attachment to China. Most Chinese participants were the sole child of parents who spoke at best very limited English. They were like the mother who declared, 'with my kid I only allow him to speak Mandarin in the house, because … I have really, really good relationship with my parents, um, I don't want to lose that, and I don't want to lose that relationship between my parents and my son'.

In Auckland it was possible to achieve a full social world within a Chinese speaking community and four of the Auckland participants from China reported socialising, shopping and dining out in Chinese rather than English-speaking

[7] In this they were different to the South East Asian migrants, many of whom where Christian before migration and kept up or increased their church attendance in New Zealand. This included all the Filipino participants, a Malaysian and an Indonesian participant.

networks.[8] Outside Auckland this was not possible, and university-based, international student networks remained primary social networks, even after graduation. As one man explained 'you can find lots of friends in the university while you study, but afterwards it's hard … so I still deal with them … It's really hard, outside the university … [but I] still can make some friends who study in the university'. Otherwise Chinese-speaking networks were few. One woman did attend a Chinese church and several fell back on family networks after they were joined by spouses, children and parents. As one woman said, 'I don't really go out to meet, to make friends on purpose, or deliberately, so I'm happy with [those] I live with.

Immersion in English after arrival in New Zealand: workplace interactions

Finding a skilled job can be a route to permanent residence for international students. But this was not easy. As one man explained, among his cohort of graduates, 'I'm the only person that found a job at that time. All the rest of my friends couldn't find job and then they all went back to China'.

International students faced the problem of securing permanent employment while they were only temporary residents. As one explained, 'Kiwi companies … don't look at people who only have a student permit or open work permit. They want residents'. Students could 'go on seek.co.nz[9] and every single ad is like, is open to residency only, you know, so it's really hard'. The few who did find a permanent job with a 'Kiwi company' either had highly relevant specialist skills or had first proved their worth in temporary positions. Students who had insulated themselves from English before looking for work had poorer English when they were job-searching. They said this meant they could not get employment in a 'Kiwi company'. As one woman explained, she had wanted 'to find a job in like Kiwi companies, but it's so hard … because of language'. They reported that they therefore turned to 'Chinese companies' that would 'look at people who have open work permits' and do understand 'they will have to support those people and … that they have to sponsor those people to get a proper work permit or residency'.

Chinese and other Asian companies varied in the extent to which they needed English-speaking employees. As one woman reported, she worked for a Chinese importer but 'did everything in English' because the firm had some 'Kiwi customers [and] I got to look after those customers'. Similarly a man who worked for a Taiwanese manufacturer selling into the New Zealand market needed English for interchanges in the workplace.

However, for those Chinese participants who had immersed themselves in Chinese-speaking networks, employment in jobs where English was not spoken could mean isolation from English-speakers. As one participant explained, in effect she was now cut off from English-speakers: 'You know, I want to, I want to

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[8] See Why Auckland? Available at: http://www.dol.govt.nz/publications/research/why-auckland/why3.asp

[9] A well-known employment website

learn more English' but she had 'not many times chances, not many chance, yeah' given her Chinese-only social and employment world. Another explained that she had made 'friends with the same nationality. You know, no place to find people of other nationality [in everyday] living my flatmate is Chinese and my work, workmate is Chinese, all my friends are Chinese'.

Use of English in the workplace was said to be a crucial factor in consolidating English proficiency. As one woman explained 'I worked in a Kiwi company and … I don't mind opening my mouth (laughter) … so that's why I, I can speak fluently now'. Another explained that her English consolidated when she took a practicum paper with a work placement in a school where she then 'practised my English, and I think I made a good improvement through that … and then certainly with this job. That's the place [where] I think I have improved the most'.

In contrast, those who did not use English at work reported their English proficiency deteriorated. This was most marked in two participants whose employment required no English. One woman reported at her work, 'all of the customers are Asian … almost from tour group, like Korean, Japan, China'. She felt that in consequence her English had deteriorated so now 'some words I can, I can speak [in] English but not all, whole sentences like that' and she had no confidence to use English with her child who was speaking English at pre-school. The other participant worked as a 'kind of immigration adviser … for people who cannot speak English, to write the letters on behalf of clients to help with the immigration office'. At work 'I speak Chinese but we're writing English because you have to work with immigration office and have to deal with them by letter … in English. So my writing now is okay, but speaking is getting worse, because no one talks to me in English'. This woman said her Chinese-only workplace made her feel cut off from 'people of other nationality'.

English proficiency: cumulative factors

North Asian migrants in this study differ from other migrants in terms of social factors that arose in part from personal attitudes and decisions in their country of origin and in New Zealand, and in part from the need to gain employment to secure residence in New Zealand.

Before coming to New Zealand, North Asian migrants were less likely to have used English outside a classroom setting. They may have had a more limited understanding of the degree to which English would be needed once in New Zealand and they varied in their determination to prepare themselves for speaking English after they came to New Zealand.

Perhaps more important, however, were decisions made by Chinese participants after arrival in New Zealand to be immersed in Chinese-speaking networks in New Zealand. In some cases, this amounted to insulation from English-speaking society. As students, although teaching was in English, Chinese students could live and study in the company only of Chinese speakers.

But the language of the workplace was critical. If English was not spoken in the workplace, participants whose English was already tentative reported that they

lost English language skills. If English was spoken in the workplace, even tentative speakers reported that English skills developed to proficiency. Use of English in the workplace seems to off-set ubiquitous use of native language elsewhere. Participants who used only their native language in their family and domestic lives, but spoke English in their workplaces, had very high levels of English proficiency.

3.2 Discussion

Individual responsibility for learning English is a cornerstone issue. There is some evidence that may suggest Chinese have greater diffidence and 'communication apprehension' about taking initiatives for communication than other cultural groups (Zhang, 2005). But some of the Chinese migrants who took part accepted their study determinedly and successfully took initiatives to prepare themselves in English before arriving in New Zealand and to ensure they remained well integrated into networks of English language speakers once in New Zealand.
In general migrant groups and international students accept a high degree of individual responsibility for learning English in New Zealand (White, Watts et al. 2002; Ministry of Education, 2007). It may be that the degree to which language is consolidated through use in real-life social and workplace situations may not always be appreciated. There is evidence that Chinese students are less interested than other groups of international students in making 'New Zealand friends' (Ministry of Education 2007). The disadvantages of this may not be appreciated.

The limited research available on recent Chinese migrants to New Zealand confirms a pattern of ubiquitous use of Chinese rather than English between employers and employees in Chinese owned firms (Meares, Ho et al., 2010). Although business owners have reported poorer English skills than employees, about one fifth of employees recently reported that they spoke or read English poorly (Meares, Ho et al., 2010). This suggests that the low level of English found among some participants in our study who were employed in Chinese owned businesses is a widespread phenomenon.

In recent discussions, researchers argue that 'linguistic landscapes' in which business areas are dominated by the language(s) of the homeland of migrants are important to consolidate among migrants a sense of belonging to a destination country. They argue that the 'the argument that is emerging from our research is that 'exercising control over' space is also synonymous with citizenship and belonging and 'putting down roots' and that they are a 'model of belonging appropriate for a plural and open society'' (Cain, Meares et al., 2011). They accept the anthropological argument that such ethnic enclaves or linguistic landscapes' are a means for 'the building of a feeling of being at home' (Cain, Meares et al., 2011) through increased sense of security and community.

These and other researchers have also reported however that Chinese employers and employees recognise the importance of learning good English in order to prosper (Cain, Meares et al., 2011) and successful business graduates (McGrath, Anderson et al., 2011) argue that good English was one of the social skills

employers required: 'having a degree is necessary but not sufficient' (McGrath, Anderson et al., 2011).

It is therefore important that ethnic enclaves, if they do provide a sense of familiarity and community to migrants, do not become linguistic ghettos in which individuals get cut off from daily interactions with the language of mainstream society. As a European survey of migration, language and integration has argued: 'linguistic diversity can lead to innovative stimulation and inter-cultural exchange on the one hand, but can also give rise to problems of understanding and coordination on the other' (Esser, 2006b). This survey of research in the European setting indicates that unfavourable conditions are mutually reinforcing. If 'ethnic concentration in neighbourhoods' coincides with or increases the likelihood of people in those communities being cut-off from use of English, it may narrow their options both for learning the language and consequently for all the advantages contingent upon having good English.

4 CONCLUSION

North Asia is an important source of skilled migration to New Zealand. China in particular has consistently featured in the top five source countries of migrants approved under SMC over recent years, making up 14 percent of approvals in 2008/09 and 8 percent in 2010/11 (Department of Labour, 2011).

Research has shown that skilled migrants from Asia generally, and from North Asia in particular, have tended to fare less well than other migrants in the New Zealand labour market (Grangier, Hodgson & McLeod, 2012; Masgoret et al. 2012; Stillman, 2011). English language ability is one area where these migrants may be particularly disadvantaged. This report has shown that English ability was reported as being lower among Asian skilled migrants generally, but North Asian migrants reported lower levels than other Asian migrants. North Asian migrants were also less likely to report improvement in their English language ability over time.

The study also suggested that North Asian (particularly Chinese) skilled migrants may be different from other skilled migrants in a number of ways:

- Before migration they were more likely to have had English only as a classroom subject, whereas other groups are likely to have used it as a language of instruction or in employment.
- After arriving in New Zealand, they were more likely to mix socially and in their daily life almost entirely with speakers of Chinese.
- Many found permanent employment in jobs in which only Chinese was spoken, and as a result their English was likely to deteriorate. Those participants who spoke English in the workplace were likely to have good English regardless of whether they otherwise mixed with only Chinese speakers.

While research has identified that business areas dominated by the language of a migrant's source country are important in providing them with a sense of belonging in a destination country, evidence also highlights the importance of learning the host language in order to fully participate in the wider economy and society. As such it is important that migrants to New Zealand do not get cut off from using English and developing their English language abilities.

A large proportion of North Asian skilled migrants had studied in New Zealand as international students prior to gaining residence, and may have used this study as evidence of English competence to meet SMC requirements (see Appendix 1). Nevertheless this report has shown that many of these former students still lacked the competence in English language of skilled migrants from other regions. This provides some evidence that study in English may not be a sufficient alternative to formal testing as an indication of English competence, and this could be an area of review for SMC policy in the future.

These conclusions also suggest that particular efforts may be required to better target services to support the integration of North Asian skilled migrants in the New Zealand labour market. In particular, the workplace seems to play an important role in supporting English language acquisition, however many migrants may not have sufficient competence in English to gain such jobs in the first place. Poor English may restrict such migrants' options in the New Zealand labour market, and may hinder their full participation in New Zealand society.

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APPENDIX 1: SMC ENGLISH LANGUAGE REQUIREMENTS

English language requirements

To apply under the Skilled Migrant Category, applicants need to meet a minimum standard of English language ability. Both the principal applicant and any non-principal applicants aged 16 and over (partner and dependent children) have to meet our requirements.

Principal applicants

The principal applicant is the person making the application. The minimum standard of English for a Principal Applicant is an International English Language Testing Systems (IELTS) certificate, with a band score of 6.5 or better in the General or Academic modules. This certificate must be less than two years old.

Other evidence of English proficiency may be considered if the applicant has:

- a recognised qualification from a course taught entirely in English,
- ongoing skilled employment in New Zealand, and have been in the job for at least the last 12 months, or
- other evidence proof of competency in English. We will consider a number of factors.

http://www.immigration.govt.nz/migrant/stream/work/skilledmigrant/caniapply/requirements/english/default.htm downloaded 20110816

APPENDIX 2: MEASUREMENT OF ENGLISH LANGUAGE ABILITY IN LISNZ

English language ability was self-reported. At Wave 1, respondents were asked "Which language do you speak best", with up to two languages being recorded. At all waves, respondents were asked a range of questions about their ability to read, write speak and understand English, however only those who did not identify English as a language they spoke best at Wave 1 were asked these questions. The questions and show-cards used were as follows.

"These questions are about how well you can read, write, speak and understand English."

"Please use card C8 to tell me how well you are able to speak English in day to day conversation."

C8	
11	very well - I can talk about almost anything in English
12	well - I can talk about many things in English
13	fairly well - I can talk about some things in English
14	not very well - I can only talk about basic or simple things in English
15	no more than a few words or phrases

Please use card C9 to tell me how well you are able to understand spoken English.

C9	
11	very well - I can understand almost anything in English
12	well - I can understand many things in English
13	fairly well - I can understand some things in English
14	not very well - I can only understand basic or simple things in English
15	no more than a few words or phrases

Please use card C10 to tell me how well you are able to read English, with understanding.

C10	
11	very well - I can read almost anything in English
12	well - I can read many things in English
13	fairly well - I can read some things in English
14	not very well - I can only read basic or simple things in English
15	no more than a few words or phrases

Please use card C11 to tell me how well you are able to write in English, with understanding.

C11	
11	very well - I can write almost anything in English
12	well - I can write many things in English
13	fairly well - I can write some things in English
14	not very well - I can only write basic or simple things in English
15	no more than a few words or phrases

Derivation of an overall English language ability measure

For the purpose of this study an overall measure of English language ability was derived using the domains of ability (reading, writing, speaking and understanding) reported above. This was done as follows:

1. Those respondents who reported 'English' as a best language were given an overall English language ability descriptor as 'English a main language spoken'.
2. For other respondents, responses given for each domain using showcards C8-C11 above was given a score as follows.
    a. 11 was given a score of 5
    b. 12 was given a score of 4
    c. 13 was given a score of 3
    d. 14 was given a score of 2
    e. 15 was given a score of 1.
3. An average score across all domains was derived for each respondent using the score given in 2. above.
4. An overall English language ability descriptor was derived based on the average score derived in 3. as follows:
    a. average between 1.0 and 4.2 was given a descriptor of 'Poor to good'
    b. average between 4.21 and 5.0 was given a descriptor of 'Very good'.

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