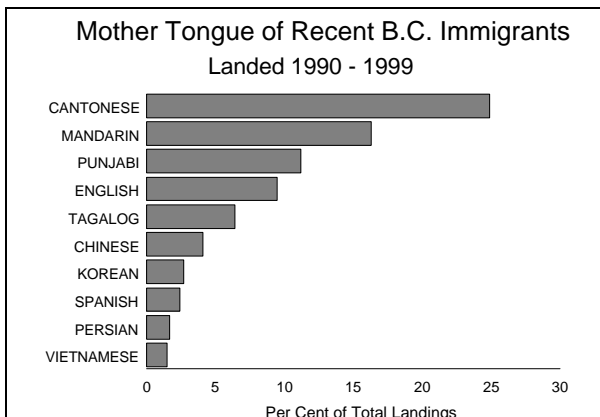


## Special Feature: Mother Tongue of Recent Immigrants to British Columbia

*During the period 1990 to 1999, B.C. attracted over 400 thousand immigrants from all over the world. Most of these immigrants speak English as a second language. . . .*

Mother tongue (or home language) is the usual language immigrants speak at home before and after they arrived in Canada. While most non-English speaking immigrants will eventually learn English, understanding the mother tongue of immigrants is important when providing settlement/integration services as well as when marketing services and products to immigrants.

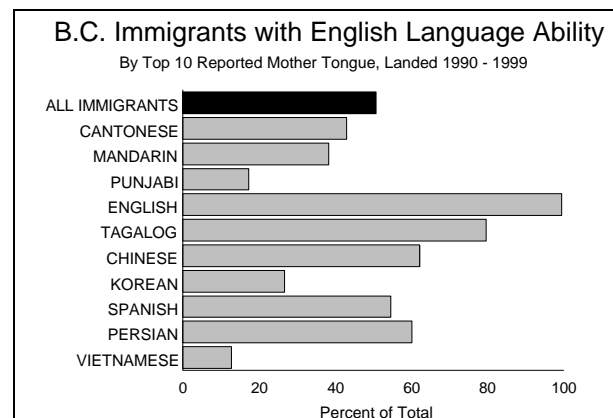
Over the ten years period between 1990 and 1999, B.C. attracted a large number of immigrants from Asia, and in particular Hong Kong, Taiwan, and India. As a result, Chinese and East Indian languages have been the most reported mother tongues for immigrants arrived during the period. Of the top ten languages spoken at home, eight were Asian languages. Cantonese, Mandarin, and Punjabi were consistently the top three in each year over the period.



It should be noted that mother tongue is more accurate than ethnicity or country of last permanent residence when analyzing language characteristics of recent immigrants due to fact that immigrants from the same country may speak completely different languages or dialects. For example, more than ten different languages were re-

ported as the mother tongue of immigrants from India.

Another important aspect when analyzing the mother tongue of immigrants is the relationship to the English language ability of immigrants at the time of their landing. While there is no reason to assume that non-English immigrants who speak a certain language at home are more proficient in English, significant variations in English language ability do exist between immigrants in different home language groups.



English language ability of immigrants at the time of landing is largely related to the immigrants' exposure to English language before they came to Canada. Many countries, while the native language is non-English, have exposure to the English language through their education system, business practices, and other influences. For example, among immigrants from Mainland China, Taiwan and Hong Kong who usually speak dialects of Chinese at home, those from Hong Kong tend to have a relatively higher English proficiency. This is due to the fact that English had been Hong Kong's official language before 1997 and also was the primary language used in the education system.

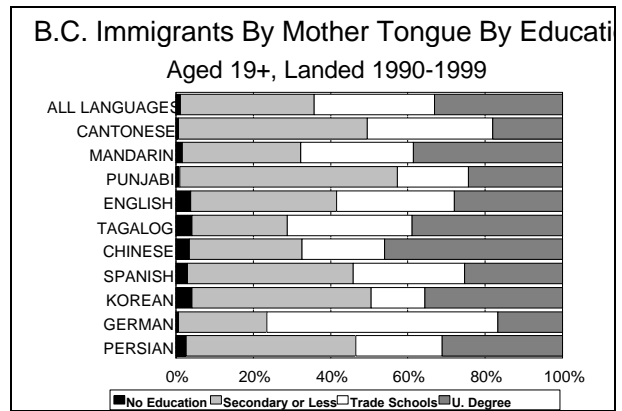
Since settlement and consumer services are utilized differently by immigrants admitted under different classes, it is also useful to understand the variation of mother tongues spoken by immigrants in different classes. Immigration classes can be divided into three main categories: Business Immigrants that

include the Entrepreneur, Investor and Self-Employed Classes; Family and Humanitarian immigrants that include the Family and Refugee Classes; and skilled worker immigrants that includes the Assisted Relatives and Other Independent Classes. As expected, a relatively higher proportion of recent immigrants in the business classes speak Chinese. This is because a very high percentage of business immigrants were from Hong Kong and Taiwan over the study period. On the other hand, most refugee immigrants who arrived over the past 10 years speak Serbo-Croatian, Spanish or Persian.

B.C. Immigrants By Class By Mother Tongue Landed 1990-1999							
Family	Business		Skilled Worker		Refugee		
Punjabi	29.8%	Cantonese	39.9%	Cantonese	21.1%	Serbo-Croatian	12.4%
Cantonese	20.2%	Mandarin	31.7%	Mandarin	20.4%	Spanish	12.0%
English	11.3%	Korean	7.2%	English	12.3%	Persian	9.7%
Tagalog	6.4%	Chinese	4.3%	Tagalog	10.5%	Vietnamese	8.5%
Mandarin	5.6%	English	3.7%	Chinese	6.5%	Cantonese	5.9%
All Others	26.7%	All Others	13.3%	All Others	29.2%	All Others	51.6%

Comparing education level and mother tongue of immigrants indicates that significant variations exist in education attainment between those who speak different home languages. For all immigrants aged 19 or older at time of landing, the distribution was relatively even among those who had secondary or less schooling, trade school education, and university degree. The overall proportion having no formal education was less than one percent. However, among immigrants in the top 10 mother tongues, a relatively higher proportion of those who speak Korean, English, Tagalog, and Chinese (other than Cantonese or Mandarin) reported to have no formal education qualification.

On the other hand, a relatively higher portion of Chinese and Tagalog speaking immigrants reported to have a university degree at time of landing. However, it is important to note that education qualifications as reported by immigrants could have a different equivalency to the Canadian.



In summary, B.C. attracts immigrants from many different countries who speak a vast diversity of languages. However, due to the high concentration of immigrants arriving from a few countries, the top 10 languages account for more than 80 percent of all immigrants landed between 1990 and 1999. With non-English speaking immigrants continuing to be the dominating source of new comers arriving B.C., the multi-lingual mosaic of the province will continue to challenge immigrant services providers.