

Immigration Trends, Language Skills and the Labour Market Integration
of Recent Immigrants*

by
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Abstract:

Using Citizenship and Immigration annual flow data and information from the 2006 Canada census, this presentation provides answers to the following two questions:
1) What are the changes over time in the English/French language skills of recent immigrants and how are they linked to the management of Canada's immigration?
2) What is the relationship between English/French proficiency and labour market outcomes, such as labour force participation, unemployment, part-time work, occupation, weeks worked, earnings and employment in linguistic enclaves? The findings update earlier research, confirming again that low levels of language proficiency in destination country languages are strongly associated with unfavorable labour market outcomes. These outcomes are disproportionately experienced by recently arrived immigrants, who increasingly originate from non-European and U.S. countries.

* This paper is the basis of a presentation given in the "Language in the Workplace" session at the Metropolis *Language Matters* Symposium, October 22, 2009 in Ottawa, Canada. The analysis is made possible by the joint university-SSHRC-Statistics Canada funding of the Research Data Centres and the availability of the 2006 Canadian Census of Population 2B database at the University of Toronto Research Data Centre. Lisa Kaida, Stella Park and Naoko Shida worked as Research Assistants on the project. Funding for the data analysis presented in this paper is from the Social Science and Humanities Research Council of Canada award of the Canada Research Chair in Immigration, Inequality and Public Policy to the author.

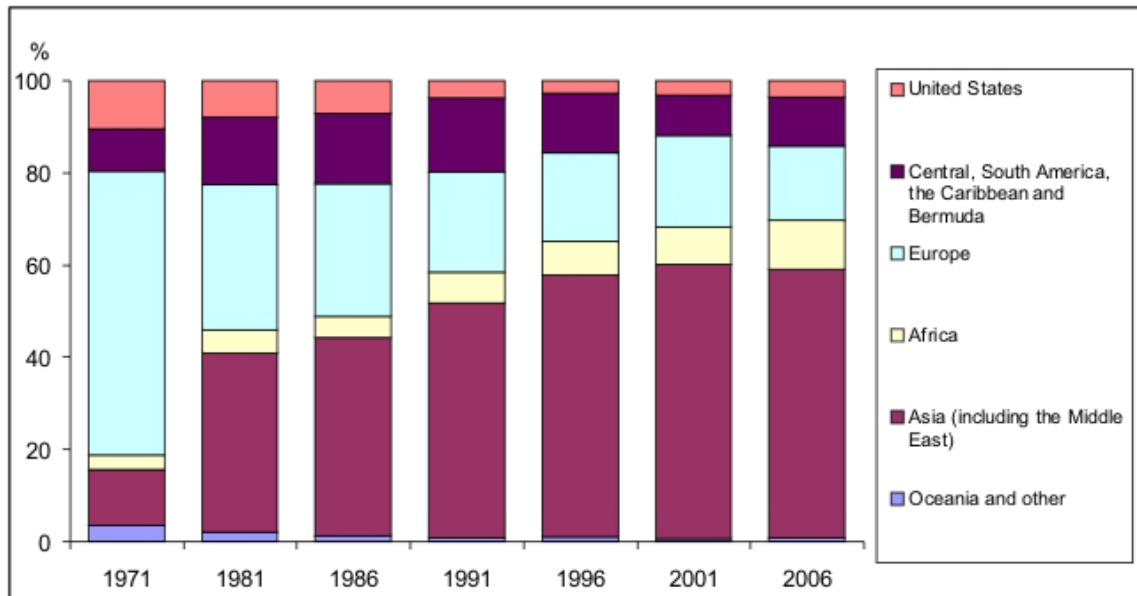
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Immigration Trends, Language Skills and the Labour Market Integration of Recent Immigrants

Introduction

Today no one would dispute that immigration – particularly within the past twenty five years – has had a significant impact on Canada’s landscape – both figuratively and literally. The proportion that is foreign born has steadily increased, and currently one out of five Canadians are foreign born. Starting in the 1960s, the removal of national origin admission criteria that favoured the admission of those from the United States and European countries brought profound alternations in the source countries from which immigrants came. The origin composition of recent immigrants, defined as those arriving five years prior to the census, shifted away from Europe and the United States; by the start of the new millennium close to 60 percent were born in Asia (Chart I).

Chart I: Regions of Birth for the Recently Arrived Foreign Born Population in Canada Enumerated in Canadian Censuses of Population, 1971-2006



Source: www12.statcan.ca/english/census06/analysis/immcit/pdf/97-557-XIE2006001.pdf

These trends in changing source countries bring with them substantial changes in the diversity of Canada’s population, particularly in large cities. Not only is nearly one in six (16.2 percent) a member of one or more visible minority groups¹, but also many of the foreign born come from countries where English or French is not used or learned. Yet having proficiency in the destination country language is an important form of human

¹ Visible minority" is a term first used in the early 1980s to denote groups that are distinctive by virtue of their race, colour or "visibility." Developed by the federal government to meet data needs of federal employment equity legislation and program requirements, the term is a constructed measure generally equated with "people of colour" other than the Aboriginal peoples. In accordance with guidelines established by the Interdepartmental Working Group on Equity Employment, ten visible minority subgroups are identified: Chinese; South Asian; Black; Filipino; Latin American; Southeast Asian; Arab; West Asian; Japanese, and Korean.

capital that assists in the labour force integration of immigrants (for a review of academic arguments to this effect, see Boyd and Cao, 1999). Language proficiency in the destination country language represents investments that workers make in themselves and which enhances productivity and thus facilitates labour market integration in a number of ways. For immigrants, knowing the destination country language(s) means the ability to participate in those labour markets where the host language is essential to the completion of tasks. Conversely, not knowing the language of the host society limits the degree to which individuals can utilize their education and previous work experience in a broad array of jobs. The economic participation of such individuals is constrained to settings in which their language is the norm, such as in ethnic enclaves or where it is not required for job performance (for example, cleaning occupations).

In short, the language skills of Canadian immigrants are associated with their economic well-being and integration and with the productivity of the Canadian economy. Knowing the language proficiency of Canada's recent arrivals and assessing the impact of language proficiency on indicators of labour market success are timely tasks for a country where one in five are immigrants and where population projections for Canada show that if current immigration rates continue, immigration could account for virtually all net labour force growth by 2011 (Statistics Canada, 2007). Accordingly, this brief paper asks two questions. First, what are the changes over time in the English/French language skills of recent immigrants and how are they linked to the management of Canada's immigration? Second, what is the relationship between the English/French proficiency of immigrants and their labour market outcomes, such as labour force participation, unemployment, part-time work, and employment in linguistic enclaves, type of occupation, weeks worked, and earnings? I address these questions using annual flow data from Citizenship and Immigration Canada; I also provide customized tabulations from the 2006 Census of Population master database on labour market outcomes. My findings update earlier studies, confirming again that low levels of language proficiency in destination country languages are strongly associated with unfavorable labour market outcomes. These outcomes are disproportionately experienced by recently arrived immigrants, who increasingly originate from non-European and U.S. countries.

Immigration Trends, Immigration Policy and Language Skills

A number of papers and books overview the changing immigration policies of Canada throughout the twentieth and twenty-first centuries (Boyd and Alboim, 2010; Dolin and Young, 2004; Green and Green, 2004; Kelley and Treblicock, 1998; Knowles, 2007; Young, 2004). Immigration planning throughout the latter half of the twentieth century rests on the principles that immigrants further demographic growth, stimulate the economy and provide labour. Today, there are three main categories under which most immigrants enter Canada; each corresponds to a principle of admissibility. The three pillars of current Canadian immigration policy for permanent residence are: family reunification, humanitarian criteria, and admission on the basis of economic contribution.

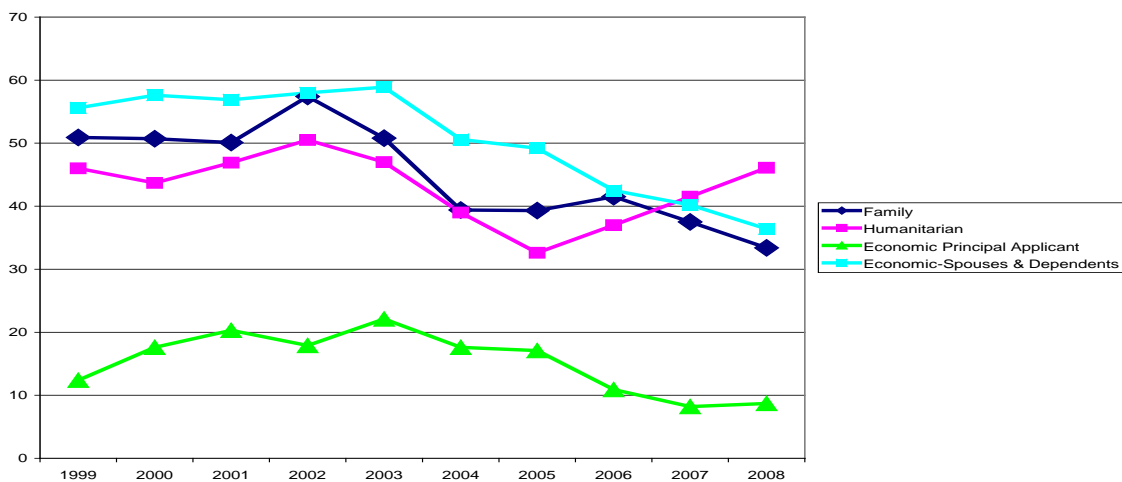
However, the comparative importance of each category of admissibility has varied over time since the 1950s, depending on the state of Canada's economy and the use, prior to the 1990s, of a "tap-on, tap-off" approach to regulating numbers of admissions by the authorized government department. From the early 1990s on, those entering in the economic class became a rapidly increasing share of all admissions for

permanent residence. By 2008, the economic class represented 60 percent of all permanent residents admitted to Canada during that year.

The skilled worker class is the largest sub-group found in the economic class. Of the numbers entering Canada in the economic class in 2008, 70 percent are admitted in the skilled worker category. Admission in the skilled worker class is governed by a system of allocating points on the basis of the primary applicant’s characteristics that are considered relevant in the labour market. Currently, points were given for the principal applicant’s age, education, knowledge of French or English, and to other factors such as the skill level of the likely occupation and work experience. Changes to the point system since the 1970s have increased the weight given to higher education and to English and/or French language proficiency (see: Boyd 1976; Boyd and Alboim, 2010; Green and Green, 1999). Under the most recent legislation (the Immigration and Refugee Protection Act or IRPA), having the highest levels of English and French language fluency counts for 24 points, or 36 percent of the minimum of 67 points; prior to IRPA, linguistic fluency counted for 25 percent of the total minimum 60 required points.

The new legislation came into effect in June 2002. Since then, the percentages who are admitted with no English or French capability have decreased for the family and economic classes and for the humanitarian class during 2002-2005 (Chart 2). Since the declines began after 2002-2003, it is reasonable to assume that the improvement in English-French language capability is related to policy changes. At the same time, it is worth noting that as recently as 2008, the percentages of those admitted into Canada who lack English/French capabilities are not trivial: one in ten of those admitted as principal applicants in the economic class, one-third of those admitted in the family class or as spouses and dependents in the economic class and nearly half of those admitted in the humanitarian class lack English/French capabilities. For these individuals, a major challenge will be to acquire the language proficiency that will assist them with respect to their labour market integration.

Chart 2: Percentage with No English/French Capability by Entry Category, Canada 1999-2008



Source: Citizenship and Immigration Canada. Facts and Figures 2008. www.cic.gc.ca/english/resources/statistics/facts2008/index.asp. Accessed October 14, 2009.

Chart 2 is based on the annual flow of permanent residents into Canada of all ages, including children. Additional information on newcomers is found in the census of

population; because the census is taken at one point in time, it provides a snapshot of all of those who are in Canada at the time of enumeration. The most recent census was taken in May 2006, and it asked respondents a large number of questions about their socio-cultural and economic characteristics. It also asked respondents to report their mother tongue(s) which is the languages they first learned at home in childhood and still understand. Respondents were also asked if they spoke English or French well enough to carry on a conversation and what language(s) they used most often at home and what other languages they used regularly. Combining the information on these three dimensions of language use (mother tongue, home language and conversational ability in one or both of Canada's official languages) creates a crude scale of language proficiency (See Appendix A)². High language proficiency is characterized by English and/or French mother tongue, the use of English and/or French most often in the home, and conversational ability in the home; conversely low language proficiency refers to those whose mother tongue(s) is other than English and/or French and where other languages are most used at home. Low language skills also include those who indicate they have no conversational abilities in English and/or French. In-between these two extremes are persons whose mother tongue(s) are English and/or French and who have conversational ability in English and/or French but who use other languages mostly in the home or whose mother tongues are not English or French but who indicate they have conversational ability in English and/or French and whose home language is mostly English and/or French.

The census also asks respondents to report their ages, when they arrived and their country of origins. Persons age 25-64 are the most likely to working in the labour force and the remainder of this paper focuses on this age group. As well, the analysis focuses only on those immigrants who arrived in adulthood, which is at age 20 or older. Those who arrived as children or teenagers are excluded for two reasons. First, when the question of "how well are immigrants doing in the labour force" is invoked, the most common assumption is the immigrants refer to those arriving as adults. Second, the foreign born who arrive as children are very different from those arriving as adults. The former go to school in Canada, and are exposed at earlier ages to language learning and to Canadian institutions. Their distinctiveness is recognized in their labeling as the "1.5 generation" situated between the first generation of immigrants that came to Canada as adults and the second generation, who are Canadian born children of immigrants.

Table 1 shows that immigrants who are age 25-64 and who arrived in Canada as adults (at age 20 or later), have low levels of English/French proficiency. Forty-four percent of those who arrived before 1996 have low levels of language proficiency while 62 percent (nearly two thirds) of those who arrived between 1996 and 2006 have low levels of English/French language proficiencies. Most of these immigrants who have low levels of English/French language skills are from places where other languages are used. For those arriving since 1996, over half are born in either East or South Asia. In terms of specific countries of birth, the top five countries of origin for these recently arrived immigrants with low language skills are the Peoples Republic of China, India, Pakistan, Philippines and South Korea.

² Different census questions could provide an alternative, more detailed, typology of language skills. In addition to obtaining information on mother tongue, American and Australian censuses ask if the respondent speaks a language other than English at home, what that alternative language is, and how well the respondent speaks English (very well, well, not well and not at all).

Table 1: Birthplace Characteristics of Permanent Residents Who Arrived at Age 20 or Later, Currently Aged 25-64, by Language Proficiency, and Recency of Arrival, Canada 2006

	Foreign-born Immigrated before 1996	Foreign-born Immigrated before 1996	Foreign-born Immigrated before 1996	Foreign-born Immigrated 1996-2006	Foreign-born Immigrated 1996-2006	Foreign-born Immigrated 1996-2006
	High Proficiency	Mixed Proficiency	Low Proficiency	High Proficiency	Mixed Proficiency	Low Proficiency
	(1)	(2)	(3)	(4)	(5)	(6)
Population Estimates	452,300	442,100	712,100	186,400	268,700	733,600
Percent Distribution^(a)	28	28	44	16	23	62
Region of Birth	100	100	100	100	100	100
North America	13	0	0	13	0	0
Central, S. Am., Carribean & Bermuda	29	11	8	20	10	7
North and Western Europe	36	10	1	26	4	1
Eastern and Southern Europe	1	25	22	1	14	15
Africa	7	9	3	16	18	5
West & Central Asia & Middle East	1	8	7	2	9	10
East Asia	1	8	26	1	11	31
Southeast Asia	5	17	16	7	15	7
South Asia	4	11	16	11	19	24
Oceania & born at sea	2	1	1	3	0	0
Ten Top Countries of Birth						
1	United Kingdom	Philippines	China,PR	United Kingdom	Philippines	China,PR
2	USA	India	India	USA	India	India
3	Jamaica	Poland	Hong Kong	France	China,PR	Pakistan
4	Guyana	Italy	Viet Nam	India	Pakistan	Philippines
5	Trinidad&Tobago	Germany	Poland	Philippines	Algeria	South Korea
6	France	Hong Kong	Philippines	Jamaica	Morocco	Iran
7	Philippines	Portugal	Portugal	Guyana	Iran	Romania
8	India	China,PR	Sri Lanka	Trinidad&Tobago	Romania	Sri Lanka
9	South Africa	Lebanon	Italy	South Africa	Mexico	Russian Fed.
10	Haiti	Haiti	South Korea	Pakistan	Sri Lanka	Hong Kong

(a) Percentages sum to 100 for each arrival group. For example, for those arriving before 1996, 28 plus 28 plus 44 sums to 100 percent.

Source: Produced especially for this paper from the Statistics Canada 2006 Census of Population Master 2B database.

Labour Market Correlates of Language Proficiency

The existence of significant numbers of employment-aged immigrants who have low language proficiency in English and/or French has implications for their labour market integration. Earlier studies conducted in Canada and in other destination countries confirm that low levels of language proficiency among migrants reduce labour force participation, increase vulnerability to unemployment, allocate workers to linguistic enclaves; create mismatches between training and jobs, and depress earnings (for a sample of recent studies see: Bleakley and Chin, 2004; Boyd, 2009; Boyd and Cao, 2009; Carnevale, Fry, and Lowell, 2001; Chiswick and Miller, 2007; Dustmann and Van Soest, 2002, 2003; Galarneau and Morissette, 2008; Grondin, 2007; Shields and Price, 2002).

The 2006 Canadian census results confirm the continued existence of these labour market correlates for levels of language skill. Table 2 presents basic labour market indicators, using the three category language proficiency measures found in Table 1 for individuals aged 25-64 in 2006 including those immigrants who arrived at age 20 or later. In addition to data on permanent residents, information is given for the Canadian-born who have the highest level of English/French proficiency. (A small number of the Canadian-born are in the mixed language category and they are omitted from the analysis). It should be noted that these data do not adjust for differences between groups in place of residence, levels of education or type of training or other factors that condition labour market outcomes. Compared to the Canadian born, the foreign born are more likely to live in Canada's largest census metropolitan areas, which generally are higher wage labour markets and which may differ from smaller cities or rural areas with respect to other labour market indicators, such as unemployment rates, labour force participation rates, occupational structures etc. If these geographical and other compositional differences were taken into account statistically, the magnitude of differences between groups defined by nativity, period of immigration and language proficiency might change

(for a good discussion on how compositional differences can minimize Canadian born-foreign born differences, see Boyd, 1992, Appendix A).

Table 2: Educational and Labour Market Characteristics for Canadian Born and Permanent Residents Arriving at Age 20 or Older, by Language Proficiency^(a), and Recency of Arrival, Age 25-64, Canada 2006

	Canadian-born High Proficiency (1)	Foreign-born Immigrated before 1996 High Proficiency (2)	Foreign-born Immigrated before 1996 Mixed Proficiency (3)	Foreign-born Immigrated before 1996 Low Proficiency (4)	Foreign-born Immigrated 1996-2006 High Proficiency (5)	Foreign-born Immigrated 1996-2006 Mixed Proficiency (6)	Foreign-born Immigrated 1996-2006 Low Proficiency (7)
Mean Total Years of Schooling	13.6	14.5	14.5	13.4	15.4	15.8	15.2
% in Labour Force	81	78	80	74	83	81	73
% Unemployed ^(b)	4	3	4	4	6	8	7
% Part-time ^(c)	15	17	14	13	16	17	16
Occupation ^(d)	100	100	100	100	100	100	100
Management	11	12	12	9	11	8	8
Professional, teaching	11	14	10	6	13	11	8
Other white collar	34	37	32	25	41	38	32
Service occupation	19	18	22	25	19	24	24
Trades, manufacturing	25	19	24	35	17	19	28
Skill Level ^(d)	100	100	100	100	100	100	100
Management occupations	11	12	12	9	11	8	8
Skill level A, university education	18	23	18	12	26	23	20
Skill level B, college/apprentice education	32	28	29	28	25	24	23
Skill level C, secondary school education	30	29	30	34	30	32	33
Skill level D, on-job training required	9	8	11	17	9	13	16
Language Spoken at work ^(d)	100	100	100	100	100	100	100
Other language most often, mixed or only	0	1	3	16	1	5	17
Eng and/or French most often, other language regularly	0	1	9	16	2	9	13
English and/or French only	100	98	88	68	97	86	69
Mean Weeks Worked in 2005 ^(e)	45.9	46.2	46.3	45.8	43.1	42.1	41.2
% Worked <30 Weeks in 2005 ^(e)	11	10	10	10	17	19	21
Mean Weekly Earnings in 2005 ^(e)	965	1145	971	763	864	720	636

^(a) For definitions of high, mixed and low levels of English/French language proficiency, see Appendix A. In accordance with the requirements of the Research Data Centres, weighted frequencies, rounded to the nearest 5, are used in the calculation of percentages.

^(b) Only for those in the labour force in 2005-06.

^(c) Only for those who worked in 2005.

^(d) Only for those who reported any occupation in 2005-06. Skills levels are those found in HRSDC National Occupational Classification System.

^(e) Only for those who worked one or more week in 2005.

(na) Not applicable

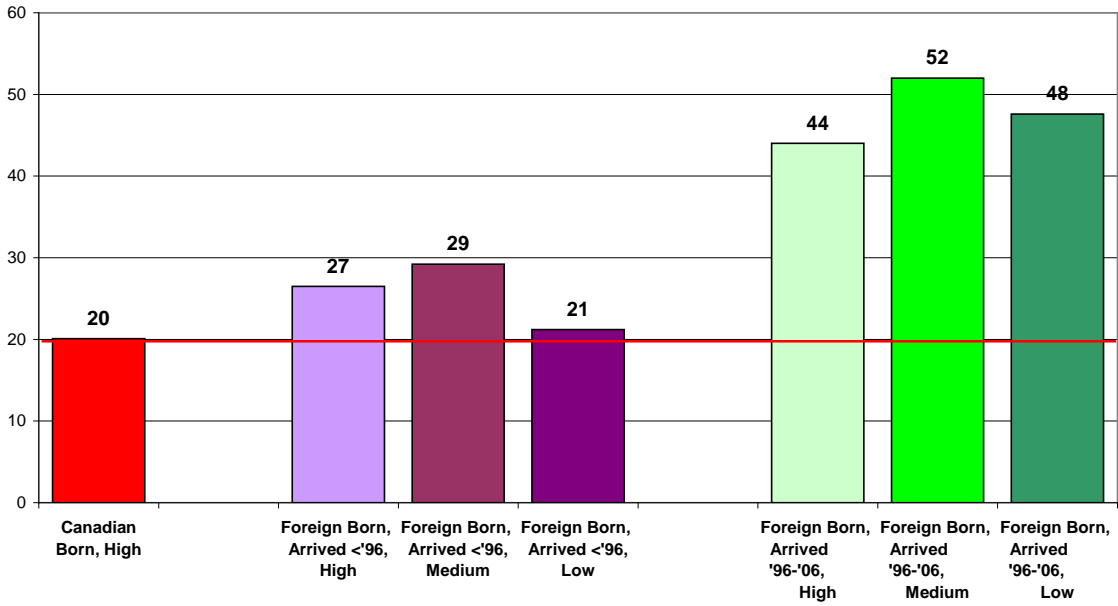
Source: Produced especially for this paper from the Statistics Canada 2006 Census of Population Master 2B database.

Chart 3, which is based on Table 1, shows that immigrants who arrived during 1996-2006 have higher levels of educational attainments compared to earlier arrivals and to those who are Canadian born. However, their higher education does not always translate in to labour market advantage; this especially holds for immigrants with low levels of language proficiency. Inspection of Charts 4 through 8 produce two summary conclusions for immigrants who arrived as adults and who have low levels of English/French language proficiency. First, for both groups of immigrants (those arriving before 1996 and those arriving between 1996 and 2006), having low rather than mixed or higher English/French language skills is associated with lower labour force participation rates, and higher percentages employed in occupations with lower skill levels. These immigrants with low English/French proficiency also are mostly likely of all groups to be in settings where languages other than English and French are used, working fewer than 30 hours a week in 2005 and having the lowest average weekly earnings in 2005.

The second conclusion rests on comparisons of recently arrived immigrants with those who arrived earlier. Although their levels of educational attainments are higher than immigrants arriving before 1996, recently arrived immigrants have similar percentages in the labour force, holding lower skilled occupations and working in settings where languages other than English and/or French are used. However, recent arrival does

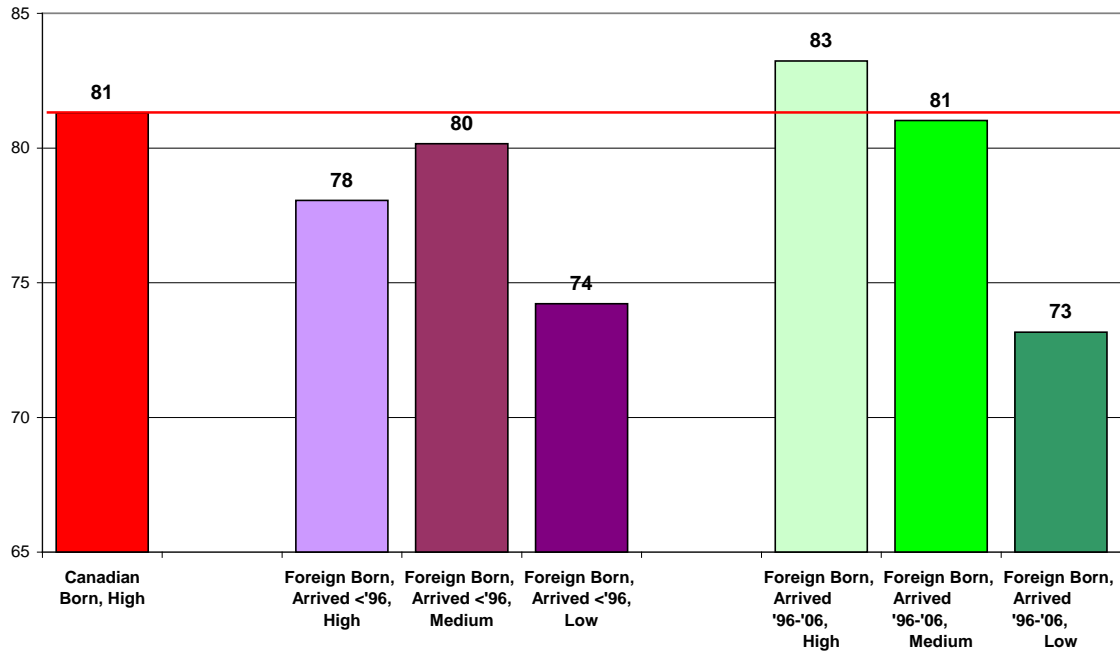
depress time spent at work and earnings. Those recently arrived immigrants who have low levels of language proficiency have the highest percentages of all groups who are working fewer than 30 weeks and they have the lowest average weekly earnings.

Chart 3: Percent with University Degree or Higher for Canadian Born and Permanent Residents Arriving at Age 20 or Older, by Language Proficiency and Arrival Period, Age 25-64, Canada 2006



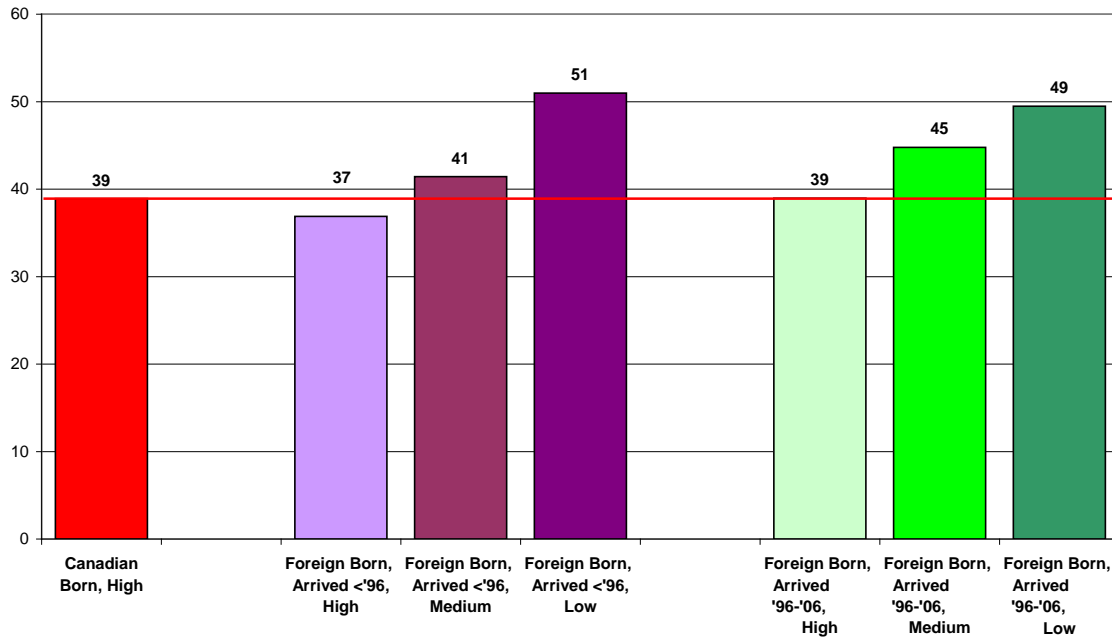
Source: Produced especially for this paper from the Statistics Canada 2006 Census of Population Master 2B database.

Chart 4: Percent in the Labour Force for Canadian Born and Permanent Residents Arriving at Age 20 or Older, by Language Proficiency and Arrival Period, Age 25-64, Canada 2006



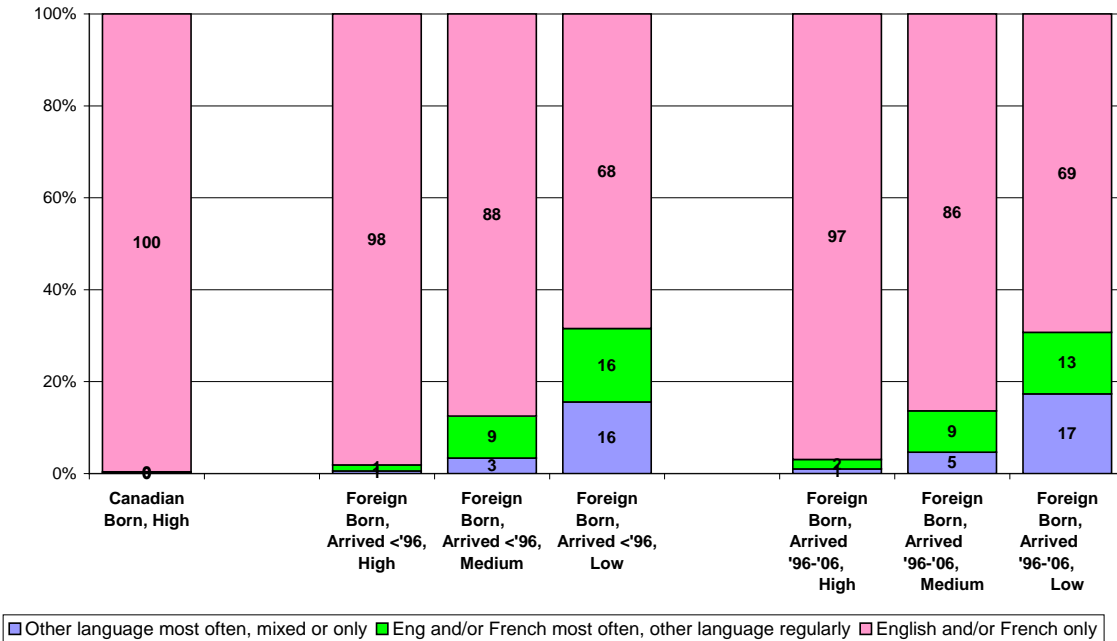
Source: Produced especially for this paper from the Statistics Canada 2006 Census of Population Master 2B database.

Chart 5: Skill Level C/D for Canadian Born and Permanent Residents Arriving at Age 20 or Older, by Language Proficiency and Arrival Period, Age 25-64, Canada 2006



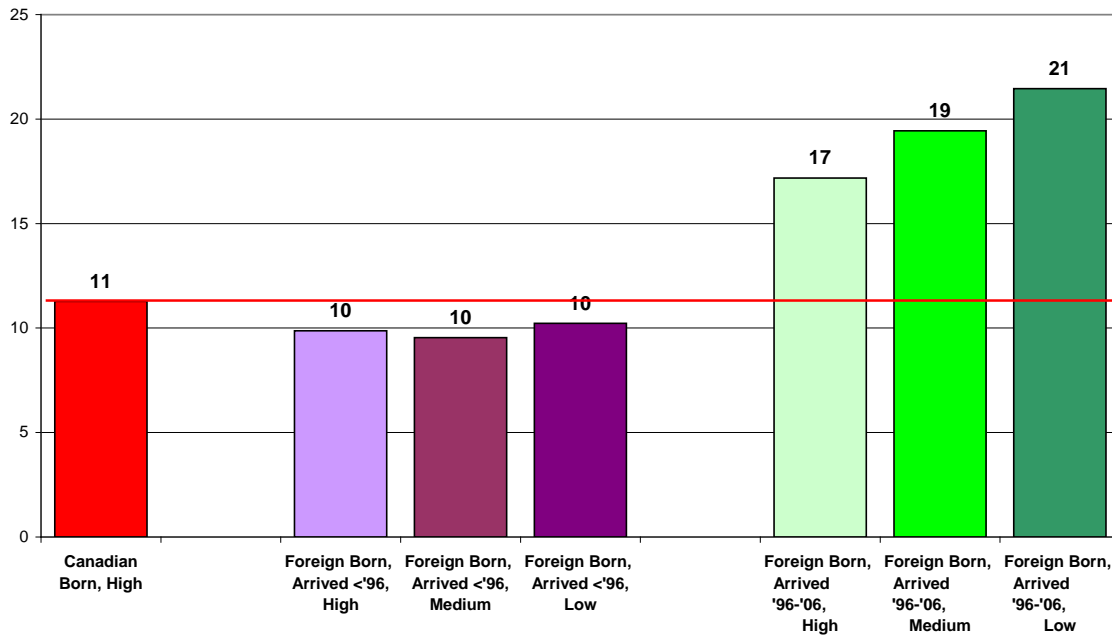
Source: Produced especially for this paper from the Statistics Canada 2006 Census of Population Master 2B database.

Chart 6: Language(s) Spoken at Work for Canadian Born and Permanent Residents Arriving at Age 20 or Older, by Language Proficiency and Arrival Period, Age 25-64, Canada 2006



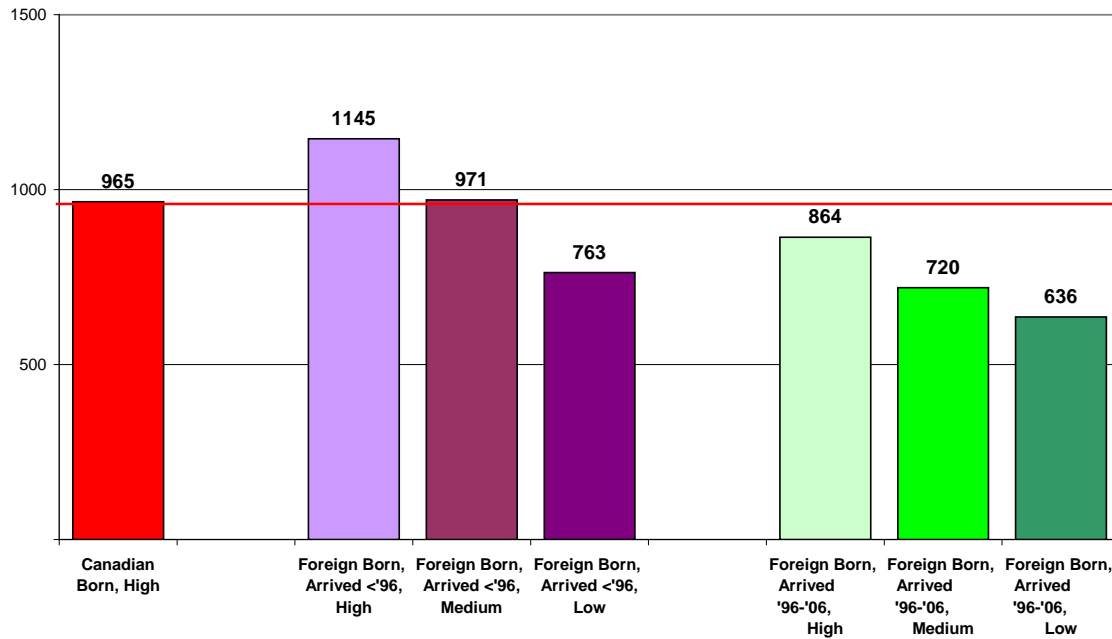
Source: Produced especially for this paper from the Statistics Canada 2006 Census of Population Master 2B database.

Chart 7: Percent Worked Less than 30 weeks in 2006 for Canadian Born and Permanent Residents Arriving at Age 20 or Older, by Language Proficiency and Arrival Period, Age 25-64, Canada 2006



Source: Produced especially for this paper from the Statistics Canada 2006 Census of Population Master 2B database.

Chart 8: Mean Weekly Earnings in 2005 for Canadian Born and Permanent Residents Arriving at Age 20 or Older, by Language Proficiency and Arrival Period, Age 25-64, Canada 2006



Source: Produced especially for this paper from the Statistics Canada 2006 Census of Population Master 2B database.

Conclusion

Data presented in this paper confirm recent declines in the percentages admitted in the family and economic classes who do not know English and/or French. These

declines coincide with the enactment of the latest immigration act, the Immigration and Refugee Protection Act which came into effect in June 2002. The timing suggests that the shift toward recruiting higher skilled workers, which began in the mid-1990s, is having an impact. At the same time, one-third of those admitted in the family class or as spouses and dependents in the economic class and nearly half of those admitted in the humanitarian class lack English/French capabilities. These categories dominate in recent migration inflows, accounting for 75 percent and 71 percent of all admissions in 1999 and 2008 respectively.

Obtaining English and/or French language proficiency thus remains a critical issue when discussing the integration of immigrants. Labour market data from the 2006 census shows that immigrants who arrive as adults often have low levels of language proficiency. Of those who are currently between 25 and 64 years of age and who arrived after age 20, two out of five (44 percent) of those who arrived before 1996 and nearly two thirds (62 percent) have very low levels of proficiency in Canada's official languages. Compared to the Canadian born and to immigrants with greater official language skills, these immigrants are more likely to hold low skill occupations, work in settings where non-official languages are spoken and have lower earnings. Recently arrived immigrants with low levels of language proficiency have fewer weeks of employment and the lowest weekly earnings of all groups.

Overall the research reported in this paper suggest that despite current policy levers aimed at increasing Canada's intake of highly educated and skilled worker, a sizable number of immigrants today have low levels of language proficiency which in turn are associated with poorer indicators of labour market integration. One finding that gives pause is that poor levels of language proficiency are not limited to only recent immigrants, who arrived within ten years of the 2006 census. Data presented in this paper indicate that low official language skills also characterize two out of five of those who arrived as adults before 1996. The persistence of low levels of proficiency over time is not new, having been observed in earlier censuses for Southern European origin groups. However, if Canada is to maximize the full economic productivity of the foreign born population, it will be important not only to stimulate improvement in the language skills of newcomers early on³, but also to encourage the acquisition of official language skills for those who have been in Canada for some time.

³ Boyd and Cao (2009) provide an overview of language training initiatives at the federal level.

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**Appendix A:
Typology of English/French Language Proficiency**

High English/French Proficiency: Consists of the following groups

- 1) Mother tongue is English and/or French, home languages used most often and regularly are English/French and official language knowledge is English/French;
- 2) Mother tongue is English and/or French, home languages used most often is English/French; home language used regularly is not English/French and official language knowledge is English/French.

Mixed English/French Proficiency: Consists of the following groups

- 3) Mother tongue is English and/or French, home languages used regularly is English/French; home language used most often is not English/French and official language knowledge is English/French;
- 4) Mother tongue is not English and/or French, home languages used most often and regularly are English/French and official language knowledge is English/French;
- 5) Mother tongue and home languages used regularly are not English/French; home language used most often and official language knowledge are English/French.

Low English/French Proficiency: Consists of the following groups

- 6) Mother tongue and home languages used most often are not English/French; home language used regularly and official language knowledge are English/French;
- 7) Mother tongue and home languages used most often and regularly are not English/French; official language knowledge is English/French;
- 8) Mother tongue, home languages used most often and used regularly and official language knowledge are not English/French.

This typology, and the related analysis, excludes a very small number of persons who declare that their mother tongue is English and/or French but who have no conversational ability in English or French and whose home languages are neither English or French