

Relationships between migration / time since entering the UK, languages spoken and proficiency in English

Oliver Duke-Williams – Department of Information Studies
 email: o.duke-williams@ucl.ac.uk – twitter: @oliver_dw

New (and repeated) questions in the 2011 Census allow us to explore relationships between immigration, languages spoken, and proficiency in English.

Graphs showing month of entry to the UK by year, over four decades. In the 1990s and 2000s, this has moved to focus on a peak in September, presumably related to students..

A question about the **year and month of** (most recent) **entry to the UK** (for persons born outside the UK) is of interest in looking at when new migrants arrive. A strength of the LS is that it can be compared for individuals with other sources of data about entry to the UK, including a similar question about *first entry to the UK*, asked in the 1971 Census, and *entry into the NHS administrative records*. It might be assumed that recall error occurs for entry longer ago, but research with the LS suggests that this is not so.

NHS entry data are available from 1971 onwards; we can therefore compare the year of entry (*i.e.* ignoring month) for persons who indicated in the 2011 Census question that they had entered the UK in 1971 or later with the year they first appear in NHS records. There is a correlation of 0.930 (significant at 0.01 level) between these two observations.

What about earlier entry to the UK? Is the same still true? For those people who indicated in the 2011 Census that they entered the UK prior to 1971, and for whom there is also a 1971 Census record in the LS, we can look at their response to the 1971 question about first entry to the UK. This also shows a highly significant strong correlation (0.924) between year of entry, even though the question wording means that the two questions could legitimately be given different responses.

Questions about **main language** used and level of **proficiency in English** allow us to look at the rich diversity of languages in the UK, and also to explore possible problems of linguistic isolation. However, it must be stressed that limited skill in English does not necessarily mean limited skill in other languages, nor does it necessarily mean that someone is limited in their day to day activities. By using the data in the LS on length of time in the UK, we can look at languages spoken and time since immigration.

Graph showing mean and inter-quartile range of year of entry for persons born outside UK, by main language used, and numbers of persons in each group. Data shown for 50 languages with largest number of users; those languages with >1000 users marked [*]

