

Podcast 100 – Languages in Australia

Learn English while learning about daily life in Australia, with Rob McCormack

Podcast Number 100 – Languages in Australia

<http://traffic.libsyn.com/slowenglish/podcast100.mp3>

Hi,

As I previously discussed in Podcast 60, Australia is a multicultural nation with people who have migrated from all over the world to make their lives here. Our history of European settlement shows that, at least up until the Second World War, almost all our immigrants came from Great Britain and Ireland. Therefore, it is no wonder that English became the main spoken language in Australia. Since the Second World War, we have had migrants from many non-English speaking countries as well. In this podcast, I would like to talk a little about what languages are spoken in Australia and how people go about learning English, if that is not their first language.

One always thinks of Australia as an English speaking nation. This is of course correct. It's interesting to look at the results of the 2016 census. In total, around 90% of people living in Australia can speak English. But some of these people can also speak another language. This is usually because they were born in a non-English speaking country and have learned to speak English as a second language, usually after arriving in Australia. Furthermore, many of the children of these migrants, although born in Australia, have also learned the first language of their parents, as well as English. All up, our 2016 census shows that around 17% of Australians can speak one other language, plus English well.

That leaves around 73% of Australians who can speak only English. Around 4% can't speak much English at all and around 6% did not complete that part of the census.



The 2016 census also shows us that around 21% of Australians live in a household where the main language spoken at home is not English. Of course, some of these people can speak English as well. It's just that, in their homes, they speak something else. So which languages are they? Well, Mandarin is the most common, with 2.55% of people, then Arabic (1.37%), followed by Cantonese (1.20%), Vietnamese (1.19%), Italian (1.16%), Greek (1.02%) and Filipino (0.78%). The list doesn't stop there. The full list is around 91 languages, besides English, which are spoken in households in Australia.

In my opinion, it's a great pity that the average Australian speaks only English. In the European Union for example, over 50% of people can speak at least 2 languages. In fact, around

38% can speak English. In my travels to parts of Europe, I have been greatly impressed by the English language skills of the local people. In Norway for example, we found it quite common that the supermarket workers operating the cash register could speak some English. In a Swiss Post Office in one small town, we met a lady behind the counter who could speak 5 languages – German, Italian, English, Romansh and French. Such skills are very rare in the average Australian. I think the fact that we are an island has played a part in this, to some extent. Since European settlement over 200 years ago, there has been no need for us to interact regularly with other language speakers on our borders, therefore we have become, mostly, a one language nation.

I think it must be very hard for someone in Australia if they don't speak English. English is almost universally used in the workplace, by service providers both government and private, in the media and in business. Of course you can often find assistance in another language, especially when seeking assistance from government departments. There is also our multicultural broadcaster SBS which provides some programming in foreign languages. But in everyday life, not being able to speak English in Australia is really going to make life hard. It's not such a problem for non-English speaking tourists because they probably don't need much English in order to enjoy a great holiday here. Also, tourism companies know how to make things easy for tourists. That is not the same as living in a country. That's when English really is needed.

As a result, new migrants to Australia are encouraged and supported to learn English. The Australian government has a program called the Adult Migrant English Program, or AMEP for short. For full and accurate details about this government program, you should visit the website for the Department of Education and Training, at <https://immi.homeaffairs.gov.au/settling-in-australia/amep/abo>

[ut-the-program](#) . I will provide only a brief summary here of some of the key points.

The program is free to eligible migrants and refugees and offers up to 510 hours of tuition to help them learn English, so they can live and work effectively in Australia. You can take either a Pre-employment English course, which will help you learn the English you need to work in a job, or you can take a Social English course, for those who are wanting to learn the English you need for day to day living. Eligible migrants must register for their course within 6 months of arriving in Australia, must commence the course within 12 months and they then have 5 years to complete their course.

The course can be delivered by different methods, depending on the location and the needs of the participant. For example, you can take classroom tuition, including part time and full time study during the day or evenings if available. For some locations there is even child care available for those with pre-school children. Alternatively, you can learn by distance education, where you are given a package of learning materials to work on at home, or alternatively using online materials. In addition, you speak with your teacher regularly on the phone or via the internet. I am very familiar with this style of learning, as I completed my Masters degree using this method. Finally, it may be possible to have a trained volunteer come to your home and work with you one on one on your English. This is called the Home Tutor Scheme.



For children of school age, there are special English school programs which help prepare them prior to entering the normal school system. These courses vary from state to state.

As I have mentioned in previous podcasts, I know what it is like to be learning a new language. I have been learning German for some years now and it is hard work. I try to use as many different methods of learning as possible, and importantly I try to find opportunities to speak the language. For me, that means finding German speakers who I can practise with. For migrants who are learning English in Australia, the best learning would happen when they are speaking English with ordinary Australians as they go about their daily living – in the shops, on public transport, at local sporting events, at work – wherever they can practise their English. That's when English becomes real and that's when the best language learning happens.

If you have a question or a comment to make, please leave it in the comments box at the bottom of this page. Or, you can send me an email at rob@slowenglish.info. I would love to hear from you. Tell me where you live, a little bit about yourself and what you think of my Slow English podcast. I will write back to you, in English of course. If you would like to take a short quiz to see if you have understood this podcast, you will also find it on my website. Goodbye until next time.

Rob

Post Script – since this podcast was published, some aspects of the AMEP have been improved. For example, there is no longer a cap on the number of hours you can participate in the program (previously 510 hours). Eligible people interested in the AMEP should visit the government website at <https://immi.homeaffairs.gov.au/settling-in-australia/amep/about-the-program>.

Podcast 100 Quiz - Did you understand the podcast?

You can take the quiz as many times as you like.

[Start quiz](#)

Vocabulary

accurate = when there are no mistakes or errors

alternatively = another way, a different way

arriving = to go to a place and reach your end point

assistance = help

besides = as well as

border = the line between two countries

broadcaster = a company or organization which sends out television programs. Can also be a person

cash register = the place where the money is kept, in a shop

census = once every 5 years in Australia, all the people are counted and information about them is collected – this is called the census.

commence = start

counter = a table or bench in a shop, which the worker stands behind

delivered = given

eligible = when you are allowed to have something which other people are not allowed to have

encouraged = when you tell someone that they should do something

European settlement = when people came from Europe to live in Australia, starting in 1788

events = special things that happen. For example, a football match or a music festival

first language = the language you learn first as a baby, your mother tongue

foreign = from another land

furthermore = in addition, as well

go about = to organize, to arrange

government departments = parts of the government which do

things for people

household = a family living in one house

immigrants = people who go to another country to live

impressed = when you think something is very good

interact = to talk to, to trade with

it is no wonder = it is expected, it is not surprising

languages = how people talk to one another

local = nearby

locations = places

Masters degree = a higher degree or award from a university

media = television, newspapers, radio, podcasts, social media

migrated = when a person has gone to live in another country

multicultural = when you have people from many different countries living together

nation = country. For example, Australia, Germany, China, etc

operating = when you make a machine work or run

opportunities = times when you can choose to do something you want to do

participant = someone who has joined a class or activity

pity = when you are sad that something has not happened

practise = to do something over and over again, in order to get better

Pre-employment = before you start a job

previously = earlier

prior = earlier

provide = give

public transport = buses, trains, trams

rare = not very common

refugees = people who have left their country because their lives are in danger

register = to give your name, showing that you want to do something

Scheme = an arrangement, a program

service providers = people or companies who do things for you, sometimes the government

state = a region in Australia with its own government. For example, Victoria, New South Wales

summary = to tell you the main points about something

supported = helped

to some extent = partly

tourism = the activities around helping tourists to have good holidays

trained volunteer = someone who works for free, but who has learned the skills needed

tuition = instruction, teaching

Tutor = teacher

universally = in all cases, at all times

vary = change