

# 7

## The semantics of *migrant* in Australian English<sup>1</sup>

Zhengdao Ye

### 1. Introduction

According to the report entitled *Trends in International Migrant Stock: The 2019 Revision* (UNDESA 2019), Australia has one of the highest rates of foreign-born people as a percentage of its total population, far exceeding other English-speaking countries such as Canada, the United Kingdom and the United States. Indeed, according to the 2016 Census data released by the Australian Bureau of Statistics (ABS 2016), 29 per cent of the estimated residents population in Australia were born overseas.

The ABS refers to overseas-born persons generally as ‘migrants’. As an example, in its media release of 27 July 2018 entitled ‘Australia’s dynamic population’, it reports that ‘in 2016–17, 377,000 people moved interstate, 276,000 moved overseas, and 539,000 people arrived as migrants’; of the latter, ‘315,000 arrived on a temporary visa, including just over 150,000 international students, just over 50,000 working holidaymakers, and 32,000 workers on temporary skill visas’. It further elaborates that

---

<sup>1</sup> I dedicate this chapter to Anna Wierzbicka, an exemplary migrant. Extraordinary scholarly achievements aside, Anna has built a new life in a new country. Together with her husband John, she raised two multilingual daughters; and she is the doting *babcia* of Liz (Clem), Nick, Catherine, Therese, Benedict and John (for the meaning of the Polish term *babcia*, see Wierzbicka 1992: 282; cf. Wierzbicka 2017: 45–49).

‘106,000 migrants arrived on permanent visas including 45,800 on skill visas, 29,800 on family visas and 23,900 on humanitarian visas’ (ABS 2018).

For speakers of Australian English, however, perhaps only those who ‘arrived on permanent visas’ would be referred to as *migrants*;<sup>2</sup> international students, backpackers and working holidaymakers would hardly be assigned such a label. Equally, it is hard to imagine that these people would refer to themselves as *migrants*. Nor is it conceivable that, when referring to themselves, migrants would prefer the description ‘those who arrived on permanent visas’ to the label *migrants*. So what does the word *migrant* mean in everyday Australian English? How is it used?

This chapter attempts to provide some answers to these questions. Its chief objective is to conduct a detailed semantic analysis of the word *migrant* as used in Australian English and in non-institutional contexts, and to offer a semantic explication in Natural Semantic Metalanguage (NSM). I first discuss the importance of studying nouns that denote social categories, drawing on Anna Wierzbicka’s seminal work on nouns and conceptual analysis (e.g. Wierzbicka 1985, 1986). I then explain the corpus I use for the semantic analysis conducted in this study, and the limitation of the data set. The main part of the chapter is an in-depth, corpus-assisted meaning analysis, which entails examining patterns of usage and using NSM as a tool for meaning description. In this process, I also compare and contrast the meaning and usage of *migrant* with those of *immigrant*. This is followed by a brief discussion of the use of *migrant* in government and international contexts.<sup>3</sup>

## 2. Nouns for people

To categorise people is a human penchant. Salient categories of people are more often than not assigned labels, such as *migrant*, *digger* and *battler* in Australian English. Therefore, studying the meanings of the nouns that people use to label themselves and others can help pinpoint the priorities

2 Australian English refers to the Standard Australian English, a regional variety of English. It is a common language of Australia, largely taking its present form since the Second World War and codified in publications such as *The Cambridge Australian English Style Guide* (Peters 1995; see also Delbridge 1999).

3 Due to limitations of space, the chapter will not compare the meaning and usage of *migrant* in Australian English and those in American and British English; for such a study, see Ye (2018).

underlying social categorisation and social groupings within a speech community, and reveal the kind of generalisations that people make about themselves and others in general.

The importance of studying nouns for people is intrinsically related to the role and function of nouns as a universal word class. In her paper entitled ‘What’s in a noun? (Or: How do nouns differ in meaning from adjectives?)’, Anna Wierzbicka stresses the categorisation role of nouns as opposed to the description role of adjectives:

A description implies the presence of a number of characteristics, all on the same level of importance. Thus, one might describe a person as tall, thin, blond, freckled, and so on. But if one categorizes a person as a hunchback, a cripple, a leper, a virgin, or a teenager, one is not mentioning one characteristic among many; rather, one is putting that person into a certain category, seen at the moment as ‘unique’. One is putting a label on that person, as one might put a label on a jar of preserves. One might say that a noun is comparable to an identifying construction: ‘that’s the kind of person that this person is’. An adjective, on the other hand, is comparable to a simple predicate compatible with many other such predicates: ‘this person is X, Y, Z’. (Wierzbicka 1986: 358)

Recognising the dual functions of nouns—referring and categorising—Wierzbicka questions the feature approach to the meanings of nouns:

I submit that what most nouns (prototypical nouns) do is to identify a certain kind of person, a kind of thing, a kind of animal. These kinds are identified in language in positive terms, not in terms of their mutual differences. For examples, the words *man*, *woman* and *child* identify certain kinds of people, each of them with a certain positive image. I think that popular descriptions which suggest that the word *man* means HUMAN + MALE + ADULT or that *child* means – ADULT + HUMAN (cf. e.g. Bierwisch 1970), miss a crucial point about the semantics of human categorization, embodied in natural language. The meaning of a noun cannot be represented as a set of ‘features’, because the basic function of a noun is to single out a certain KIND, a kind which may be partly described in terms of features but which cannot be reduced to a set of features. (Wierzbicka 1986: 360)

What this means for semantic analysis is that NSM-based definitions should include how people *think about* the referent in question and not simply the referent itself.

Wierzbicka's insistence on understanding the meanings of (prototypical) nouns based on the semantic prime of *KIND* has influenced the NSM approach to the semantics of nouns (e.g. Ye 2017a); rather than identifying features, it attempts to elucidate and articulate what makes a category a certain *KIND*.<sup>4</sup> This chapter deals with the semantics of *KINDS* of people; particularly, the kind of people who are referred to as *migrants* in Australian English.

### 3. A word on the semantic primes and semantic molecules

The chapter employs the methods of reductive paraphrasing (that is, to say the same things but in simpler words) to explain the meaning of words concerned, and uses NSM as a descriptive language to represent paraphrased meaning. Research in NSM has shown that, despite their obvious referents, the semantic structure of nouns is complex, which often includes layers of embedded semantic molecules, in addition to the 65 atomic-level semantic primes (e.g. Wierzbicka 1985, 1996; Ye 2017b; see Goddard 2018a for the list of semantic molecules). To explicate the meaning of *migrant* and related words, the semantic molecules 'be born' and 'country', which belong to the 'biosocial' domain and the domain of 'place where one lives', are necessary in order to paraphrase the more complex idea of 'country of birth'. This idea can be paraphrased as 'they were not born in this country/here; they were born in another country/in another place'. The presence of the semantic prime 'here' and the combination of primes 'in another place' ('another' being a variant of 'other') indicate that the terms containing a reference to changing places are in fact deictic in nature.

---

<sup>4</sup> Obviously, kinship terms are not *KIND*-based but specify relations between two persons. The relational nature of kinship terms means that they do not have to select the word class of nouns exclusively; they can, in fact, be verbs (see e.g. Evans 2000).

## 4. Corpus-based contrastive semantic analysis

### 4.1. The corpus

This study analyses the meaning of *migrant* as it is used in Australian English. For this purpose, I draw on examples from the Oznews subcorpus of Collins Wordbanks Online (hereafter Wordbanks).<sup>5</sup> There are two advantages of using Wordbanks. One is that the inclusion of diverse varieties of English in this corpus—such as American English, British English, Canadian English, South African English—makes it possible to compare, within one site, the usage of concerned terms in Australian English and other varieties of English. The other is that the many existing functions of the database allow quantitative analysis of usage and collocational data.<sup>6</sup> However, there are also serious limitations in relying on Oznews as the main source of data for semantic analysis. First, Oznews, being the only subcorpus representing Australian English usages in Wordbanks, comprises examples chiefly drawn from newspapers.<sup>7</sup> Notwithstanding that discourse about *migrants* often takes place in public, the reader should keep in mind that the data presented in this chapter are drawn from one genre only. The second limitation is the relatively small size of the Oznews corpus, which contains about 35 million tokens, accounting for 6.33 per cent of the total tokens in Wordbanks. The third limitation concerns the age of Wordbanks, which spans 1960 to 2005, the bulk of the corpus deriving from the period 2001–05. Given that many people change places due to social, political and economic events, be they local or global, the semantics of *migrant*, as discussed in this chapter and based on Oznews, is inevitably marked by the time period in which the term is used. Although the phrase ‘Australian English’ is used sparingly in the chapter, its referential range is largely limited, owing to the data set used in the study.<sup>8</sup>

5 Collins Wordbanks Online: [wordbanks.harpercollins.co.uk](http://wordbanks.harpercollins.co.uk).

6 For these two reasons, Wordbanks is preferred to the Australian National Corpus: [www.ausnc.org.au/](http://www.ausnc.org.au/).

7 This is different from the subcorpora of both American English and British English, which contain diverse genres, ranging from newspapers to spoken language.

8 The earliest example of *migrant* included in the Oznews subcorpus is from 1995, and the majority of the examples date from 2000–05. The age of Wordbanks, and the more recent examples of *migrant* in Oznews, also mean that this study is unable to comment on the usage of *migrant* between the late 1940s and early 1960s, a crucial period during which a large number of what are referred to today as migrants arrived and settled in Australia.

**Table 7.1. Frequencies of the lemmas MIGRANT and IMMIGRANT in Wordbanks.**

Lemma	All varieties of English	Australian English	Other varieties of English by country						
			America	Great Britain	Canada	India	Ireland	New Zealand	South Africa
MIGRANT	3,693	443	1,683	1,133	111	88	21	236	21
IMMIGRANT	13,892	379	9,379	2,603	1,023	136	86	250	104

Source: Wordbanks.

**Table 7.2. Frequencies of MIGRANT and IMMIGRANT in news.**

Lemma	Oznews	Brnews	Cannews	Indnews	USnews
MIGRANT	443	24	111	88	226
IMMIGRANT	379	97	1,023	136	2,558

Source: Wordbanks.

## 4.2. Frequency data

Table 7.1 shows the tokens of *MIGRANT* as a lemma, in contrast to those of *IMMIGRANT* across all varieties of English included in Wordbanks.<sup>9</sup>

A striking feature of the pair of words concerned here is that the frequency of *MIGRANT* is higher than that of *IMMIGRANT*, in reverse trend to all other varieties of English. This suggests that *migrant* is perhaps used more frequently than *immigrant* in Australian English. The frequency data are consistent with the observation offered by *The Australian National Dictionary* (AND 2016), which specifically includes the term *migrant* and says that it is ‘of special significance to the history of Australia’ and ‘now more usual than *immigrant*’ (AND 2016: 951; see also Peters 1995: 483).

What is also interesting is that roughly one-third of the 443 tokens of *MIGRANT* are used as a modifier of a following noun, such as *workers*, *doctors*, *service* and *waves*. In contrast, all the 379 tokens of *IMMIGRANT* are of nominal usage.<sup>10</sup>

The distinctiveness of *migrant* in Australian English is brought out further when compared with other varieties of English against the same genre of news, as reflected in Table 7.2.

## 4.3. Semantic analysis

The frequency data presented in Tables 7.1 and 7.2 point to the fact that, of the two terms, *migrant* and *immigrant*, the former could be seen as being more salient than the latter in Australian English.

In its nominal usage, the word *migrant* has two distinctive senses. *Migrant*<sub>1</sub> has a country-specific meaning, ‘people who have migrated to Australia’, and *migrant*<sub>2</sub> refers to interstate migrants. These two senses will be discussed in turn.

The country-specific characteristic of *migrant*<sub>1</sub> is clearly reflected in the following examples:

<sup>9</sup> In Table 7.1, the Part of Speech of the two lemmas is not specified.

<sup>10</sup> In Oznews, the phrase ‘migrant workers’ typically refers to those based in countries other than Australia.

- (1) Jan Bassett's collection draws the distinction between visitors who came to Australia and **migrants** who intended to stay.
- (2) Like many new **migrants**, she felt lonely and isolated, unable to speak English and communicate with her new neighbours.
- (3) Many of the thousands of **migrants** who came to this country after the Second World War thrived despite not being able to speak English ...
- (4) They are some of South Australia's greatest imports—the **migrants** who brought their hopes, skills ...

The collocational patterns of *migrant* in Oznews reveal many interesting points about the concept. They relate to its group-oriented nature, its references to countries of origin, age, language ability, the society's attitudes and a high level of government planning.

In many cases, *migrant*<sub>1</sub> is used in a plural sense and collocated with a collective noun, as shown in examples (5–6):

- (5) **a new generation of migrants** from continental Europe
- (6) **waves of migrants**

The majority of the corpus examples convey a group sense. The suggestion that *migrant*<sub>1</sub> is normally evoked in a collective sense does not mean that it cannot refer to an individual. There are many such examples in Oznews, such as (7–8):

- (7) The year was 1998 and **the migrant** who came to Australia for a better life had found it.
- (8) Yet, **a migrant** from Beijing such as Guan Wei, who has settled in Sydney with his wife and small daughter, is a latecomer in the short history of European Australia.

The data in Oznews also show that migrants' ethnicities are frequently mentioned. They include British, Danish, English, German, Greek, Italian, Lithuanian, Macedonian, Maltese and Slovenian. These descriptors simultaneously indicate migrants' countries of origin. Expressions such as 'a Fijian-born migrant' explicitly mention the place of birth.

The range of countries alluded to in Oznews undoubtedly reflects the make-up of the migrant population and the history of migration in Australia.<sup>11</sup> This is clearly shown when the frequency data of *migrant*<sub>1</sub> in Australian English are compared with that of *migrant* across all varieties of English. Wordbanks' Word Sketch shows that, across all varieties of English, the most frequently used modifiers for *migrant* are actually Albanian, Haitian, Bangladeshi, Mexican, North Korean, Burmese and Cuban. None of these appear in the examples of *migrant* in the Oznews corpus, however.

Apart from country of origin, global modifiers such as African, Asian and European are also commonly collocated with *migrant*<sub>1</sub>, indicating the larger continents the migrants come from.

It is interesting to note that although expressions such as 'the daughter of Slovenian migrants' and 'her father a German migrant' exist in the corpus, there is no reference of migrants being children.<sup>12</sup> This makes sense when we think of the typical motivations attributed to migrants, a point to be discussed later. However, we do find examples of *migrant*<sub>1</sub> where age is implied, such as 'young migrants living in Australia' (in this example, 'young migrants' refers to teenage) and 'elderly Asian migrants'. When such descriptions are given, they often stress the vulnerability of being a migrant.

In general, the data show that migrants are portrayed positively, and seen as representing a disadvantaged social group because of their very limited language ability and of the fact that they are new to the country, as reflected in examples (2–3) and (9–10):

- (9) Textile unions are concerned the tariff cuts between 2010 and 2015 will force mainly older **non-English speaking migrants** out of work.
- (10) **Early migrants** faced confusion, fears and frustrations settling into a **foreign land**.

11 For a succinct account of Australia's migration history, see [www.migrationheritage.nsw.gov.au/belongings-home/about-belongings/australias-migration-history/index.html](http://www.migrationheritage.nsw.gov.au/belongings-home/about-belongings/australias-migration-history/index.html).

12 Another example of migrants, implying adults, comes from the same website mentioned in Footnote 11. In this article, entitled 'Australia's migration story', the opening paragraph states that 'In New South Wales, four out of every 10 people are either migrants or the children of migrants'.

Other indications that migrants are thought of as being socially disadvantaged include the frequent mention of the word *migrants* along with *refugees*, *women* and *Aboriginal people* in Oznews.<sup>13</sup>

The corpus data indicate that Australian society shows an overwhelmingly sympathetic attitude towards migrants, recognising the difficulties they face and providing various services to assist them. Some of the corpus examples are given in example (11) (see also example (3)):

- (11) a. **welcoming** refugees and new migrants  
 b. Migrant Resource Centres/Migrants and Refugee Settlement Services **assist** new migrants  
 c. (the women's and children's hospital) to **help** migrants and refugee women  
 d. **create** a migrant friendly community  
 e. voluntary work **teaching English** to Vietnamese migrants and illiterate adults

The institution name Migrant Resource Centre is especially worth mentioning because it has become a fixed phrase in Australian English. The word 'resource' itself suggests that the society recognises that migrants need support.<sup>14</sup>

The verbs that go with *migrant*<sub>1</sub>, as shown in (11a–e), look markedly different from those that go with *migrant* in Word Sketch: when used as the object of a verb, the latter are most likely to collocate with *repatriate*, *deport*, *intercept* and *detain*. This difference in collocation affirms that *migrant*<sub>1</sub> in Australian English has its distinctive usage, and that it has a positive connotation.

One also observes marked differences in the kind of modifiers the word *migrant* selects in Oznews and in Word Sketch, which confirm the dominantly positive sense of *migrant*<sub>1</sub> in Australian English. Whereas Word Sketch reveals that the top three modifiers most likely to be combined with *migrant* are *illegal* (168 tokens/T-score 8.46), *undocumented* (15 tokens/T-score 8.24) and *skilled* (42 tokens/T-score 8.09), in the Oznews subcorpus, the phrase *illegal migrants* only occurs

13 And in government websites as well: see Footnote 17.

14 Peters (1995: 483) particularly mentions that 'the word [migrant] is enshrined in institutions such as the Adult Migrant English Service (AMES)'.

nine times (compared with the 134 instances of *illegal immigrant/s* in the same subcorpus); the phrase *undocumented migrant* simply does not exist; and the collocation *skilled migrant* occurs 39 times, accounting for almost all the examples contained in Wordbanks.

Upon a close examination of the nine occurrences of the phrase *illegal migrant/s*, it becomes clear that half of these refer to a foreign context. When referring to the Australian context, the situations described are actually positive, as is the case of example (12):

- (12) Prime Minister John Howard and Immigration Minister Senator Amanda Vanstone are refusing to say sorry to the mentally ill woman, who was **mistaken for an illegal migrant** and forced to spend 10 months in detention.

Overall, the examples in Oznews show that the word *migrant*, when used in the Australian context, has a positive sense.

Words and expressions, such as ‘settle’ and ‘call Australia home’, also suggest the societal expectations of migrants in Australia, where there is a high degree of government planning in matters relating to migrants, as reflected in the frequent mention of ‘Government’s plan for migrant intakes’, ‘intake of skilled migrants’ and ‘to attract skilled migrants’ in Oznews. Example (13) suggests that the uniqueness of the skill-based migration policy initiated by the Australian government is recognised overseas.

- (13) The British Labour Party in turn has attempted to steal the thunder of the Conservative party, announcing the introduction of an ‘Australian-style’ migration system which will give preference to **skilled migrants** over the unskilled.

Using NSM, the full explication of *migrant*<sub>1</sub> is presented in [A]:

**[A] *migrant*<sub>1</sub> (Australian usage)**

a.	someone of one kind	CATEGORY
b.	people can know that it is like this:	KNOWLEDGE
	people of this kind were not born in Australia, they were born in another country	STATUS
	after they lived for some time in that country where they were born, they wanted to live in Australia	
	because of this, sometime after this, they lived in Australia, not in that country where they were born	CHANGING PLACES
c.	people in Australia can think about people of this kind like this:	PERCEPTION
	'they wanted to live here, because at some time they thought like this:	
	'if we live in Australia, very good things can happen to us, we want this'	MOTIVATION
	because they thought like this, they did many things	ACTION
	after this, they could live in Australia because Australian government said so'	PERMISSION
d.	many people in Australia think about people of this kind like this:	ATTITUDES
	'many people of this kind can't speak English well, many people of this kind can't do much	
	it is good if other people do many good things for them'	

Explication [A] is framed around a semantic template encompassing CATEGORY, KNOWLEDGE, PERCEPTION, MOTIVATION and ATTITUDE. Component (a) reflects that *migrant*<sub>1</sub> refers to an individual belonging to a category. The components in (b) describe people's general knowledge about migrants. They suggest that there are certain facts about migrants that are public knowledge. For example, they are not born in Australia, they come from another country, and it is their voluntary decision to take up residency in Australia ('they wanted to live in Australia'). This mature way of thinking, as well as the geographic knowledge of Australia itself as the intended destination, explain why the referential range of the word *migrant*<sub>1</sub> does not extend to children. Components under (c) describe societal perception of migrants as reflected in Australian English, including their seeking a better life in

Australia and that they have the Australian government's permission to reside in Australia. This sense of 'for a better life' is pervasive in the data (e.g. examples (4) and (7)), and the idea of their having a legal status adds to the positive meaning of the term.

In addition to semantic primitives and semantic molecules, the reductive paraphrases in [A], written in the English version of NSM, also include words belonging to Minimal English, such as *Australia* and *government*.<sup>15</sup>

The name of the country *Australia* is built into the explication to reflect the use of the term *migrant* in Australian English and the fact that the meaning being explicated is confined to the Australian language context.

The word *government* is included to reflect the idea that 'they can live in this country because the government of this country says so'. It seems that, for ordinary speakers, the idea of people entering a country legally has much to do with what the government of that country says, whereas that of unlawful entry into a country is associated with not complying with the law.

#### 4.4. *Migrant*, vs *immigrant* in Australian English

To further appreciate the positive sense of the word *migrant*<sub>1</sub> in Australian English, it is instructive to look at the general usage of the word *immigrant*. As already shown in Tables 7.1 and 7.2, the frequency data associated with this pair of words look very different from that in other varieties of English. A close look at the collocations of *immigrant* confirms that it is largely used in negative contexts. Further evidence comes from the fact that of the 379 total occurrences of *immigrant/s*, 134 actually are *illegal immigrant/s*, with references mostly to contexts outside Australia (e.g. 'illegal Thai immigrants in NY'; 'illegal Mexican immigrants in US'); and the related examples depict the means of people entering a specific country (e.g. 'boat', 'truck' and 'smuggling ... into'), and the actions taken by the government (e.g. 'send back'; 'interviewed by customs officers'). In Oznews, there are no collocations of *immigrant* with positive verbs, such as *settle* and *help*, or with nouns such as *community*. Nor does the word *immigrant* have a deictic reference to Australia.

15 For the notion of Minimal English, see Wierzbicka (2014: 185–96) and Goddard (2018b).

For reasons of space, the full explication of *immigrant* is not offered here. However, the differences in the explications between the two words can be summarised. First, the explication of *immigrant* does not contain the specific reference to ‘they want to live in Australia’; rather, the component ‘they want to live in another country’ can refer to any country. Second, the meaning of *immigrant* does not include reference to activities under the PERCEPTION component; it only has the reference to motivation ‘if we live in another country, very good things can happen to us, we want this’. This ‘thinner’ semantic content of *immigrant* is consistent with the fact that it has become a marginal word in Australian English. The third difference is that the word *immigrant* is associated with a negative attitude: ‘often, people in Australia think bad things about people of this kind’.

#### 4.5. *Migrant*<sub>2</sub> in Australian English

The second nominal usage of *migrant* (i.e. *migrant*<sub>2</sub>) in Australian English refers to interstate migrants, who change places for reasons of retirement, employment opportunities or lifestyle, as illustrated in examples (14–15):

- (14) The biggest proportion were **interstate migrants**, overwhelmingly from Sydney fleeing soaring housing prices for southeast Queensland’s relative affordability and better lifestyle.
- (15) No longer is Queensland attracting mainly elderly people escaping the bustling capital cities of NSW [New South Wales] and Victoria, but Queensland’s **migrants** are likely to be young and from regional areas.

This second sense of the word *migrant* is spelt out in [B].

#### [B] *migrant*<sub>2</sub> (Australian usage, as in ‘Queensland’s migrants’)

- |    |  |                    |
|----|--|--------------------|
| a. | someone of one kind                                    | CATEGORY           |
| b. | people in Australia can know that it is like this:     | KNOWLEDGE          |
|    | people of this kind live now in one part of Australia, |                    |
|    | before, they lived in another part of Australia        | CHANGING<br>PLACES |

- c. people in Australian can think about people of this kind like this: PERCEPTION
- ‘they wanted to live in another place in Australia, because at some time they thought like this:
- ‘this other place is not the same as where I live now in Australia, MOTIVATION
- very good things can happen to me if I live in this other place,
- these things can’t happen to me when I live here’
- because they thought like this, they did many things ACTION
- after this, they did not live any more where they lived before, they lived in this other place in Australia

Obviously, the notion of ‘country’ is absent in the meaning of *migrant*<sub>2</sub>. It follows that people do not think about interstate migrants in terms of ‘being lawful’ or ‘unlawful’. Explication [B] focuses on changing place and motivation. The corpus data do not suggest any particular attitudes that people have towards interstate migrants.

## 5. The meaning of *migrant* in institutional contexts

In either of the two meanings discussed above, the use of *migrant* in media and the public space in Australia conveys the sense that the people being referred to intend to stay and settle. This folk understanding of the word *migrant* is different from its institutional meaning. The quotations taken from the ABS at the beginning of the chapter illustrate one institutional context where *migrants* refers to people who live in another country temporarily, such as international students, who typically spend a few years studying and living in Australia. Some may wish to settle in Australia; others may not. But they come to Australia mostly voluntarily. In fact, the ABS Glossary for the Migrant Data Matrices indicate that ‘being born overseas’ and ‘residing in Australia for a period of 12 months or more’ are integral to ABS’s definition of ‘migrant’ (ABS 2011).<sup>16</sup>

16 However, it is also interesting to note that on the Department of Human Services website, the everyday sense of *migrants* is used. For example, in talking about the kind of services available to different clients, the social categories of ‘migrants’, ‘refugees’ and ‘visitors’ are distinguished (e.g. [www.humanservices.gov.au/individuals/information-in-your-language](http://www.humanservices.gov.au/individuals/information-in-your-language)).

The 12-month residence element is also key to the definition of migrant in international contexts. For example, the International Organization for Migration (IOM) states that it follows the United Nations' definition of 'migrant' as 'an individual who has resided in a foreign country for more than one year irrespective of the causes, voluntary or involuntary, and the means, regular or irregular, used to migrate' (IOM 2011).<sup>17</sup> This is a broad definition which includes references to 'migrant workers, refugees, asylum seekers and IDPs [internally displaced persons], as well as of remittances', as is evident in the IOM's *World Migration Report 2018*:

Current estimates are that there are 244 million international migrants globally (or 3.3 per cent of the world's population). While the vast majority of people in the world continue to live in the country in which they were born, more people are migrating to other countries, especially those within their region. ... migrant workers constitute a large majority of the world's international migrants ... Global displacement is at a record high, with the number of internally displaced at over 40 million and the number of refugees more than 22 million. (IOM 2018)

## 6. Coda

Back to the Australian context. The Heritage Museum of the Bonegilla Migrant Experience provides information relevant to the meaning of migrant analysed in this chapter. Bonegilla, once a military barracks, was converted to a migrant reception and training centre in 1947. According to the information provided at the site, migrants stayed at Bonegilla for a few days or several weeks, depending on their level of English, before being dispatched to other places. And from 1958, it became the only centre of this type, until its closure in 1971. As stated on the website of the Bonegilla Migrant Experience, 'more than 300,000 migrants passed [through] its doors between 1947 and 1971, most of those originating from non-English speaking European countries' (Bonegilla n.d.a).<sup>18</sup>

17 According to the UN definition, the term 'migrant' can be understood as 'any person who lives temporarily or permanently in a country where he or she was not born, and has acquired some significant social ties to this country' (UNESCO 2017). See: [www.unesco.org/new/en/social-and-human-sciences/themes/international-migration/glossary/migrant/](http://www.unesco.org/new/en/social-and-human-sciences/themes/international-migration/glossary/migrant/).

18 A brochure about the place states: 'Today the centre touches the lives of millions of Australians. One in 20 Australians have had either a parent, brother, sister, uncle, aunty or grandparent who spent time at Bonegilla before work allocations dispersed them Australia wide' (Bonegilla n.d.b).

The Bonegilla camp serves as a reminder of the scale of postwar migration, early migrants' experiences and their living conditions, as well as the enormous contributions they made to building Australian society. For example, the timeline on display shows that in 1951, the year when the Displaced Persons Scheme ended and Assisted Migrant Scheme began in Australia, 10,000 migrants arrived at Bonegilla. The same year saw the first Australian naturalisation ceremony. Between 1949 and 1974, the Snowy Mountains Hydro-Electric Scheme was completed, largely with migrant labour (100,000 migrants from over 30 countries). In 1973, the Multicultural policy speech, 'Strength in diversity', delivered by Al Grassby (the then Minister for Immigration), marked a new era in Australian government policy.

But what is perhaps most striking in Bonegilla is that migrants received there were from non-English speaking countries, and that a great deal of their training was about learning English. Signs displayed at the Bonegilla site, such as 'no English, no Jobs', remind people of such reality. The site has kept the name 'Tudor Hall'. It is so named 'because it contained pictures of the Tudor monarchs and the British coat-of-arms to help migrants identify with the British heritage of Australia' (Bonegilla n.d.b).

At the time when the Bonegilla camp was operating, migrants to Australia also included many from Great Britain, but they came under a different scheme, according to the information provided at the camp site: from 1946 onwards, the Commonwealth could act as their nominee. They were free to choose their own type of work and live in work hostels with their families, usually located in capital cities.<sup>19</sup> Later, under pressure of numbers, some also came to Bonegilla, but not before the camp was readied and considerably improved.

---

19 In fact, they could also vote after six months!

Thus, in reality, it seems to me that there were, and continue to be, two kinds of migrants: the marked and the unmarked. The latter come from English-speaking countries (particularly England),<sup>20</sup> which are typically developed countries; and the former non-English speaking countries. Explication [A] offered in this chapter indicates that typical conceptions of migrants are that they are non-English speaking. This point, which is ubiquitously observed in the Oznews subcorpus, is also reinforced by the enormous emphasis placed on learning and speaking English for migrants' social advancement.

Thus, it seems that in the public image and perception, migrants are simultaneously 'accented'. This marks their position as a socially disadvantaged group. A typical migrant to Australia is, therefore, one who comes from a non-English speaking country.<sup>21</sup>

## References

ABS (Australian Bureau of Statistics) (2011). *3415.0—Migrant Data Matrices, Nov 2011*. Canberra: ABS. Available at: [www.abs.gov.au/AUSSTATS/abs@.nsf/Lookup/3415.0Glossary1Nov+2011](http://www.abs.gov.au/AUSSTATS/abs@.nsf/Lookup/3415.0Glossary1Nov+2011).

ABS (2016). *Special Article: The 2016 Census of Population and Housing*. Canberra: ABS. Available at: [www.abs.gov.au/ausstats/abs@.nsf/Lookup/by%20Subject/1001.0-2016-17-Main%20Features-The%202016%20Census%20of%20Population%20and%20Housing-10009](http://www.abs.gov.au/ausstats/abs@.nsf/Lookup/by%20Subject/1001.0-2016-17-Main%20Features-The%202016%20Census%20of%20Population%20and%20Housing-10009).

---

20 British-born migrants to Australia make up the largest overseas-born migrants in Australia. The Records of British migrants held at the National Archives of Australia states that 'Since European settlement to Australia began in 1788 more migrants have come from Great Britain to settle in Australia than from any other country' (National Archives of Australia 2019: Fact Sheet 123). And according to the article entitled 'Australia's migration history' (NSW Migration Heritage Centre 2010), 'In 1996, for the first time in Australia's migration history, the number of British migrants arriving fell to second place behind New Zealand'. In Australian English, to say 'New Zealand migrants' or 'American migrants', 'Irish migrants' or 'Canadian migrants' sounds unnatural. Although 'British migrants' is a fixed expression, it primarily refers to the origins of those who settled in Australia. The Oznews subcorpus records four occurrences of *British migrants*: one in the context of New Zealand, one about the new waves of British migrants heading to South Australia, one about a Parliamentarian's renunciation of dual citizenship and one about British migrants outnumbering the Aboriginal inhabitants. These are quite different contexts from those discussed in this chapter.

21 It is clear that a close examination of the meaning and usage of the word *migrant* during the postwar period is needed in order to better understand whether it replaces the word *immigrant*, and when, how and why this change took place. Foremost, this will require scrutinising media and government documents of that period.

- ABS (2018). *Media Release: Australia's Dynamic Population*. Canberra: ABS. Available at: [www.abs.gov.au/ausstats/abs@.nsf/lookup/3412.0Media%20Release12016-17](http://www.abs.gov.au/ausstats/abs@.nsf/lookup/3412.0Media%20Release12016-17).
- The Australian National Dictionary (AND)* (2016). *The Australian National Dictionary: Australian Words and their Origins* (2nd edn) (Bruce Moore, Mark Gwynn, Amanda Laugesen and Julia Robinson, eds). Melbourne: Oxford University Press.
- Bonegilla (n.d.a). About Bonegilla Migrant Experience. *Bonegilla Migrant Experience*. Available at: [www.bonegilla.org.au/about-us/about-bonegilla-migrant-experience](http://www.bonegilla.org.au/about-us/about-bonegilla-migrant-experience).
- Bonegilla (n.d.b). Bonegilla Migrant Experience site guide [brochure]. *Bonegilla Migrant Experience*. Available at: [www.bonegilla.org.au/Portals/2/Downloads/Site\\_Guide\\_October\\_2019.pdf?ver=2020-01-13-134513-500](http://www.bonegilla.org.au/Portals/2/Downloads/Site_Guide_October_2019.pdf?ver=2020-01-13-134513-500).
- Delbridge, Arthur (1999). Standard Australian English. *World Englishes* 18 (2): 259–70.
- Evans, Nicholas (2000). Kinship verbs. In Patra M. Vogel and Bernard Comrie (eds), *Approaches to the Typology of Word Classes*. Berlin: Mouton de Gruyter, 103–72.
- Goddard, Cliff (2018a). *Ten Lectures on Natural Semantic Metalanguage: Exploring Language, Thought and Culture Using Simple, Translatable Words*. Leiden: Brill.
- Goddard, Cliff (ed.) (2018b). *Minimal English for a Global World: Improved Communication Using Fewer Words*. London: Palgrave.
- IOM (International Organization for Migration) (2011). *Glossary on Migration* (2nd edn). International Migration Law No. 25. Geneva: International Organization for Migration. Available at: [publications.iom.int/system/files/pdf/iml25\\_1.pdf](http://publications.iom.int/system/files/pdf/iml25_1.pdf).
- IOM (2018). Chapter 02: Migration and migrants: A global overview [website introductory text]. *World Migration Report 2018*. Geneva: International Organization for Migration. doi.org/10.18356/2aede4d9-en.
- National Archives of Australia (2019). *Records of British Migrants Held in Canberra*. Fact sheet 123. Available at: [www.naa.gov.au/sites/default/files/2020-05/fs-123-records-of-british-migrants-held-in-canberra.pdf](http://www.naa.gov.au/sites/default/files/2020-05/fs-123-records-of-british-migrants-held-in-canberra.pdf).
- NSW Migration Heritage Centre (2010). Australia's migration history. *Migration Heritage Centre*. Available at: [www.migrationheritage.nsw.gov.au/belongings-home/about-belongings/australias-migration-history/index.html](http://www.migrationheritage.nsw.gov.au/belongings-home/about-belongings/australias-migration-history/index.html).

- Peters, Pam (1995). *The Cambridge Australian English Style Guide* (1st edn). Melbourne: Cambridge University Press.
- UNESCO (United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organisation) (2017). Migrant/Migration. Available at: [www.unesco.org/new/en/social-and-human-sciences/themes/international-migration/glossary/migrant/](http://www.unesco.org/new/en/social-and-human-sciences/themes/international-migration/glossary/migrant/) (site discontinued).
- UNDESA (United Nations Department of Economics and Social Affairs) (2019). *Trends in International Migrant Stock: The 2019 Revision*. Geneva: United Nations.
- Wierzbicka, Anna (1985). *Lexicography and Conceptual Analysis*. Ann Arbor: Karoma.
- Wierzbicka, Anna (1986). What's in a noun? (Or: How do nouns differ in meaning from adjectives?). *Studies in Language* 10 (2): 353–89. doi.org/10.1075/sl.10.2.05wie.
- Wierzbicka, Anna (1992). *Semantics, Culture, and Cognition: Universal Human Concepts in Culture-Specific Configurations*. New York: Oxford University Press.
- Wierzbicka, Anna (1996). *Semantics: Primes and Universals*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.
- Wierzbicka, Anna (2014). *Imprisoned in English: The Hazards of English as a Default Language*. New York: Oxford University Press.
- Wierzbicka, Anna (2017). The meaning of kinship terms: A developmental and cross linguistic perspective. In Zhengdao Ye (ed.), *The Semantics of Nouns*. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 19–62.
- Ye, Zhengdao (ed.) (2017a). *The Semantics of Nouns*. Oxford: Oxford University Press. doi.org/10.1093/oso/9780198736721.003.0001.
- Ye, Zhengdao (2017b). The semantics of nouns: A cross-linguistic and cross-domain perspective. In Ye Zhengdao (ed.), *The Semantics of Nouns*. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1–18.
- Ye, Zhengdao (2018). The semantics of 'migrant', 'immigrant', and 'refugee': A cross-linguistic perspective. Invited Keynote Address, presented at the *International Conference on Nommer L'Humain: Description, Categorisation, Enjeux: Multidisciplinary Approaches*, Strasbourg University.

This text is taken from *Meaning, Life and Culture: In conversation with Anna Wierzbicka*, edited by Helen Bromhead and Zhengdao Ye, published 2020 by ANU Press, The Australian National University, Canberra, Australia.

[doi.org/10.22459/MLC.2020.07](https://doi.org/10.22459/MLC.2020.07)