Accessing and Using Language Data from the Census Bureau

Handout from the 2008 Federal Interagency Conference on Limited English Proficiency
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Detailed language data that used to be collected every 10 years in the decennial census are now available on a yearly basis from The American Community Survey (ACS). The ACS provides critical economic, social, demographic, and housing information about the U.S. and its communities. Pre-tabulated tables on these characteristics, including language use and English-speaking ability, are available from American FactFinder.

I. **How can I use American FactFinder to find Census Bureau language data?**
   1. Start at our main website www.census.gov.
   2. On the left-hand side, click on the link for American FactFinder (AFF).
   3. On the AFF main site, on the left-hand side, scroll your mouse over the blue bar DATA SETS.
   4. Click on the second bullet that says "American Community Survey".
   5. Click on the radio button for the year you want. The latest data we have available are from 2007.
   6. On the right side of the survey year, click on Detailed Tables for the most detailed information we have. You can also check out the other options such as Ranking Tables and Subject Tables.
   7. On the second bullet labeled "Select a geographic type", pull the menu down and click on the geography you want.
   8. Once your geography is highlighted, click the ADD button, then click the NEXT button. This will populate the box at the bottom.
   9. Click on the second tab that says "by keyword".
   10. Type in "language" in the box and click SEARCH (note: you can isolate any other information you're looking for by typing in the word or looking at the "by subject" tab.
   11. You'll get the list of all tables with language data.
   12. Highlight the table(s) you want and click the ADD button.
   13. Click SHOW RESULTS.

II. **How can I download tables from American FactFinder?**
   1. Near the top right side of the page where you have your output table, you'll see three choices: OPTIONS, PRINT/DOWNLOAD, and RELATED ITEMS.
   2. Scroll your mouse over the PRINT/DOWNLOAD choice.
   3. Click on DOWNLOAD.
   4. On the pop-up window, keep the settings as they are and click OK.
   5. Once you have it saved on your hard drive, you can open it up and do whatever tabulations you want.

III. **What should I do if I need language information for a small geographic area?**
   The population threshold for the current 1-year estimates from the ACS is areas with 65,000 or more population. The first 3-year estimates will be available in December 2008. The population threshold for the 3-year estimates is for areas with a population of 20,000 or more.

   In 2010 the ACS will release 5-year estimates for the smallest geographic areas. The most recent ACS data available at this time are based on one year of sample and cannot support the production of most small area tabulation. You should therefore continue to use Census 2000 data following the step-by-step instructions in section I. You should select "2000 Decennial Census - Summary File 3" as the DATA SET.

IV. **Where can I find documentation of the Accuracy of the Data, including instructions on how to calculate confidence intervals?**
   1. Start at the main website www.census.gov
   2. On the center of the page, click on the link for American Community Survey.
   3. Inside the Using the Data tab, click on the link for Accuracy of the Data – 200X.
   4. Click on the document "How to Us the Data" that corresponds with the data of the year you want.

V. What are the key ACS language tables that are available from American FactFinder?
The Detailed Tables are the data products with the most detailed information on language. Two key tables include:
- B16001. Language Spoken at Home by Ability to Speak English for the Population 5 Years and Over. This table gives the most detailed language data available by English-speaking ability.
- B16004. Age by Language Spoken at Home by Ability to Speak English for the Population 5 Years and Over. This table gives the four major language categories by English-speaking ability for the 5-17 year olds, 18-64 year olds, and 65 years and older populations.

VI. Where can I find information about other language-related products?
The Language Use Webpage includes a list of Census 2000 products. Use the following directions to find that webpage.

1. Start at main website www.census.gov
2. On the top right-hand side, click on Subjects A to Z
3. Click on L for language
4. Click on the link for Language Use Data

The most detailed language data available are accessible from the Language Use website using Census 2000 data. Choose Link F -- STP 224. Data are not available by English-speaking ability but are available down to the census tract level. Also, under Related Reports, the document How Good is "How Well"? An Examination of the Census English-Speaking Ability Question is available.

VII. Where will I find information about special tabulations?
1. For Census 2000
    a. Look on the Language Use website at
        i. http://www.census.gov/population/www/socdemo/lang_use.html
        ii. Those labeled STP indicate special tabulations
    b. Go to the Gateway to Census 2000 at
        i. http://www.census.gov/main/www/cen2000.html
        ii. On the left-hand side, under Information Links, click on the link for Special Tabulations.
2. For ACS
    a. Please visit the Custom Tabulations website to get more information on requesting special tabulations from ACS.
        i. http://www.census.gov/acs/www/Products/spec_tabs/

VIII. Who can I contact if I have questions?
For questions about Census 2000 and ACS data on language, contact
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For general questions about the ACS, contact
The American Community Survey Office
1-888-456-7215
cmo.acs@census.gov