

**English Proficiency and Other Languages
Spoken in Oregon**

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Oregon Dept. of Revenue
Research Section

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To effectively serve taxpayers, it is important for the Oregon Department of Revenue to know as much as possible about other languages spoken in the state and the ability of individuals to speak English. This report summarizes available data, for both individuals and households, from Census 2000 on the languages spoken in Oregon and English proficiency. While it is relevant to communication with taxpayers, this paper does not address the ability of Oregonians to read and write in English or other languages.

Individuals

As part of Census 2000, the Census Bureau asked people five years and older if they spoke a language other than English at home. The results for Oregon are presented below.

Age	Total Population	Speak only English		Speak non-English Language at Home	
	Number	Number	Percent	Number	Percent
5 years and over	3,199,323	2,810,654	87.9	388,669	12.1
5 to 17 years	624,510	536,874	86.0	87,636	14.0
18 to 64 years	2,136,696	1,861,556	87.1	275,140	12.9
65 years and over	438,117	412,224	94.1	25,893	5.9

Source: U.S. Census Bureau, Census 2000.

The number of non-English-language speakers in the state more than doubled from 1990 to 2000, with 388,669 residents or 12.1% of the population aged five and over speaking a language other than English at home. However, for individuals aged 65 and over, only 5.9% spoke another language.

Individuals who reported speaking another language at home were then asked to identify the language and to indicate how well they spoke English ("very well", "well", "not well", or "not at all"). The results for the top five other languages in Oregon are shown below.

Language Spoken at Home	Total Population Aged 5 and Older		Speak English "very well"		Speak English less than "very well"	
	Number	Percent of Total Population	Number	Percent of Total Population	Number	Percent of Total Population
English Only	2,810,654	87.9	2,810,655	87.9	NA	NA
All Other Languages	388,669	12.1	199,710	6.2	188,960	5.9
Spanish	217,610	6.8	101,055	3.2	116,555	3.6
German	18,400	0.6	15,050	0.5	3,350	0.1
Vietnamese	17,805	0.6	5,920	0.2	11,885	0.4
Russian	16,345	0.5	6,240	0.2	10,105	0.3
Chinese	15,505	0.5	6,790	0.2	8,715	0.3
Other	103,005	3.2	64,655	2.0	38,350	1.2

Source: U.S. Census Bureau, Census 2000.

Individuals who reported speaking English less than “very well” were considered to have difficulty with English. Thus, 5.9% of all Oregonians aged five and older were classified as having limited English abilities. For these individuals, Spanish was the most common language spoken at home. Approximately 3.6% of the population aged five and older, or 116,555 residents, spoke Spanish and had limited English proficiency.

Households

To evaluate the potential number of filers with English difficulties, it may be more useful to look at households rather than individuals. This is true for two reasons. First, not every individual with poor English skills will be filing a return. Some are children and many others will file a joint return representing two adults. Second, if someone lacking English proficiency has a family member who is fluent in English, he or she may not need any language assistance.

The Census Bureau determines the language of a household by looking at the householder, who is “the person, or one of the people, in whose name the home is owned, being bought, or rented.” For tax purposes, it is likely that the householder will either be the one filing a return or assisting other household members with returns. For 2000, information about the language spoken at home and English proficiency by household is as follows:

Type of Household	Number	Percent
Speak only English	1,207,463	90.4
Speak other language and speak English "very well"	68,115	5.1
Speak other language and speak English less than "very well"	59,531	4.5

Source: U.S. Census Bureau, Census 2000.

In 2000, 4.5% of Oregon householders had limited English proficiency. During the same time period, approximately 1,628,400 personal income tax returns were filed in Oregon, or about 1.22 per household. More detailed information about the primary languages spoken in Oregon households is presented below.

Language Spoken at Home	Householder speaks English "very well"		Householder speaks English less than "very well"	
	Number of Households	Percent	Number of Households	Percent
English Only	1,207,463	90.4	NA	NA
All Other Languages	68,115	5.1	59,531	4.5
Spanish	30,472	2.3	33,742	2.5
German	6,819	0.5	1,541	0.1
Vietnamese	1,446	0.1	3,856	0.3
Russian	1,580	0.1	3,205	0.2
Chinese	2,310	0.2	3,177	0.2
Other	25,488	1.9	14,010	1

Source: U.S. Census Bureau, Census 2000.

Of the householders lacking English proficiency and speaking another language, the majority were Spanish speakers, representing 33,742 Oregon households.

Linguistically Isolated Households

The Census Bureau further examines English difficulties in households by looking at linguistically isolated households, defined as households "... in which no person aged 14 or over speaks English at least 'Very well.'" In 2000, there were 38,695 linguistically isolated households in Oregon, consisting of 116,956 individuals or 3.7% of the population aged five and older.

Summary

While there are no data available that explicitly describe Oregonians who may have difficulty understanding tax information because of limited English proficiency, it is important for the Department of Revenue to know as much as possible about taxpayers who may speak other languages and struggle with English. When looking at the population aged five and over, 388,669 Oregon residents, or 12.1%, speak a language other than English at home, with Spanish being the most common. But, only 188,960 individuals in this age group, or 5.9% of the population, have difficulty with English. Further, only 59,531 Oregon householders, or 4.5%, have limited English proficiency, with 33,742 of these speaking Spanish. Finally, just 38,695 Oregon households, containing 3.7% of the population aged five and over, are classified as linguistically isolated, thus being most likely to require assistance in another language.