

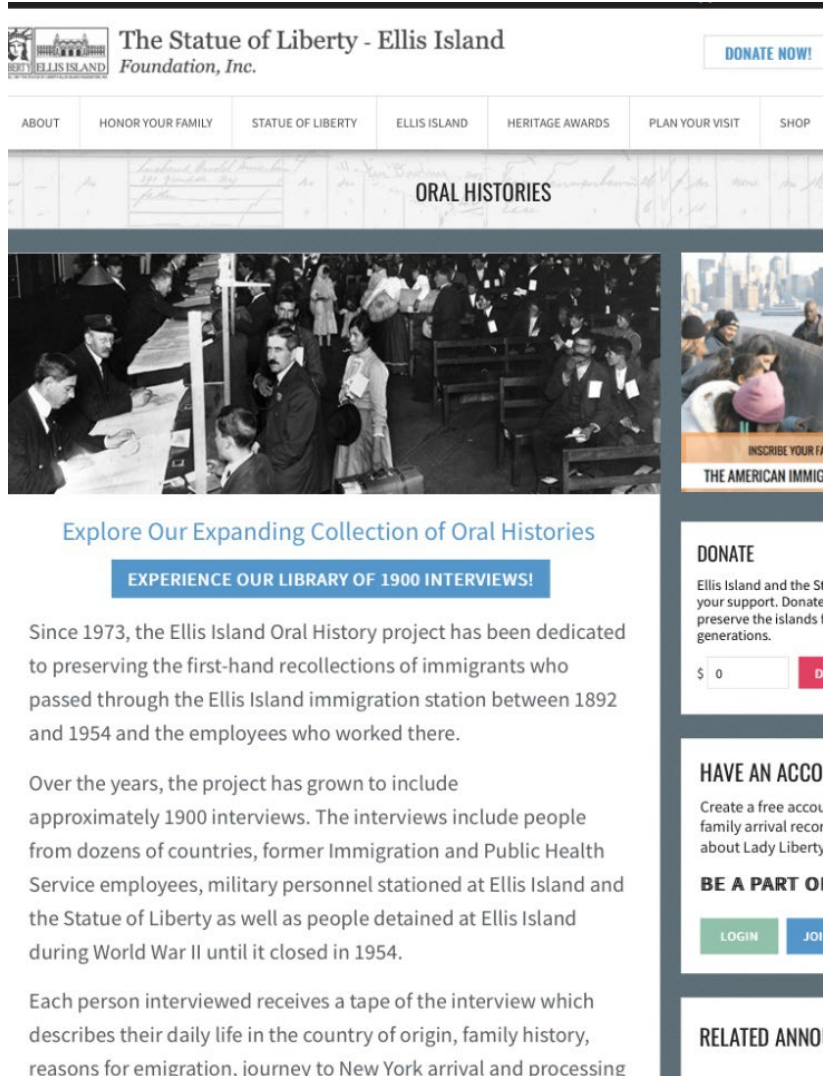
Refugees without Assistance: English-Language Attainment and Economic Outcomes in the Early Twentieth Century

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Refugee assimilation without assistance

- Modern studies: Refugees to US assimilate faster than non-refugees (Chin and Cortes, 2015; Brell, Dustmann and Preston, [2020](#))
- Is this due to government supports or refugees' own investments?
- We classify new sample of immigrants by refugee status during the Age of Mass Migration before the rise of government assistance (c. 1920)
- We find that stronger assimilation for refugees than for non-refugees
 - Higher English proficiency than others from same country and religious group
 - Better depth of vocabulary but not more likely to lose accent

Oral histories from Ellis Island Foundation



The screenshot shows the website of The Statue of Liberty - Ellis Island Foundation, Inc. The header includes a logo, the organization's name, and a "DONATE NOW!" button. A navigation bar lists: ABOUT, HONOR YOUR FAMILY, STATUE OF LIBERTY, ELLIS ISLAND, HERITAGE AWARDS, PLAN YOUR VISIT, and SHOP. The main content area is titled "ORAL HISTORIES" and features a large black and white photograph of immigrants at the station. Below the photo is a blue button that says "EXPLORE OUR EXPANDING COLLECTION OF ORAL HISTORIES" and another blue button that says "EXPERIENCE OUR LIBRARY OF 1900 INTERVIEWS!". Text on the page states: "Since 1973, the Ellis Island Oral History project has been dedicated to preserving the first-hand recollections of immigrants who passed through the Ellis Island immigration station between 1892 and 1954 and the employees who worked there." It continues: "Over the years, the project has grown to include approximately 1900 interviews. The interviews include people from dozens of countries, former Immigration and Public Health Service employees, military personnel stationed at Ellis Island and the Statue of Liberty as well as people detained at Ellis Island during World War II until it closed in 1954." The final paragraph reads: "Each person interviewed receives a tape of the interview which describes their daily life in the country of origin, family history, reasons for emigration, journey to New York arrival and processing". On the right side of the page, there is a "DONATE" section with a text input field showing "\$ 0" and a red "DONATE" button. Below that is a "HAVE AN ACCOUNT?" section with a text input field and a "LOGIN" button. At the bottom right, there is a "BE A PART OF" section with a "JOIN" button. A "RELATED ANNOUNCEMENTS" section is partially visible at the bottom.

The Statue of Liberty - Ellis Island Foundation, Inc.

ABOUT HONOR YOUR FAMILY STATUE OF LIBERTY ELLIS ISLAND HERITAGE AWARDS PLAN YOUR VISIT SHOP

ORAL HISTORIES

Explore Our Expanding Collection of Oral Histories

EXPERIENCE OUR LIBRARY OF 1900 INTERVIEWS!

Since 1973, the Ellis Island Oral History project has been dedicated to preserving the first-hand recollections of immigrants who passed through the Ellis Island immigration station between 1892 and 1954 and the employees who worked there.

Over the years, the project has grown to include approximately 1900 interviews. The interviews include people from dozens of countries, former Immigration and Public Health Service employees, military personnel stationed at Ellis Island and the Statue of Liberty as well as people detained at Ellis Island during World War II until it closed in 1954.

Each person interviewed receives a tape of the interview which describes their daily life in the country of origin, family history, reasons for emigration, journey to New York arrival and processing

DONATE

Ellis Island and the Statue of Liberty need your support. Donate today to preserve the islands for future generations.

\$ 0

HAVE AN ACCOUNT?

Create a free account to access your family arrival record about Lady Liberty

BE A PART OF

LOGIN JOIN

RELATED ANNOUNCEMENTS

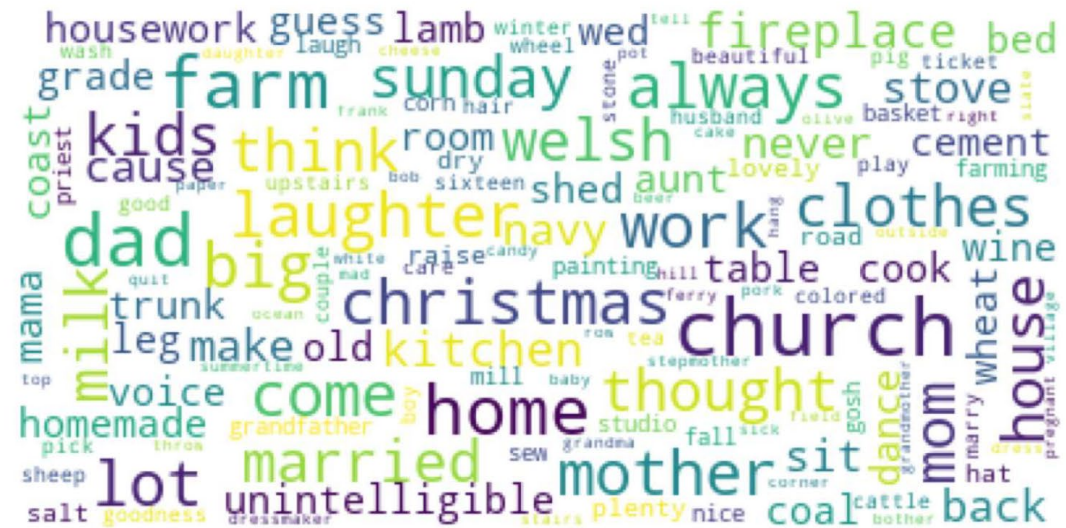
- 1,200 interviews with transcript and audio files
- Classify reason for move (~25% = persecution)
- Code pre-migration attributes: Religion, urban status, father occupation. Also collect country of origin and year of arrival.
- Measure English ability: Vocabulary, syntax, accent
 - Exclude childhood arrivals
- Match to 1940 Census for income, etc.

Coding refugee and non-refugee immigrants

A



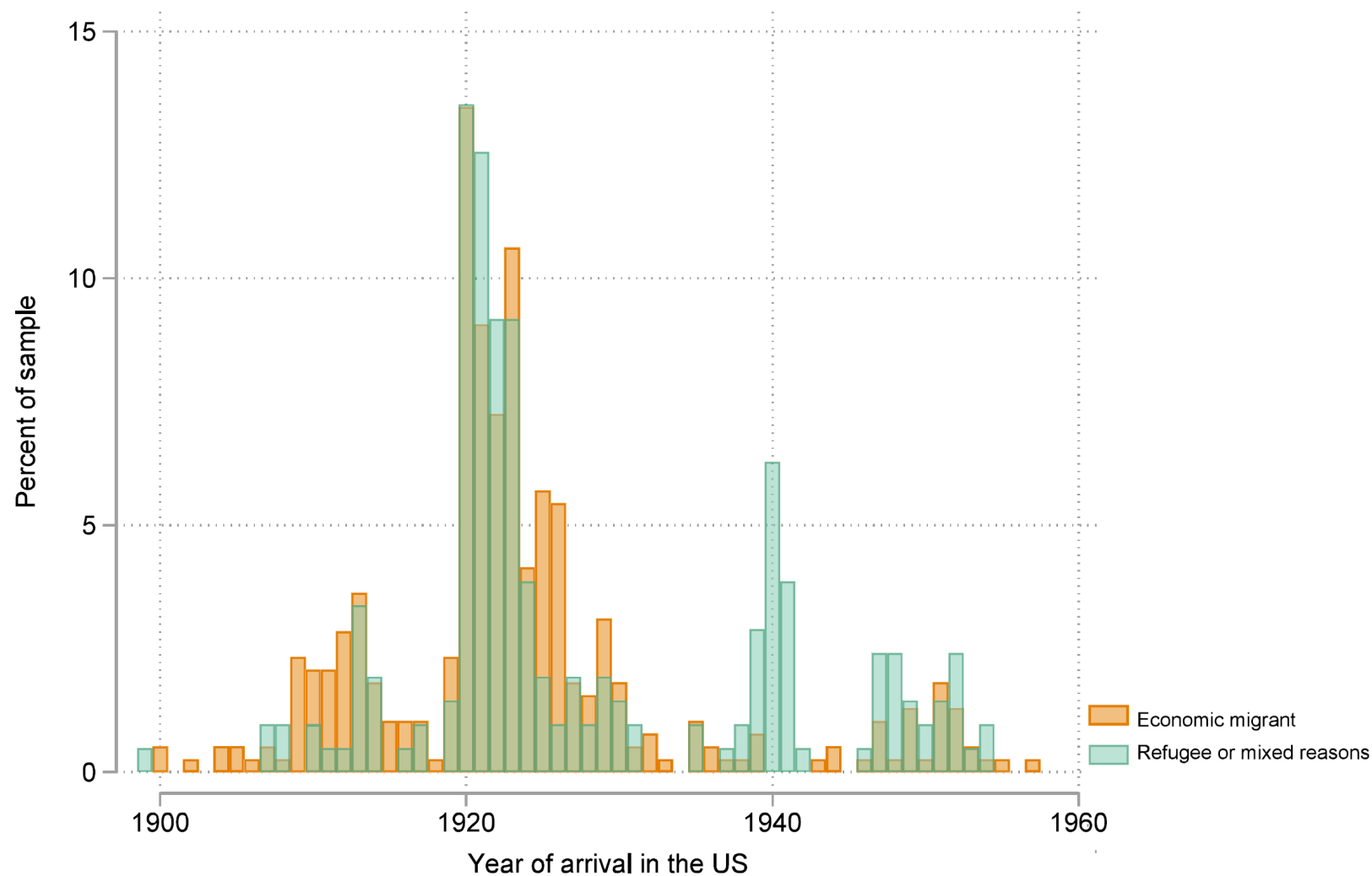
B



Reasons for fleeing

- Pogroms (Jews)
- Genocide (Armenians, Syrians)
- World War I (most of Europe)
- Rise of Fascism (Italy), Rise of Nazism (most of Europe)
- Natural Disasters (parts of Europe)
- Revolutions (Russia)
- Other conflicts (Civil wars, political dissidents, etc)

Arrival years of refugees and non-refugees in sample



Vocabulary: Age of Acquisition (AOA) score

(Kuperman et al., 2012)

PD: "I'll tell you why. My father went away from the army.
AoA 2.79 4.26 4.35 3.97 2.72 4.11 5.07 4.44 3.98 7.15

The, you know, the Russian Army with the, uh, the Japanese Army was fighting at that time. He was a soldier in the Russian Army, you know, and he didn't want to stay there, and he came over here in 1905, my father. Then after a couple, two years more, so he took my mother and three boys up, you understand, three brothers."

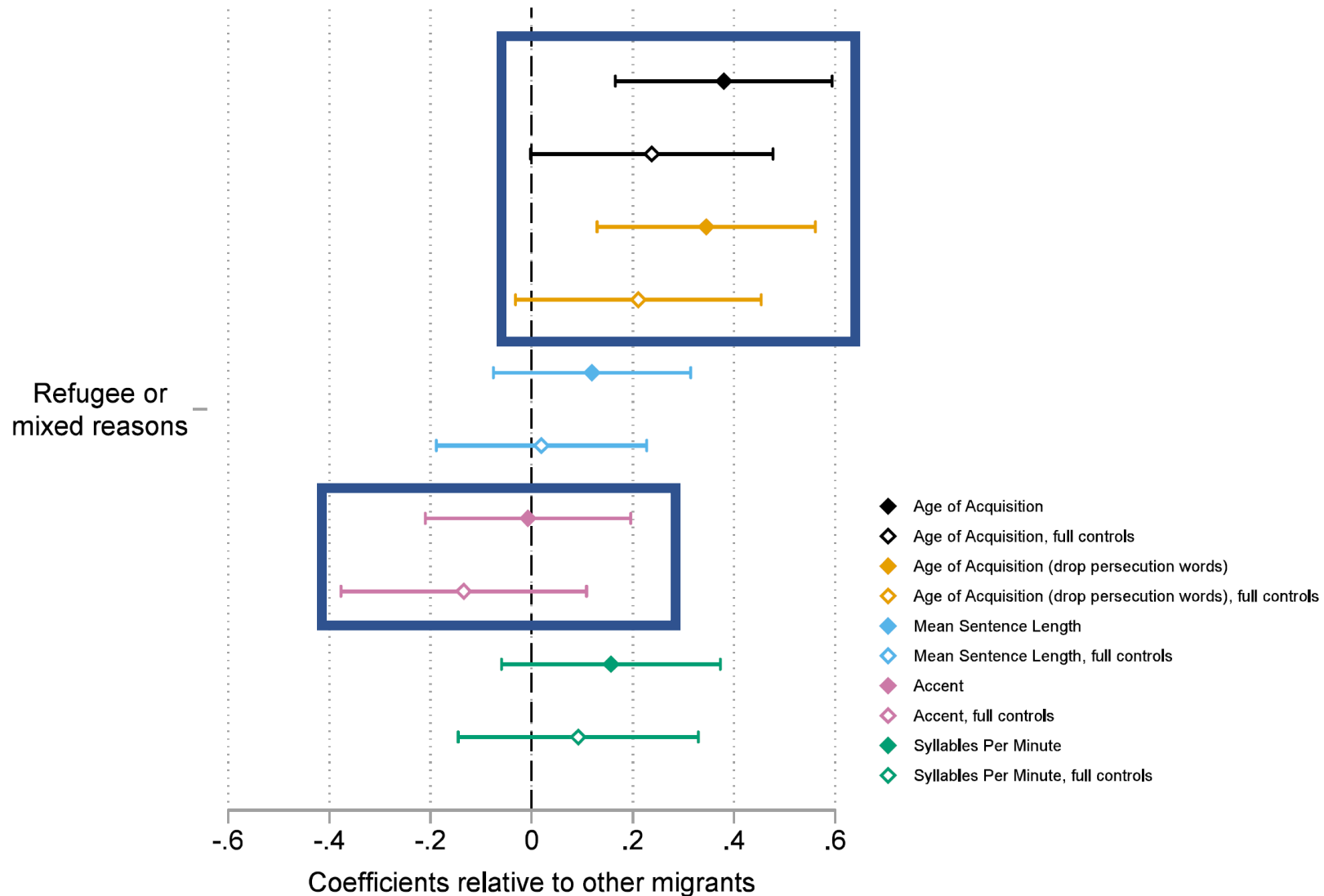
Mean AoA: 4.62

MH: "And, of course, at that time the Revolution was brewing.
AoA 4.57 4.55 7.34 4.04 5.53 5.16 3.98 10.00 9.06

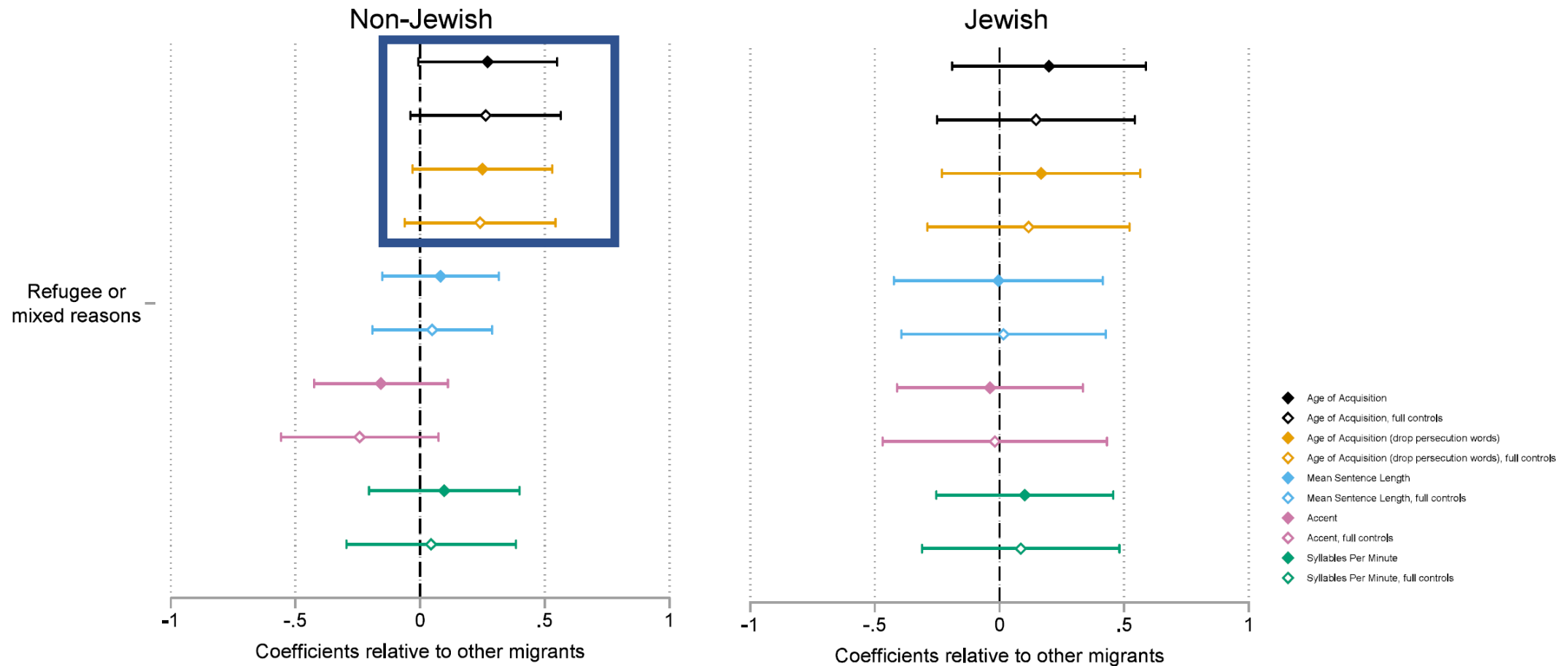
I was born in 1914. I think it's important that I indicate the date, March 22, 1914. And it was prior to the Russian Revolution and things were becoming very hectic. And, and all of a sudden the Revolution comes, in 1917, and, uh, we're, we're all in a state of upheaval, a terrible hunger ensured that, uh, thousands of people were just dying like flies."

Mean AoA: 5.72

Refugees acquired stronger vocabulary; no evidence of losing accent



Results are not being driven by Jewish migrants



Our new English proficiency measures are associated with higher income

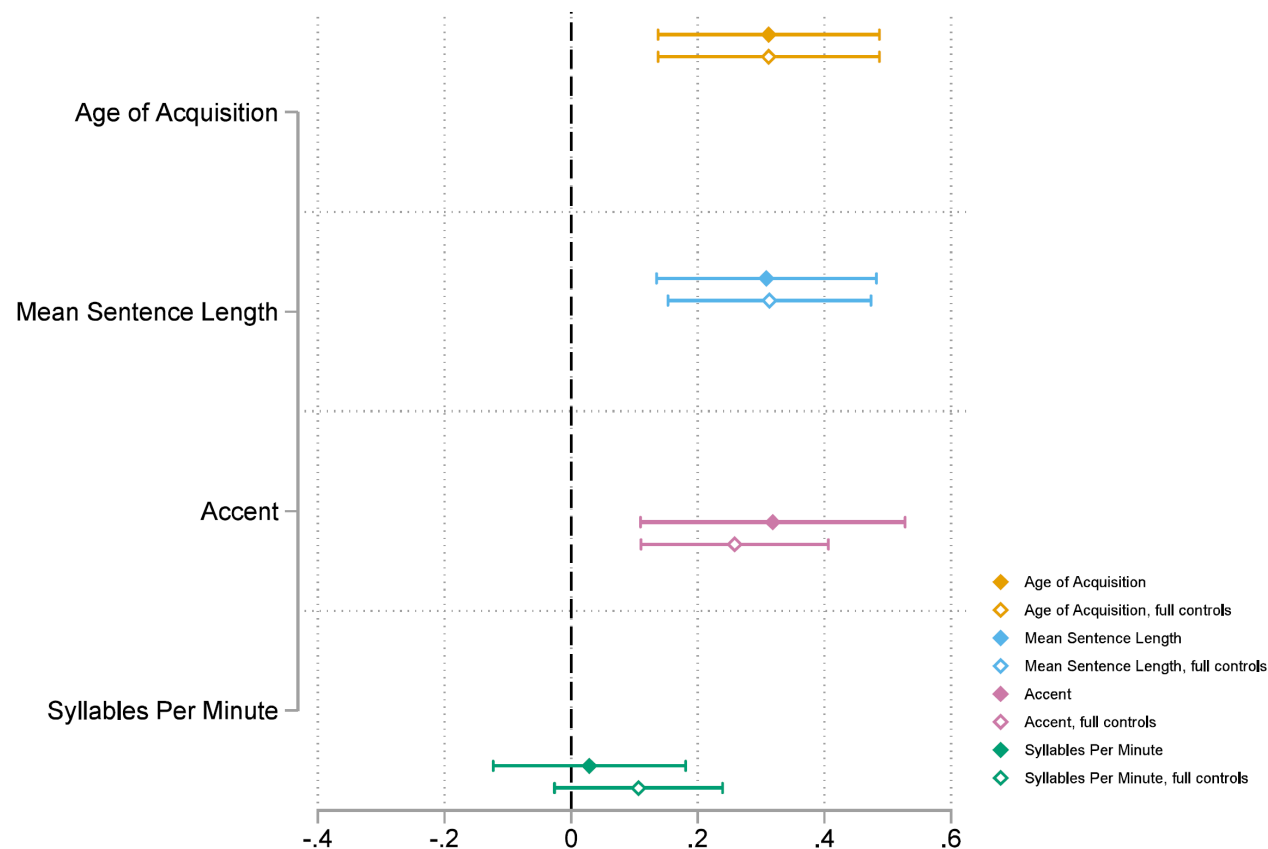


Figure 9. Regressions of logarithm of income on linguistic measures, English speakers included. This figure documents the results of four regression models where logarithm of income is regressed on (i) Age of Acquisition ($N=277$, $N=218$ with full controls), (ii) Mean Sentence Length ($N=277$, $N=218$), (iii) Accent ($N=243$, $N=193$) and (iv) Syllables Per Minute ($N=238$, $N=189$). Linguistic measures have been standardized. Controls include age, age squared, arrival period, birthplace, gender and an indicator for arriving before or after the age of 12. Added controls in regressions with “full controls” include father’s pre-migration occupation, pre-migration urban status and religion. Results are weighted by the propensity of

Similar pattern in modern data (New Immigrant Survey)

Table 3. Association between refugee status and English fluency in the New Immigrant Survey

	(1)	(2)	(3)	(4)
<i>Panel A: Outcome: Speaks any English</i>				
Refugee	0.0168 (0.031)	0.0793** (0.032)	0.0797** (0.032)	0.0714* (0.037)
Recent English class			0.0691*** (0.015)	0.0489* (0.028)
Pre-US English class			0.103*** (0.013)	0.0491** (0.024)
Adjusted R ²	0.351	0.416	0.433	0.299
<i>Panel B: Outcome: Speaks English Well</i>				
Refugee	-0.108** (0.045)	-0.0465 (0.042)	-0.0333 (0.042)	-0.0284 (0.053)
Recent English class			-0.151*** (0.018)	-0.122*** (0.042)
Pre-US English class			0.156*** (0.018)	0.120*** (0.038)
Add'l Control	No	Yes	Yes	Yes
Sample Type	Full	Full	Full	In US ≥ 2 yrs
Adjusted R ²	0.347	0.391	0.420	0.379
No. of Obs.	2938	2938	2938	654

Note: All regression specifications include fixed effects for departure timing and country of origin, as well as controls for age, age squared, and gender.

Additional Controls includes years of schooling prior to immigration, rural/urban, and religion. Specifications 1-3 use the full sample, where as specification 4 includes only immigrants who have been in the US for at least 2 years. Refugee = 1 for immigrants with Refugee or Asylee visa status. Recent English class is defined as a current English class or one taken within the past year. Standard errors in parentheses

* $p < 0.1$, ** $p < 0.05$, *** $p < 0.01$

- Immigrants who reported leaving Europe in response to war, violence or persecution attained *higher* English proficiency than immigrants from the same countries of origin and religious group who came for economic opportunities
- This pattern is consistent with stronger incentives for refugees to invest in their human capital