Migration is a defining feature of our times. In 2012 around 215 million people were living outside the country of their birth. Over the last seven or eight decades migration to the UK has changed the profile of British towns and cities. Throughout these decades one of the most consistent migration routes has been through marriage; that is, where the UK-based partner is a national or long-term resident, and the relationship is the basis of entry rights. From the perspective of government, marriage migration permits the entry of migrants who would not otherwise be admitted. This presentation considers how governments have introduced legislation to limit or prevent marriage migration. A recent dimension of this legislation has been the introduction of a requirement for candidates for entry, settlement, and naturalisation to demonstrate a certain level of proficiency in the English language. This talk will particularly focus on the introduction of pre-entry English language tests for applicants for marriage visas. The analysis here examines legislation as it is introduced; interrogates the pre-entry language tests themselves, and the stories of candidates for the tests; and analyses the judgment of the High Court in a test case which engaged with the legislation to introduce the pre-entry language test. The paper argues that the national border is on the move, shifting in time and space as language tuition and tests are often locally unavailable to candidates for entry, and unpredictable in mode, duration, and location. Legislation requires that the examination of speaking subjects occurs at the changing borders of a nation in far-flung outposts where the prescribed test may not exist. In making these arguments the paper concurs with Wray (2011:9) that "marriage migration is a prism through which many other concerns and anxieties are filtered".

Keywords: