

## LINGUISTIC DIVERSITY IN MELBOURNE'S SOUTH-EAST

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*The south-eastern suburbs of Monash, Greater Dandenong and Casey have become Melbourne's most linguistically diverse area. This article describes the language demography of the three local government areas, with some comparisons with other parts of Melbourne, taking into account age profiles. The value of such linguistic diversity and the challenges it presents in terms of service provision and other language policy issues are also discussed.*

### INTRODUCTION

The local government areas of Monash, Greater Dandenong and Casey, in Melbourne's south-eastern suburbs, now form the most linguistically and culturally diverse contiguous area in the statistical division (SD) of Melbourne and also in the state of Victoria. Data on the use of community languages (that is, non-indigenous languages other than English) show that these areas have become more diverse than the now gentrified inner suburbs, where the number of community languages has decreased. These south-eastern suburbs are also more diverse than the western suburbs which, though still multilingual, are not attracting the same range of new migrants.

This article describes the linguistic profile of these south-eastern suburbs, and notes some implications of their diversity. In this article we will conceptualise linguistic diversity in three ways:

- the number of languages other than English (LOTEs) spoken at home by over 1,000 speakers in each municipality, as recorded in the 2006 census
- the percentage of residents speaking a LOTE at home, and
- the range of languages in terms of regional and historical origins.

### COMMUNITY LANGUAGES IN THE SOUTH EAST

The three local government areas (LGAs) in the south east are of quite different sizes. In

2006, Casey was Victoria's largest municipality with 212,793 residents, Monash was the state's fourth largest LGA with 160,026 and Greater Dandenong ranked fourteenth with 125,060 residents. Thus the high raw numbers of LOTE speakers in Casey (discussed below) are partly an artefact of the large size of this LGA, and need to be interpreted in this light. Conversely, the smaller size of Greater Dandenong makes the high levels of linguistic diversity in this LGA even more notable.

In 2006, Casey reported 20 LOTEs with more than 1,000 speakers, making it the most multilingual LGA in the Melbourne SD, followed by Greater Dandenong (16), both exceeding Brimbank (15), which is the most multilingual area in Melbourne's north-west. Monash, with 12 LOTEs with over 1,000 speakers has overtaken Hume (11), the second most linguistically diverse LGA in the north-west. Casey, which is in the Cranbourne–Pakenham corridor on Melbourne's south-eastern outskirts, has been exceptional in that it has added five new languages with over 1,000 speakers in the past five years, and twelve since 1996.

Of the 40 most widely spoken languages in Victoria, seven have more speakers living in Casey than in any other municipality in Victoria, and four each have their highest numbers of speakers in Greater Dandenong and Monash. Table 1 lists these languages and shows the total number of speakers in each case.

In addition to these spoken languages, Auslan (Australian sign language) is used by more people in Casey (127 users) than in any other municipality in the state, while Monash ranks third in Melbourne for the size of its Auslan population (87) and Greater Dandenong is ranked eleventh, with 53 users. Although small, these populations have seen remarkably steep increases since the 2001 census (when the total number of Auslan speakers across all three municipalities was less than 50) and together now account for just under 20 per cent of the Auslan using population in Melbourne.<sup>1</sup> The south-eastern suburbs are thus becoming an increasingly important centre of Melbourne's deaf community.

### SPEAKING LOTE<sub>s</sub> AT HOME

Two of the three south-eastern LGAs have above average proportions of people speaking a LOTE at home. This is particularly striking in Greater Dandenong which, with 55.2 per cent speaking a LOTE at home, has the highest percentage in Victoria. Monash is also above average, with 38.3 per cent of residents speaking a LOTE at home. By contrast, the percentage of LOTE speakers in Casey, at 23.9 per cent, is below the Melbourne average of 27.9 per cent. However, as we showed above, Casey is the largest LGA in Melbourne, and its raw numbers of LOTE speakers are consequently high. While a number of municipalities in the north and west of the city have above average proportions of LOTE speakers—Brim-

bank (53.8 per cent), Whittlesea (43.1 per cent), Maribyrnong (43.0 per cent), Moreland (39.6 per cent) and Darebin (45.6 per cent)—all fall below Greater Dandenong.

While the proportion of LOTE speakers in Casey is currently below average this is changing very rapidly. Between 1996 and 2006 Casey, Monash and Greater Dandenong all added LOTE speakers at rates above their general population growth. This trend was most dramatic in the City of Casey, where the number of LOTE speakers increased by 81.9 per cent as against an increase of 48.2 per cent in the general population. Within metropolitan Melbourne only Melton and the City of Melbourne itself (that is the LGA comprising the central business district and its immediate environs) saw larger increases in

**Table 1: Languages with more speakers in the three south-eastern LGAs than elsewhere in the Melbourne SD**

LGA	Language	No. of speakers
Casey	Sinhala	3,247
	Hindi	1,844
	French	1,713
	Dari	1,585
	Romanian	1,446
	Samoan	1,144
	Hungarian	1,102
Greater Dandenong	Khmer	5,132
	Serbian	2,846
	Albanian	1,602
	Bosnian	1,463
Monash	Greek	11,040
	Mandarin	9,882
	Tamil	1,889
	Korean	1,083

the number of LOTE speakers (334.7 per cent and 116.0 per cent respectively) over this time period, and these figures need to be interpreted in relation to the exceptionally high total population growth in these LGAs (100 per cent in Melton and 75 per cent in the City of Melbourne).

Monash experienced below average growth in its general population between 1996 and 2006 (4.9 per cent) yet the LOTE speaking population increased by 30.3 per cent, while in Greater Dandenong the total population declined by 0.9 per cent between 1996 and 2006 yet the number of LOTE speakers rose by 13.1 per cent.

The Pakenham–Cranbourne growth corridor (which includes Casey) is adding LOTE speakers, but, as Bradshaw et al.<sup>2</sup> show, the proportion of the population who speak a LOTE is declining in many inner Melbourne LGAs (including Port Philip, Maribyrnong and Moreland), bringing about a gradual redistribution of LOTE speakers within the Melbourne population.

**RANGE AND TYPE OF LANGUAGES SPOKEN**

In terms of family relationships between languages in the three LGAs, Casey hosts the most diverse range of languages. Nine of its 20 main languages are members of the Indo-European family: six from Europe and three from

India, Sri Lanka or Iran. There are two Chinese languages and one each from six other families (Arabic, Filipino, Hungarian, Samoan, Tamil and Turkish). The four most widely used languages are given in Table 2. The low percentages for the top four community languages reflect the diversity of languages in this LGA.

Of Greater Dandenong’s 16 main languages, nine are from the Indo-European

**Table 2: Most widely used community languages in Casey**

Language	No. of speakers	per cent of LGA population
Sinhala	3,269	1.5
Spanish	2,991	1.4
Arabic	2,862	1.3
Italian	2,733	1.3

**Table 3: Most widely used community languages in Greater Dandenong**

Language	No. of speakers	per cent of LGA population
Vietnamese	13,061	10.4
Khmer	5,158	4.1
Cantonese	4,616	3.7
Greek	3,824	3.1

**Table 4: Most widely used community languages in Monash**

Language	No. of speakers	per cent of LGA population
Greek	11,055	6.9
Mandarin	9,912	6.1
Cantonese	7,897	4.9
Italian	4,924	3.1

languages, seven from Europe and two from Sri Lanka or Iran. There are two Chinese languages and one each from four other families (Arabic, Khmer, Vietnamese and Turkish). The four most widely used community languages are given in Table 3. The figures reflect the importance of Vietnamese in the municipality and the strong presence of Asian languages.

Monash has a smaller proportion of languages from Europe and a proportionately higher number of languages from Asia. Five of the 12 main languages are Indo-European: two from Europe and two from the Indian sub-continent. There are also two Chinese languages, together with Arabic, Indonesian, Korean, Tamil, and Vietnamese. The four most widely used community languages are shown in Table 4.

The three south-eastern suburbs have very substantial concentrations of a number of languages, and this is especially true of Greater Dandenong. This can be measured through a concentration factor which is sensitive to the general population figures in the area and to the size of the language group in the Melbourne SD. This concentration factor, which has been employed in previous studies<sup>3</sup> is derived from the formula (shown below).

A concentration factor (CF) greater than 1 indicates a strong concentration of a particular language in the LGA. Applying the formula, we find that the highest concentration of Khmer (CF 15.018) is in Greater Dandenong, followed by the neighbouring LGA, Kingston with 2.763. For Bosnian, both the highest (Greater Dandenong, 7.509) and the second highest concentration (Casey, 1.482) are in the

south-east. In each case there is a considerable drop between the highest and next highest concentrations. This is the case also with Dinka which drops from the highest concentration in Greater Dandenong (4.640) to the next highest, inner suburban Yarra (1.816), and with Serbian (Greater Dandenong, 5.314; followed by Brimbank, north-west, 2.685). Three languages of the Indian sub-continent have their two or three highest concentrations in the south-east: Sinhala (Casey 3.281, Monash 3.171, Greater Dandenong 2.991), Tamil (Monash 3.891, Greater Dandenong 3.462), and the widely dispersed language, Hindi (Monash 1.864, Casey 1.746). The same applies to French (Greater Dandenong 2.889, Casey 2.629) and Hungarian (Casey 2.666, Greater Dandenong 2.584).

#### AGE PROFILES OF SPEAKERS OF LOTES IN THE SOUTH-EAST

Across the three municipalities the same five languages—Dutch, German, Hungarian, Italian and Maltese—record the highest proportion of speakers aged 65 and over. This in part reflects their wider status as languages with some of the highest proportions of elderly speakers in Victoria,<sup>4</sup> yet, as Table 5 shows, the exact proportion of speakers aged 65 and over varies markedly between the three municipalities.

Part of this variation can be attributed to the relative age of the general population in each municipality. Casey is an urban-fringe municipality that is principally attracting young families to its new housing estates. As such, the proportion of residents aged 65 and over is low, at only 7.7 per cent, and only around 20 per cent of Hungarian, Italian and Maltese speakers living in Casey

#### Formula for calculating concentration factor

$$\frac{\text{Number of users of the language in LGA}}{\text{Number of users of the language in metropolitan area}} \div \frac{\text{Population of LGA}}{\text{Population of whole metropolitan area}}$$

are in this age bracket. Greater Dandenong and Monash by contrast have a much larger proportion of older residents, with 13.7 per cent of the population in Greater Dandenong aged 65 and over and 16.0 per cent in Monash, and around 40 per cent of Hungarian, Italian and Maltese speakers are in this age bracket. Greater Dandenong has a disproportionately elderly Dutch and German speaking population, which reflects two factors: the large number of Dutch and German migrants who settled in the area in the post-war years and its declining popularity compared to municipalities such as Monash and Casey with more recent migrants from those countries. While the three municipalities under discussion are consistent in the five languages with the highest proportion of speakers aged 65 and over, there is more variation when it comes to the languages with the highest concentration of speakers aged under 15. Vietnamese and Khmer were among the top five languages for young speakers in each municipality, with between 18 per cent and 25 per cent of speakers aged under 15, as shown in Table 6.

African languages such as Dinka and Somali have high proportions of speaker aged under 15, but have been excluded from this study due to the small total speaker numbers at the time of the 2006 Census. In Casey, Vietnamese and Khmer are joined in the top five young languages by Sinhala (27.8 per cent), Punjabi (26.7 per cent) and Arabic (25.3 per cent). In Greater Dandenong they are joined by Arabic (28.4 per cent), Turkish (21.3

per cent) and Cantonese (21.1 per cent) and in Monash by Hindi (18.2 per cent), Tamil (16.5 per cent) and Indonesian (16.1 per cent). There is also strong variation between the raw number of speakers of various languages in each municipality. Table 7 gives figures for the six languages where the number of speakers aged under 15 varies across the three LGAs by 750 children or more.

The differing youth populations have obvious implications for demand for language classes across the three LGAs, at mainstream schools, centres of the Victorian School of Languages and at community language schools. For example, even though Vietnamese and Khmer have high proportions of younger speakers in all three LGAs, their high absolute numbers in Greater Dandenong suggest that this is where demand for classes will be highest.

**Table 5: Proportion of speakers of selected community languages aged 65 and over**

Language	Casey	Greater Dandenong	Monash
Dutch	48.7	71.0	37.4
German	38.2	61.8	47.1
Hungarian	19.1	39.6	44.0
Italian	20.4	43.5	38.5
Maltese	24.9	43.0	36.8
Total population	7.7	13.7	16.0

**Table 6: Proportion of speakers aged under 15**

	Casey	Greater Dandenong	Monash
Vietnamese	25.2	24.8	22.8
Khmer	24.5	21.3	18.2
Total population	24.5	19.1	15.9

**VARIATION BETWEEN SUBURBS**

Differing demands for some language services may occur at the level of the municipality or that of the suburb, because of specific local differences. One example is the small suburb of Dandenong South. This section of Greater Dandenong has nearly a fifth of Australia’s Albanian speakers. While a mere 21.8 per cent of Dandenong South residents speak only English at home, 27.5 per cent use Albanian. The next 16.0 per cent of the population speak Dari (from Afghanistan), Russian, Arabic or Mandarin. A complete contrast is offered by another suburb in Greater Dandenong: Noble Park. Here 41.6 per cent use only English at home. The most widely used community language, Vietnamese, is spoken at home by 9.7 per cent of the population, followed by Khmer (4.6 per cent), Cantonese (2.7 per cent), Italian (2.4 per cent) and Greek (2.3 per cent). The predominance of Vietnamese and other Asian languages, along with a significant presence of older established community languages of European origin, makes Noble Park more typical of the Greater Dandenong municipality as a whole. It is notable that a Sudanese community, principally Dinka-speaking, has settled in the area largely since the 2006 Census.

There are ten suburbs within the LGA of Greater Dandenong, varying in total population between Dandenong North (21,956) and Bangholme (556). We will differentiate between ‘dominant’ suburbs, where the dominant community language has more speakers than the total of the next two languages, and ‘mixed’ suburbs where this is not the case. In Greater Dandenong, the ‘dominant’

community language is Vietnamese, and this is the case in four of the five ‘dominant’ suburbs. The fifth is Dandenong South, with its large Albanian-speaking community. In the ‘mixed’ suburbs, some of which are small, the language with the largest numbers varies between Arabic, German, Greek, Serbian and Spanish (one each).

In contrast, Monash LGA, with 14 suburbs, has Greek dominance in five and Mandarin in one. In four of the ‘mixed’ suburbs, the most widely used LOTE is Greek. German and Italian dominate in one suburb each and Cantonese and Mandarin have the same numbers in the seventh. Mandarin reaches second place in Monash by its consistently high numbers across the municipality.

The sprawling LGA of Casey comprises 26 suburbs, some of which are still rather rural in character and have very small populations. Of the two suburbs with a ‘dominant’ language, in both cases Italian, one has only ten Italian speakers. Six of the 23 ‘mixed’ suburbs also have Italian as the most widely spoken language, five Spanish, four Sinhala, two Greek, two Serbian, one Gaelic, and in one Hungarian and Spanish have the same numbers. In one suburb, French is the only LOTE, with seven speakers, perhaps members of the one family.

**Table 7: Number of speakers aged under 15, where LGAs differ by 750 or more**

	Casey	Greater Dandenong	Monash
Arabic	674	920	133
Cantonese	205	972	1,039
Greek	362	392	1,410
Khmer	327	1,095	41
Mandarin	383	491	1,506
Vietnamese	341	3,225	493

## **THE VALUE OF LINGUISTIC DIVERSITY IN THE SOUTH-EAST**

In all the areas discussed we have people of many different cultural backgrounds and speakers of first languages ranging from Vietnamese to Greek, from Spanish to Mandarin, from Sinhala to Serbian, from Dinka to Dari, and from Arabic to Khmer. These speakers have never been in contact with one another's cultures prior to migration and are interacting in their own varieties of English as a lingua franca, at work, at school, in housing estates, and in shopping centres. Research in Melbourne<sup>5</sup> has demonstrated how, at the grassroots level, people have developed strategies for overcoming inter-cultural communication breakdown and in the process have got to understand one another's cultural values. Because of our unique cultural mix Australia is ahead of the rest of the world in developing such skills, which we should be harnessing at a time when they are needed internationally. This has not escaped the attention of European companies establishing Asia-Pacific headquarters or call centres in Melbourne or Sydney.

The utilisation of our multilingualism and inter-cultural communication experience could be a special contribution that Australia can make to our region. Australia could become an important link between Asia, Europe and other parts of the world if we made more use of our linguistic diversity and our grassroots experience in inter-cultural communication. In Melbourne's south east, adjacent suburbs and LGAs offer opportunities for vastly different patterns of contact and cultural interchange.

## **LANGUAGE SERVICE IMPLICATIONS**

The varied and changing demographics noted in this paper pose a number of challenges for service providers working in the south eastern suburbs. In general, demand for interpreters or multilingual services is

likely to continue to increase in all three LGAs. This may pose a particular challenge for Casey, since this area is experiencing the fastest growth in its LOTE speaking population and lacks the long history and experience of working with a highly multilingual population of many service-providers based in Greater Dandenong and Monash. Schools will need support to adapt very rapidly to a growing young migrant and refugee population in need of English as a second language (ESL) provision, and may need to review the LOTEs offered. More experienced schools such as Westall and Noble Park Secondary Colleges might be able to provide a mentoring role to schools needing to develop language support programs.

The disproportionate number of LOTE speakers aged 65 and over in each of the LGAs under discussion points to an increasing demand for multilingual aged services in coming years, including in the areas of home help, senior citizens' clubs/activities, nursing homes and district nursing and medical services. The analysis has also shown that for each LOTE the population is aging at different rates in different LGAs, so planners need to stay alert to the demographics of their particular area when attempting to predict future demand for multilingual aged services.

Finally, the increasingly diverse LOTE speaking population found in Casey, Monash and Greater Dandenong is part of more general changes in the demographics of Melbourne's LOTE speaking population that have important implications for service delivery. Service providers who need to cater for clients from a wide variety of language backgrounds need to develop creative communication solutions, as it can be prohibitively expensive to translate printed materials into 10 or more languages, and this cost may seem particularly difficult to justify if only a handful of clients speak a certain language. It is also difficult

for schools to offer mainstream classes in students' community languages if they have a very mixed student body. For example, Slaughter and Hajek found that many primary schools in Greater Dandenong deliberately avoided teaching widely spoken LOTE from the school community lest they be seen as favouring one group and ignoring others.<sup>6</sup>

Since the increase of LOTE speakers in the south east is in part due to a decrease in the number of recent migrants settling in the inner suburbs, statewide services and funding bodies need to remain vigilant in reviewing which areas of Melbourne have the highest need for which types of language and settlement services. This will hopefully ensure that resourcing keeps pace with changes in demography and that today's outer-suburban LOTE speakers continue to have access to the high quality ESL programs, settlement services, community language schools and interpreter services that have been a hallmark of Victoria's language policy.

## CONCLUDING REMARKS

As we have shown above, the linguistic riches of Melbourne's south-eastern suburbs are increasing. Numbers of speakers of LOTE are rising relative to the general population, and the range and diversity of languages spoken continue to grow. Planning for resource allocation and service provision needs to build on the detailed patterns of settlement described above, particularly in the areas of education and youth services for younger languages and aged care services for the languages of older migration vintages, taking into account the very local patterns of language concentration. However it is important not to let concerns about needs for service provision overshadow the remarkable contribution to cultural understanding and the development of communication skills involved in the most mundane of interactions in this linguistic land of plenty.

## References

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