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Chapter 10

Bringing Asia to the Home Front. The Australian Experience of Asian Language Education through National Policy

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Introduction

The history of the study of Asian languages in Australia has been about a struggle for recognition. Australia's longstanding identification with the British Empire led to the legitimisation of xenophobia and racism, as embodied in the White Australia policy (see below), and ensured that few Asians were allowed to migrate to Australia for much of the 20th century (see also Djité, and Ryan & McNamara, this volume). Substantial waves of European migration to Australia following the Second World War eventually led to the integration of numerous European languages into school curricula, but due to the White Australia policy, Asian languages were not afforded the same opportunity. However, in recent decades, Australia's realisation of the economic and strategic importance of Asia has dramatically changed its relationship with the region. Within this evolving context, Asian languages and studies have also taken a greater role in the Australian education system.

In 1994, the Australian Federal government introduced the National Asian Languages and Studies in Australian Schools (NALSAS) programme. NALSAS, which ceased in 2002, aimed to increase knowledge of Asian cultures and languages amongst Australian students in the hope that an increase in 'Asia literacy' would contribute towards greater economic interaction between Australia and its Asian neighbours. Chinese (Mandarin), Indonesian, Japanese and Korean were prioritised within the education system based on the prediction that these would be the languages spoken by Australia's largest trading partners in 2014.

Building linguistic resources is considered key, by many Australian policymakers and others, to greater economic and cultural engagement. As the Asian region continues to grow from strength to strength and plays a more important economic role globally, there are important lessons to be gleaned from the Australian experience of Asian language prioritisation. To begin, this chapter explores the historical role of languages and languages study in Australian society and its education systems, and the circumstances which led to the Federal government prioritising Asian languages. The argument then turns to three factors which have strongly influenced outcomes for the study of the four Asian languages:

1. The differential effect of top-down Federal policy and bottom-up State and Territory level languages policies (focusing on the States of Victoria and New South Wales (NSW))
2. The strengths and weaknesses of a narrow economic rationale for language study, including the effect of socio-political events, and
3. The influence of background speakers of these languages in the classroom.

The Australian Experience

Although Australia is a predominantly English-speaking country, a significant minority of people have always been multilingual. Since Australia was colonised in 1788, it has moved through a wide range of language ideologies, closely connected with broader societal and political changes. Clyne (2005) argues that Australian society was initially tolerant and accepting of its linguistic and cultural diversity. By the second half of the nineteenth century, having been established as a colony, and on the verge of becoming a federation, Australian society consisted of a gathering of diverse cultural and linguistic communities – indigenous communities, and settlers and convicts, who came not only from Great Britain, but Africa, Asia, Europe and the Americas (Clyne, 1991 and Djité, this volume).

However, with the birth of the Australian federation in 1901 and the worsening situation between Germany and Great Britain in the lead up to the First World War, the tolerance experienced in Australia to this point quickly dissipated (Clyne, 1991). Racism against Asians in particular led to 'Asia' and 'Asians' serving as a negative influence for Australian immigration policy. Asian migration was initially stemmed through prohibitive entry taxes for Asians and eventually barred outright through the Immigration Restriction Act of 1901, known popularly as the White Australia policy (Markey, 1982). Citizenship tests designed to restrict access for certain migrants were also introduced in 1897 in Western Australia and nationally in 1901 (see Ryan & McNamara, this volume). Increasing xenophobia and British patriotism during the First and Second World Wars led to an exclusionary agenda which saw the closure of bilingual schools (over 100 were established by the early 1900s) and a shift to English-only education (Clyne, 1991).

Following the Second World War, the Australian government encouraged mass migration of unskilled European migrants to Australia, primarily to develop secondary industry in Australia and to populate Australia as protection against an invasion from Asia. European migrants were encouraged to forgo their own cultures and languages and assimilate into Australian society as quickly as possible (Clyne, 1991). Admission to Australia was linked to English instruction through the establishment of the Adult Migrant Education Program, which was eventually extended to children, and which continues to the present (Lo Bianco, 2009).

Nevertheless, such a significant population change brought with it major social upheaval, and a struggle began for the construction of a new Australian identity. One of the most important struggles was against the homogenisation of the migrant experience, with proponents fighting for the growth of a more tolerant and culturally varied society. Lobbying for the development of multiculturalism was influenced by the sheer number of new arrivals, and 'their hard won accession to positions of some authority in the community and perhaps a realisation that they might be a political constituency' (Herriman, 1996: 41). As a result, in the late 1960s and 1970s, Australia started to slowly emerge from its history of assimilation and monolingualism.

Languages Education Policy

As well as fundamentally changing the shape of Australian society, migration also impacted upon the study of languages in the Australian education system. In the 1960s, language study in schools and universities was 'conceptualized and actualised strictly as "foreign language" teaching' which limited language study mainly to French (Clyne *et al*., 1997: 1). In 1964, 75% of language students were studying French, followed by German and Latin, with less than 2% of enrolments in Asian languages (Bonyhady, 1965). By the end of the 1970s, after persistent lobbying by

community groups and language teachers, several European languages, including Italian, Modern Greek and Turkish, gained a more permanent position in the education system when they were introduced as matriculation subjects in the state of Victoria. Other States and Territories slowly followed suit (Ozolins, 1993: 132).

However, this progression created a problematic dichotomy between 'foreign' and 'community' languages; community languages referring to those spoken by migrants in Australia. This dichotomy separates language learners into: (a) beginners who are seeking cultural enrichment and the development of linguistic skills in the 'foreign' language; and (b) those with a background in a language other than English who wish to develop proficiency in these language/s, while also developing proficiency in English. This dichotomy is too simplistic to address the needs of all language learners but persists to this day, and its restrictive consequences will be explored shortly.

Policy Directions and the Rise of Asian Languages

While community demand led to the greater inclusion of European languages in the education system, it was persistent lobbying by government and academic personnel which led to prioritisation of Asian languages (see e.g. Mackenzie, 2004; Slaughter, 2008). In the 1960s and 70s, concern grew within diplomatic and government circles about the lack of Asian language skills in the Department of External Affairs, a concern amplified by the increasing instability in the Asia-Pacific region, including the Vietnam War and political upheaval in Indonesia (Mackenzie, 2001). In 1970, an influential report, *Teaching of Asian Languages and Cultures in Australia* (Auchmuty, 1970) expressed concern with the disparity between the teaching, study and resourcing of Asian and European languages respectively, although Kamada (1994) argues that in reality, few Australians were interested in studying about Asia and Asian languages at the time.

In 1987, Australia produced a pioneering language policy, the *National Policy on Languages* (NPL) (Lo Bianco, 1987), which reflected the influence of both social and economic interests and provided broad support for the social and educational use and development of languages and language-related services. However, even before the NPL was introduced, government rhetoric was already pointing towards the economic importance of 'foreign' – especially Asian – languages (Lo Bianco, 1990) and the sophisticated rationale of the NPL changed drastically with the introduction of its successor, *Australia's Language and Literacy Policy* (ALLP) (Dawkins, 1991). This policy was primarily focused on English literacy and was followed by several other English language-focused policies (see, e.g. Moore, 2001; Wickert, 1997). Dawkins was also concerned with the lack of regional language competency, stating that 'Australia's location in the Asia-Pacific region and our patterns of trade should continue to be a factor in this selection of priorities' (Dawkins, 1991: 15).

The persistence of lobbying for Asian languages by influential groups such as the Asian Studies Association of Australia (ASAA), often presented in opposition to European language study, had also continued at the governmental level for several decades. Their strategic and economic rationalist arguments eventually won favour and in 1994, the report *Asian Languages and Australia's Economic Future* (Rudd, 1994) was released. The report, written by Australia's future Prime Minister Kevin Rudd (2007-) during his time as a senior government bureaucrat, supported the belief that Australia's economic success was dependent upon greater economic interaction with the Asian region. In accordance with the report findings, the Australian government spent over $200 million on the NALSAS programme between 1994 and 2002.

The Australian Political System and Language Education Policy

In order to understand language policy in Australian education, it is essential to understand the federal system of governance. Australia consists of six States and two Territories, which are supported nationally by the Federal government. (The differentiation between a State and Territory lies in its constitutional standing. The term 'State' will be used to refer to both here). Currently, pre-school, primary and secondary education are the responsibility of the State governments, while the Federal government has assumed primary responsibility for tertiary education. In actuality, most powers are concurrent: State governments can legislate in regards to education as long as they do not contradict any existing Federal legislation (Mackenzie, 2001: 79–80).

As a result, each State has introduced its own languages education policies. There are eight different policies (or lack thereof) across Australia, each with differing levels of commitment to the study of languages (see Table 1) and to the financing of programmes. Policies range from the expectation that students will study a language throughout compulsory schooling (Pre-year 1 to Year 10), to the mandate that students study a language for only 100 hours during secondary schooling. No State requires language study up to Year 12, the final year of secondary education. Policy and guidelines from the Federal government include national goals (non-binding) for languages study (e.g. MCEETYA, 2005), as well as targeted financial programmes for languages such as the NALSAS programme. There are three education providers in Australia – the government, Catholic and independent school systems. The policies referred to in Table 1 have been developed by the government education systems, which account for two-thirds of students. Catholic systems in each State decide whether to follow the State policies or to develop their own guidelines, while the Independent schools sector does not possess an overarching languages policy.

Table 1: Language requirements in Australian states and territories

State/Territory	Status of language education	Extent of study	Comment
Australian Capital Territory (ACT)	Not mandated	n/a	n/a
New South Wales (NSW)	Mandated	100 hours at secondary level only	Preferably in Years 7–8
Northern Territory (NT)	Not mandated	n/a	n/a
Queensland (Qld)	Mandate being revised	Previously Years 6-8	New policy awaiting cabinet approval
South Australia (SA)	Implied mandate	Pre-Year 1 to Year 10	Year levels not explicitly stated
Tasmania (Tas.)	Not mandated	n/a	n/a
Victoria (Vic.)	Implied mandate	Pre-Year 1 to Year 10	Government schools are expected to report student achievement in language learning against the Victorian Essential Learning Standards from Level 4 onwards
Western Australia (WA)	Implied mandate	Years 3–10	Students expected to reach Level 3 by Year 9

Source: based on Liddicoat *et al.* (2007: 15).

As well as differing languages education policies, each State education system supports a different number of languages, based on local demographic, regional, global, educational, vocational and historical considerations. Languages are also taught in some States through government-run language schools (after hours), distance education and ethnic schools. For example, over 30 languages are taught during the school day in SA, Victoria, NSW and NT. These languages reflect the rich migration histories of each State, as well as the languages of the local Australian Indigenous populations. In other States, fewer languages are taught. For example, in Tasmania, only eight languages are available in schools.

Outcomes of the NALSAS Programme

There is no doubt that the NALSAS programme, during its lifetime (1994-2002), greatly boosted the study of the four Asian languages. However, it is difficult to ascertain the exact impact of the programme on enrolment numbers as comprehensive data collection on languages study has been sporadic and incomplete. Nevertheless, a 2002 report evaluating the NALSAS programme indicates that enrolments in Chinese, Indonesian and Japanese roughly doubled from the start of the programme in 1994 to 2000, from approximately 350,000 enrolments to just over 760,000 (Wyatt *et al.*, 2002). Korean never gained a strong foothold in Australian schools. Comparative enrolment figures are not available for the language.

While the short-term outcomes for the programme were remarkable, enrolments in Indonesian and Japanese began declining as soon as the programme ceased, falling 20.9% and 20.6% respectively between 2000 and 2006. Given that a significant amount of funding and support for the four Asian languages was withdrawn when NALSAS ended, it is not surprising that enrolments in some languages decreased. An important question to ask is whether these changes are consistent with changes across all language enrolments and whether they fell at the same rate across all States. This is difficult to answer due to the lack of comprehensive data. However, a comparison of enrolments in government-run schools across Australia suggests that enrolments in all languages declined around 7.5% between 2001 and 2005 (Liddicoat *et al.*, 2007: 33), significantly less than for Indonesian and Japanese.

Further analysis shows that there were remarkable differences at State level. Slaughter (2009) compared outcomes for the four Asian languages in the two most populous States, NSW and Victoria, and found that the underlying support for languages study provided by State level governments impacted dramatically on the longer term success of Indonesian and Japanese study. The aims of NSW language policy are modest at best, with students expected to study a language for 100 hours during secondary schooling. Minimal financial and structural support has been provided to encourage the study of languages in schools outside these parameters. Although the NSW government supports over 50 languages in the education system, including community languages for select groups of students at the primary level and access to the study of community languages (after hours) for background speakers at the secondary level, language study overall remains very limited.

The NALSAS programme did lead to an upsurge in enrolments in Asian languages in NSW, particularly at the primary level, indicating that school communities are interested in studying language when the appropriate support structures are in place. Unfortunately, the NSW State government refused to assume financial responsibility for the increased interest in language study generated by the supplementary NALSAS funding. Once the Federal NALSAS funding was withdrawn, primary level enrolments in Indonesian and Japanese fell dramatically (77.1% and 78% respectively)

between 1999 and 2009, essentially decimating widespread primary level language study in the State. This experience has left a very negative impression of languages study in many school communities (Slaughter, 2008). Indonesian and Japanese language programmes at the secondary level proved to be more robust, experiencing a more limited decline in enrolments (16.1% and 10.7% respectively), but still notably higher than the general decline of 8.1% for the study of all languages at the secondary level in NSW (NSW. DE&T, 1999, 2006).

In Victorian primary schools, enrolments also dropped, but to a lesser extent, down 17.6% for Indonesian and 4.1% for Japanese. Programmes were partly cushioned by pre-existing policy and financial support for primary level languages study, which had been phased in since the early 1980s (Slaughter & Hajek, 2007). At the secondary level, Indonesian enrolments fell 16.3%, while Japanese enrolments fell 9.9%, higher than the general decline of 2.9% for all languages at the secondary level in Victoria. While there was certainly some decline in enrolments in Japanese and Indonesian, the robust condition of languages education in Victoria prior to NALSAS ensured that languages education remained largely intact once the supplementary funding ended. Overall, language enrolments in Victoria were nearly triple those in NSW in 2005.

The comparison between the two States highlights that both the short-term and longer-term effectiveness of a funding initiative like NALSAS is significantly limited by the strength of State level support structures. It is clear a programme such as NALSAS can only build on what is already firmly established in each State.

The Rationale for Language Study

The success of a school languages programme is dependent on a broad range of factors, including policy initiatives, such as NALSAS, financial and structural variables, and the uptake and continuation of languages study by students. However, in exploring the fallout of the NALSAS programme, Slaughter (2008) found that socio-political events have also had an enormous impact on the valuing of different languages within school communities and on the willingness of students to continue studying particular languages.

This is clearly illustrated by the study of Korean. South Korea has been and remains an important economic partner for Australia; it was Australia's fourth ranked trade partner in 2008-9 (DFAT, 2008). However, despite considerable Federal funding and promotion, the language has not gained in popularity in the education system. The most recently available data, from 2000, shows that only 3,672 students studied the language nationally. If we focus on the study of Korean at the Year 12 level, in 2003 only 259 students studied Korean, decreasing to approximately 150 students in 2008 (Slaughter, 2008).

Only a very small number of schools offer Korean in Australia (less than 0.3%). In a study of three schools that do teach Korean, school staff argued that negative media presentations in the years since the NALSAS programme began had had a detrimental effect on the image of South Korea and in turn, on Korean programmes (Slaughter, 2008). These events included the disruptive political situation on the Korean peninsula, the continued division of the country, an ongoing US military presence, a build up of nuclear power in North Korea, and militant unionism. The economic imperative has held little sway for the study of Korean.

The impact of socio-political events has also seriously impacted on the study of Indonesian. While Indonesian remains very strong in Australian schools – it is the third most studied language – enrolments fell 20.9% nationally between 2000 and 2006. In Victoria, over 80% of the decline in languages enrolments between 2000 and

2005 can be ascribed to Indonesian. In a study looking at 19 secondary schools which had substantial languages programmes (the schools were able to offer languages from Year 7 to 12), Slaughter (2007) found that enrolment levels dropped in all schools after a series of negative events, including financial crises, terrorist attacks involving Australians in Indonesia, and surges in the number of refugees reaching Australia via Indonesia. Travel advisories issued by Australian government officials, which prevented Australian students and teachers from travelling to Indonesia (and still remain in place), were also identified as problematic. Due to the prolonged sequence of these events, some schools found that enrolments fell repeatedly over a number of years, forcing them to eventually close their Indonesian programmes, while still maintaining other language programmes. Given the prominence of the Federal government's economic rationale for studying Indonesian, it was also argued that Indonesia's lack of economic success led many students and parents to question why the language was being offered at all.

Other factors that aid and impede schools in offering languages, such as differences in student motivation and the social issues that drive language policies at a State level, are complex and cannot be adequately addressed here. What is clear from the Indonesian and Korean examples is that isolating a language and promoting it on the basis of its economic importance does not guarantee success.

The Australian experience shows that the rationale for the study of these and other languages needs to be broadened beyond the economic imperative in order for them to be sustainable and to create a buffer against the capricious nature of world events and world economics. This is not to say that certain languages should not be provided with greater support than other languages, but that a narrow economic or strategic rationale is insufficient. Arguments in support of languages education need to clearly outline the numerous benefits of languages education and of supporting a wide range of languages, both as community languages and as languages to be studied by the wider community (Lo Bianco, 2009; Slaughter, 2009).

Asian Languages as Australian Languages: Background Speakers in the Language Classroom

One of the most pertinent critiques of the NALSAS policy was the promotion of the four Asian languages as 'foreign' languages in Australia, when in fact there were already sizeable and growing communities of Asian languages speakers around Australia in 1994 (Lo Bianco, 2000, 2002). This situation has caused particular problems for the study of Chinese. While there were already large numbers of Cantonese-speaking migrants in Australia in 1994, the promotion of Chinese study through NALSAS coincided with a significant upsurge in the migration of Mandarin speakers to Australia: the number of Australians who speak primarily Mandarin at home increased 304.5% between 1991 and 2006 (Clyne *et al.*, 2008). This does not include the numerous earlier generation Chinese-Australians who also have varying degrees of Chinese linguistic and cultural understanding (including speakers of a wide range of *fang yan* or Chinese languages and dialects spoken not in only in Mainland China but throughout Asia). Nor does it include the large number of international students from China who enter the Australian education system at the senior secondary level to assist in their endeavours to study in Australian universities.

Consequently, the Chinese (Mandarin) language learning classroom consists of a mix of students, ranging from those without a background in Chinese to those with a background in Chinese but with widely varying degrees of Chinese linguistic and cultural competencies (Orton, 2008; Slaughter, 2008). This has created ongoing

tensions surrounding the study of Chinese, particularly in relation to the high-stakes language examination at Year 12 (final secondary matriculation), critical for university entry. The tensions are based on the perception that background speakers have an unfair advantage over non-background speakers in a single language exam.

From the early 1990s, in an initial attempt to separate more proficient speakers of Asian languages from beginners students, separate curricula were developed in most States for the study of Chinese, Indonesian, Japanese and Korean, dividing students into those with and without a background in these languages. The selection criteria for background speaker courses differ among States and remain controversial. For example, in NT, SA and Tasmania, students who have had more than one year of education where Chinese was the medium of instruction (predominantly in overseas countries) must take the Chinese background speaker course. However, in other States, home use and other experiences within Australia figure prominently. In NSW, if students have more than one year of education in Chinese or if they speak or write the language 'in a sustained manner with a person or persons who have a background in using the language' (NSW. Board of Studies, 2005: 85), they must take the background speaker course (See Lo Bianco, 2009: 51 for detailed criteria).

The most obvious problem is the inconsistent definition of background speaker across jurisdictions. Based on the preceding examples, the same student would be in the background speaker course in NSW, but the Chinese as a second language course in NT, SA and Tasmania. At the Year 12 level, Australian-born students in NSW who must take the background speaker course compete in examinations against recently arrived Chinese international students. Clyne (2005) has argued that the approach utilised by NSW (as well as WA) penalises parents and students who work hard to develop bilingualism and potentially discourages the transmission of bilingualism across generations.

Conversely, in other States, Australian-born background speakers will take the same examination as beginner learners of Chinese. This can prove to be highly demotivating for beginner students who feel incapable of achieving high scores in Chinese, regardless of the effort they put into the endeavour, due to the number of background speakers in their classes (Liddicoat *et al.*, 2007; Slaughter, 2008: 187–216).

The fundamental problem is the rudimentary dichotomy between background and non-background speaker, which oversimplifies a very complex issue. This has translated into curricula and examinations which do not seek to extend all language learners, but which seemingly attempt to move advantages between groups of students. This approach has undoubtedly contributed to limiting the uptake of Chinese in Australian schools. If a student can see unresolved issues with the study of Chinese at the Year 12 level, they will avoid studying the language all together. In fact, many secondary schools, particularly in the independent sector, will not introduce Chinese because they believe the current system does not provide a fair opportunity for non-background speakers to achieve in the higher score bands necessary for university entry (Slaughter, 2008). For the study of Chinese to grow in Australia, curricula which aim to develop the linguistic competence of all learners, regardless of their starting point, need to be developed and implemented.

A number of alternatives have been suggested, for example, certificates of achievement, such as those utilised for music. Students take an examination when they feel they have achieved the required level of proficiency and then continue at their own pace. This encourages students by recognising their skill development as they progress. The system utilised by the International Baccalaureate (IB) provides

another model. All students completing the IB diploma must develop proficiency in two languages to graduate at the secondary level. Such an approach in Australia would ensure that students gain competency in English and another language, regardless of their home language. Bilingualism may seem a modest aim to many European countries, where multilingualism is an unquestioned expectation, but in Australia, where only around 14% of students study a language other than English at Year 12, it is an enormous challenge.

Another alternative would be the development of three streams for Chinese, for 1) beginners, 2) background speakers and 3) international students/highly proficient students of Chinese. While avenues already exist at the senior secondary level for gifted students to undertake university level 1st year language subjects, this is not necessarily an appropriate pathway for background speakers whose oral and aural skills are often stronger than those in reading and writing (Elder, 2003). A Year 7 to 12 school curriculum that expressly addresses the needs of background speakers, and includes an incentive for students to move into this stream, is urgently required. To this end, the new Year 11 and 12 background speaker course should be university accredited. This incentive may encourage background speakers to move voluntarily into a background speaker stream, decreasing the pressure on second language learners within the Chinese as a second language stream. Alternatively, as Orton (2008) has suggested for Chinese, background speaker or higher level courses could be developed, where students receive bonus points towards tertiary entrance scores.

If the ultimate aim of language policies and initiatives such as NALSAS is to increase the study of Chinese in Australian schools, this can only be achieved by encouraging rather than constraining the linguistic potential of both background and non-background speakers, an essential endeavour given that 'public institutions alone will never be able to generate the numbers, range and experiences in languages that are already inherent in the wider population' (Lo Bianco, 2009: 59).

Concluding Comments: Back to the Future?

In 2007, Kevin Rudd, the architect of the original NALSAS programme, was elected Prime Minister of Australia's Federal government. A fluent speaker of Chinese, and former bureaucrat and diplomat, he remains a keen advocate of Asian languages education. In 2009, his government introduced a replacement to the NALSAS programme – the National Asian Languages and Studies in Schools Program (NALSSP). While its predecessor aimed to increase the study of Asian languages and studies at both primary and secondary levels, NALSSP is focused on secondary education. Around $62 million has been allocated for a four-year period (2009-2012), aimed at increasing opportunities for students to study the languages and cultures of 'Australia's key regional neighbours, namely China, Indonesia, Japan and Korea' (DEEWR, 2009).

While NALSSP is designed to reinvigorate the learning of the same four Asian languages, it does not take into account the most pertinent problems of its predecessor. First, the withdrawal of NALSAS funding and the subsequent decreases in enrolments highlights the need for congruence between the aims of Federal and State level policy. The rapid rise and fall of languages programmes, such as was seen at primary level in NSW, risks devaluing the study of all languages, not just the four prioritised languages, and harming the broader and stable provision of languages education. Appropriate levels of structural and financial support need to be provided on an ongoing basis by both levels of governance. As each State government is committed to varying levels of secondary languages education, the NALSSP focus on the

secondary level will avoid the same fallout that occurred in primary languages education under its predecessor. However, the lack of engagement with lower levels of learning is arguably short-sighted and the ongoing promotion of four Asian languages continues to constrain languages education in Australia.

Second, the effect of socio-political events on the study of Korean and Indonesian underlines the negative impact of a narrow economic imperative. Regardless of politically-based linguistic needs of a government, a rationale for languages education needs to be situated within a broad, humanistic valuing of languages, which outlines the cognitive, social, cultural, as well as economic and strategic benefits of languages education. The NALSSP initiative does not articulate the broad benefits of languages education but remains tightly framed within an economic paradigm, vaguely arguing that the study of the four Asian languages 'is beneficial for our economy, community and individuals, creating more jobs and higher wages and overall better opportunities for all Australians' (DEEWR, 2009).

Finally, local demographics must be a fundamental consideration in effectively prioritising any languages in the education system. At present, the expansion of Chinese study in Australia is crippled by a curriculum and examination system that does not encourage a broad range of students to continue with the language through to Year 12. By failing to take into consideration the linguistic diversity in Australia, the NALSAS policy, and the subsequent NALSSP policy, are critically undermining the expansive aims of the programme itself. Appropriate streams of study for Chinese, designed to support and extend the languages abilities of all students, is urgently needed to ensure the establishment of a rich source of linguistic capital.

It is difficult, given the nature of the Australian political system, for a Federal initiative to address many of the jurisdictional, structural and attitudinal challenges to furthering languages education across Australia. It is also improbable that $62 million over four years will act as the desired catalysis for Asian languages education, particularly as it does not address the most pertinent problems arising from the NALSAS programme. However, only time will tell: it will not be possible to determine the full impact of the NALSSP programme until its completion.

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