



Language Map of Victoria VACL ©

This map is an indicative map showing the language groups from across Victoria. The names of each of the language groups are placed in a central position within their cultural boundaries. This Map is indicative only and is not to be used for any legal purposes.

About Gunditjmara languages

You will see our Country and the languages or dialects that are listed there. These language groups had territories that they have custodial stewardship in cultural heritage management and cultural songlines responsibilities.

Each dialect of Gunditjmara or Maar peoples is culturally related in kinship, ceremony, totem, moiety, marriage and songlines.

In linguistics, the study of languages, Gunditjmara languages are identified as a distinct language 'family'. A language family is a group of dialects or languages that are related in specific ways, like how our languages are culturally related and interconnected. Our language family is different from the western Kulin of the northwest and Kulin languages of the east, north east of our Country.

Our languages are
Dhauwurd Wurrung
Wooloowoorroong
Kee Woorroong
Koornkopanoot
Keerray Woorroong
Peek Woorroong
Bear language

Gadubanud or Katoopanoot if we spell it with the same spelling system as Keerray Woorroong.

Djargurd Woorroong

Spelling Systems

We have a standardised spelling and sound system (called an Orthography) for Keerray Woorroong language or dialect. This is because a decision was made to create a standardised spelling system by Dad when he was working with the linguist Sharnthi Pillay-Krishna in the 1990's. They published the Keerray Woorroong and Related Dialects dictionary in 1996 after a few years of research and development.

The other dialects have not had any workshops or decisions on standardised spelling. This is up to the identified language group members to decide.

Why do we need to make a spelling system? And What is standardised spelling?

We need to develop spelling systems because our languages are the key part of our oral traditions. We didn't 'write' things down in the way we do now.

Our Old People left our language legacy in our DNA, in our Country, in our stories and in 'historical records'. It was their wisdom to share with those non Aboriginal people who recorded their stories and language to create a legacy archive for us to discover and retrieve. It is with deep gratitude to our Old People that we can 're-dream' our languages back to living languages: in our homes, in our lives, our spirits.

Our languages have sounds that aren't in English. Most languages have distinctive sounds and patterns or rhythms that characterise and individualise those languages.

The non-Aboriginal people who recorded our Old People came from a time when English wasn't properly standardised either as well as there being a huge gap in individual education standards in the 19th century. So some people were literate and educated, others less so and spelling was much more haphazard then. To add another layer of complexity, you need to think of the nationality of the person writing down our Old Peoples stories and knowledge. What heritage background lens were the writers listening from? What sounds could they hear? Remember if a Scots person was listening (ie: James Dawson) then that person will possibly hear different sounds than is a Belgian like Von Guerrard or an Italian or German were listening and writing.

And the other big factor is what language were they writing it in? Whatever that language they were writing in they had to find their letters to represent sounds of our languages.

In English for example 'ng' is used to represent this sound and this works well because this sound is in English and once you know that the two letters (diphthong) are for one sound. In English of course, it not usually at the start of words whereas in Gunditjmarra we have a lot of words that start with this sound 'ng'.

An example of a sound that is difficult to translate through English is the sound represented by the letters 'tj' or 'ty/yt' or even 'tch' or 'ch'. These combinations are often used to represent this sound that is unique to our language and is not found in English. These letter combinations are variations used by different writers in the historical archives, who have used their own spelling interpretation to attempt and approximate representation of this sound.

AAAAND....because there were so many different people writing things down and there can be 40,50 or 70 entries for one word; and each spelt differently. We then have to work out the sounds from these and filter these written records.

So you can see there are many factors which come into play when reclaiming and revitalising our languages.

Phew lots of information hey? ...its probably time for another cuppa tea☺

Standardised spelling

Standardised spelling means a system that consistently uses the same letters and letter combinations ie 'th' for a sound, to spell, read and write their language.

And those are the three main reasons we need a standardised system.

A number of other issues can arise:

- hard to correctly read someone elses writings in Gunditjmarra;
- mispronunciations become normal and our language loses its integrity;
- mixed up and not 'proper' dialects could grow and become normal;

NB: spelling doesn't matter when we are speaking.....its literacy that makes it necessary

What spelling systems are already being used?

Keerray Woorroong

The Keerray Woorroong system is the one that I use and encourage people to use when we are writing for all of the reasons above.

Dhauwaurd Wurrong

Dhauwurd Wurrong don't have a fully developed and agreed upon Orthography. They do however choose to use some consistent spelling and sounds like the 'g' instead of the 'k' and 'tj' instead of 'ty/yt' used in Keerray....

BUT, as an example now- **Gunditjmara** is commonly spelt and accepted by all of us as with a 'G' (sound like 'goat') at the start and the 'u' letter represents the sound as in **put** or **foot**; and then....

'Budj Bim' is usually pronounced with the **Budj** word pronounced as in 'but' sound (see how tricky it can be reading English for our language sounds ☺)
you will remember the Keerray spelling see the comparison below

Budj Bim

Pooyt Peem

These are the same words spelt differently. As long as you understand the spelling system used for each then you can say them, read them and understand each other.

So you may, if you are belong to that dialect, choose to use that spelling system.

Barry Blake system

Barry Blake a linguist and author of 'The Warrnambool Language' publication uses a system he developed purely for use in his publication. It is one however that people could choose to use for writing purposes if they wish.

Again, it will need an understanding of the sounds to understand the sound of the letters used to represent the sounds. Example when reading **u**, which sound is **u** representing? **but** or **put**.

See attached Barry Blake 'The Warrnambool Language' List as a resource for you to find words and use his spelling if you want.

