

The language quilt

By Catherine Farley and Damian Listar/TORONTO STAR

English is still, by far, the first language across Greater Toronto. But strip away that blanket of dominance and a colourful patchwork emerges, showing where newcomers from around the world chose to settle. The map shows the most prevalent mother tongue after English in more than 1,000 neighbourhoods across the GTA, as revealed by a Star analysis of 2006 census data

Some discoveries

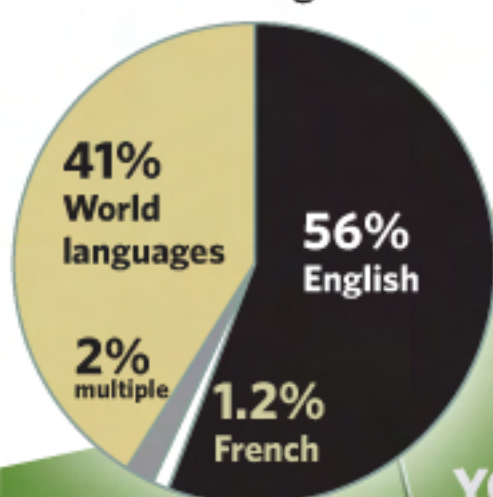
- English is the second language in **47** of the GTA's **1,076** census tracts
- English is in third place in **7** tracts in Agincourt, on Toronto's northern edge
- In **57** tracts, **70%** or more of the population has a non-English mother tongue
- The preponderance of English as a mother tongue is **90%** or more in **42** census tracts
- In **200** tracts, more than **30** distinct mother tongues are spoken by 15 or more people — the minimum number of speakers required for a language to count in the census
- In **13** tracts, there are more than **40** mother tongues

56% of the **5.4 million** GTA residents count English as their mother tongue. Here are the next most prevalent:

Top 10 mother tongues (after English)

- Italian** 3.5%
- Chinese (no language specified)** 3.2%
- Cantonese** 3.1%
- Punjabi** 2.5%
- Portuguese** 2%
- Spanish** 2%
- Tagalog** 1.9%
- Urdu** 1.8%
- Tamil** 1.7%
- Polish** 1.6%

Mother tongue mix



Behind the mosaic

Tight knit: The Greek community, comprising 47,305 speakers, is one of the GTA's most compact with Greek placing second behind English in 20 census tracts in central Toronto. Estonian, with 4,200 speakers, is one of the smallest communities, but it ranks No. 2 in one rural community in North Durham, ahead of the German and French contingents.

Loose knit: Mother tongues with wide distribution rarely get into second place. Although a sizeable community in numbers (33,810), Hindi has no dominant census tracts and Hungarian (21,325) has just one. In contrast, Ukrainians, with 29,040 speakers, command 17 No. 2 positions.

In the shadows: Some languages are under-represented on the map because they are overshadowed by other dominant tongues. In parts of North Toronto and Markham, where Chinese and Cantonese rank 1 and 2, Mandarin is consistently third or fourth. Despite 63,140 speakers, Mandarin only achieves second place in 6 census tracts.

Mother tongue: First language learned in childhood and still understood. The 2006 Census identifies 116 distinct mother tongues spoken by at least 15 people in the GTA.

Census tract: A neighbourhood or rural area defined by geographic boundaries such as rivers, highways and streets, with typically 2,000 to 10,000 residents.

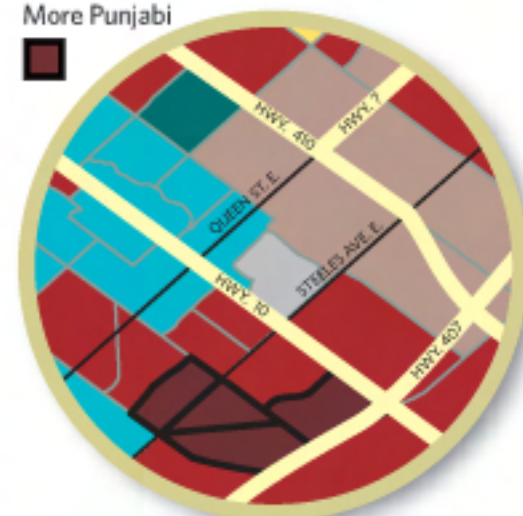
***Chinese (no language specified):** May include Cantonese, Mandarin, Hakka, Taiwanese, Fukien or Shanghaiese languages

Where English is the second language... and even the third

In these highlighted areas, non-official languages outnumber English as the mother tongue

Brampton

More Punjabi



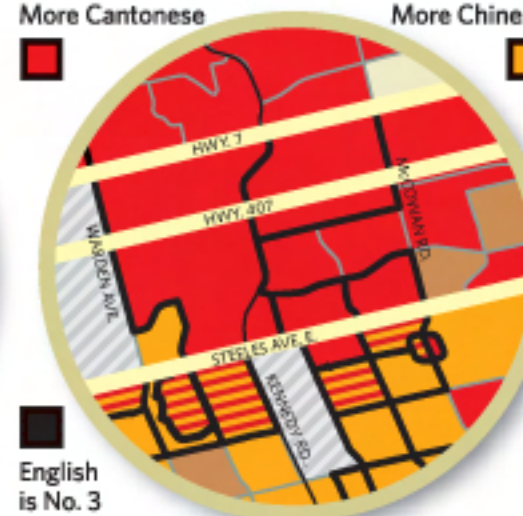
Woodbridge

More Italian



Markham/Agincourt

More Cantonese



More Chinese
English is No. 3

BUILDING THE MAP OF SECOND LANGUAGES

Our challenge was to show the many language communities while retaining the areas where English overwhelmingly dominates:

- Only languages that ranked second in at least 5 census tracts are shown on the map.
- To replace English — the dominant language in 95% of census tracts — the second language must be above its GTA average.
- If languages were tied, the census tract was assigned to the language that was highest compared to its own GTA average, representing a more significant pocket.

SOURCE: Statistics Canada, 2006 Census; Toronto Star Library

MAPS AND GRAPHICS: CATHERINE FARLEY DATA ANALYSIS: DAMIAN LISTAR

KEY TO MOTHER TONGUES

Number of speakers in the GTA

Western Europe, Americas

- English 3,029,955 (56%)
- Italian 189,775 (3.5%)
- Portuguese 110,255 (2%)
- Spanish 110,225 (2%)
- French 65,405 (1.2%)
- Greek 47,305 (0.9%)
- German 42,955 (0.8%)
- Dutch 13,460 (0.2%)

East Asia

- Chinese (no language specified)* 173,405 (3.2%)
- Cantonese 167,305 (3.1%) (Hong Kong)
- Tagalog 101,485 (1.9%) (Philippines)
- Mandarin 63,140 (1.2%) (China)
- Korean 48,185 (0.9%)
- Vietnamese 45,735 (0.8%)

South Asia

- Punjabi 133,110 (2.5%) (Sikhs in Pakistan, India)
- Urdu 99,300 (1.8%) (Pakistan)
- Tamil 94,180 (1.7%) (South India, Sri Lanka)
- Gujarati 54,710 (1%) (West India)
- Bengali 25,210 (0.5%) (Bangladesh)

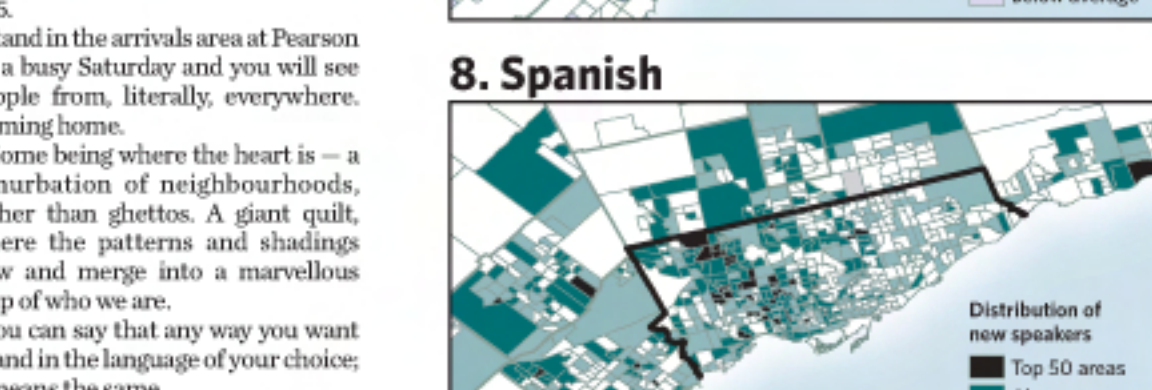
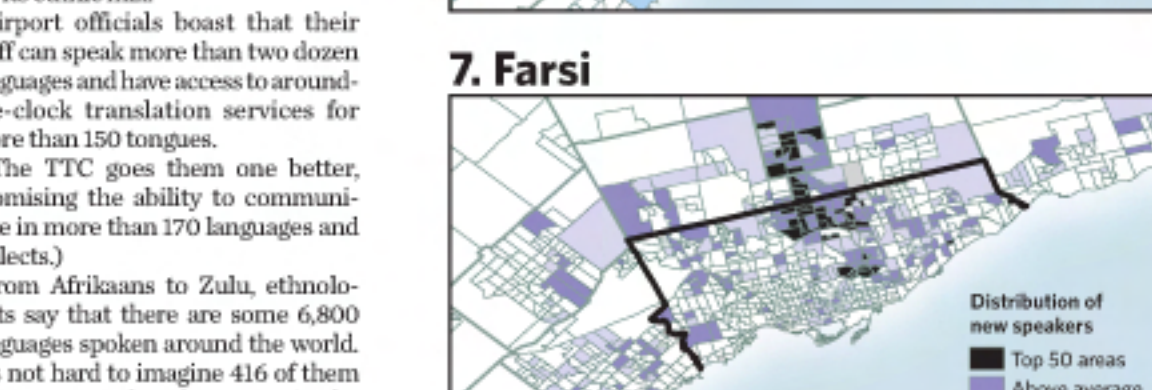
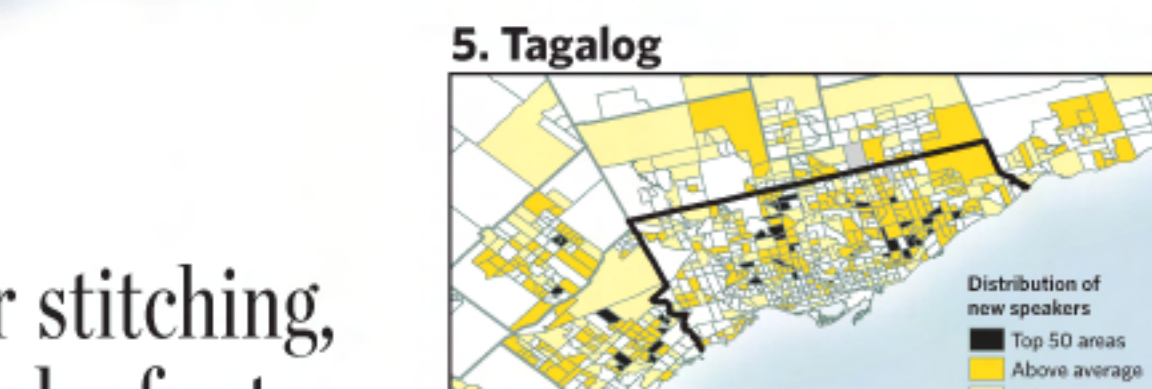
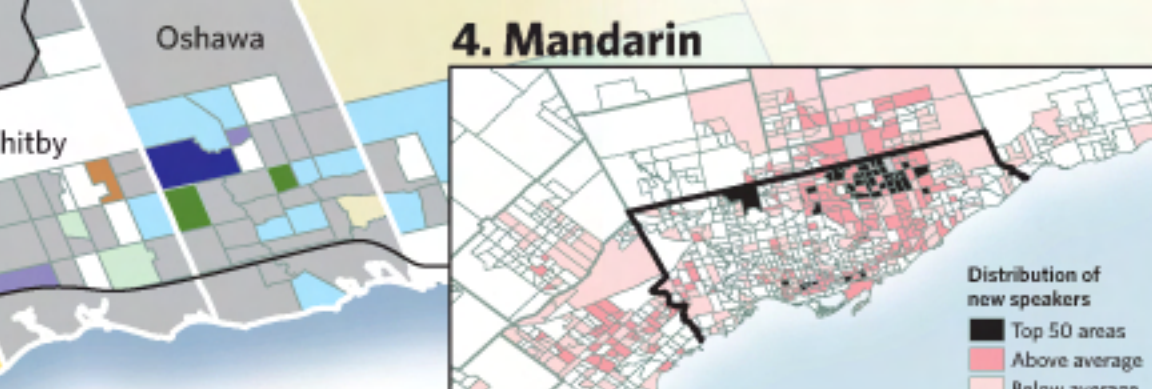
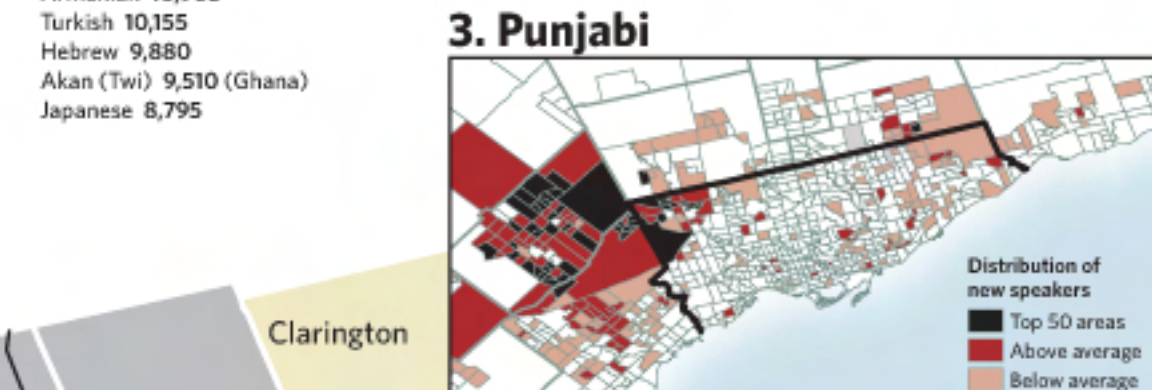
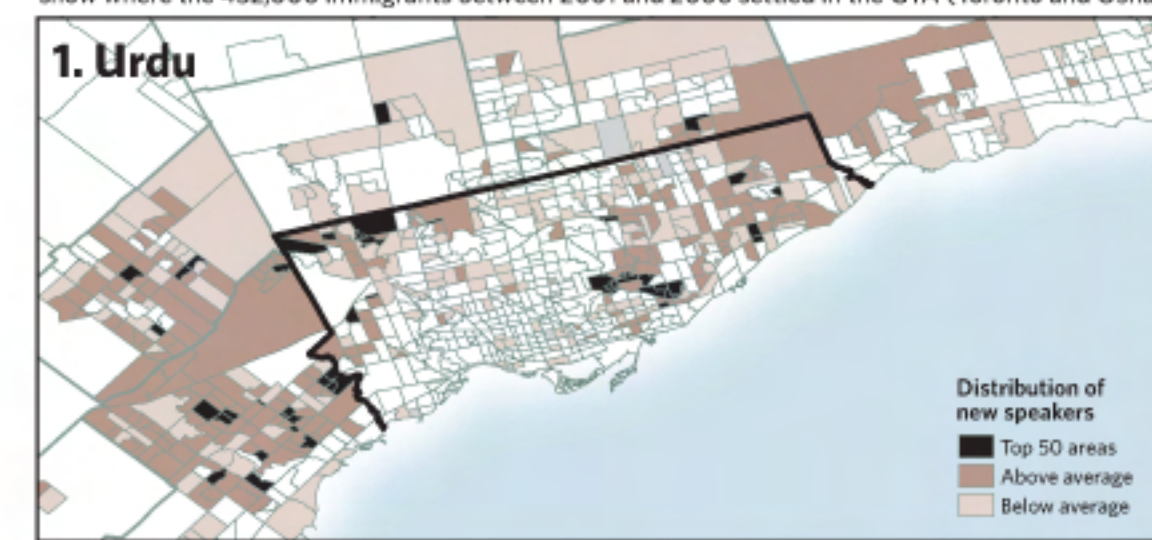
Eastern Europe & Middle East

- Polish 83,950 (1.6%)
- Russian 65,730 (1.2%)
- Farsi 65,025 (1.2%) (Iran)
- Arabic 56,875 (1.1%) (Middle East, N. Africa)
- Ukrainian 29,040 (0.5%)

No data in 8 census tracts

Top 8 new voices

The new languages that will shape the language quilt of the future are mostly from South Asia and Asia. Maps show where the 452,000 immigrants between 2001 and 2006 settled in the GTA (Toronto and Oshawa CMAs).



From irregular stitching, an ongoing work of art

BILL TAYLOR
FEATURE WRITER

Someone really should make this quilt, throw it on their bed, and sleep soundly under it each night knowing that, while Canada is officially a bilingual country, the GTA — unofficially but inexorably — is approaching omni-lingualism.

It's Greater Toronto as an ongoing work of art: a quilt with patches where English is the second or even third language and French is an also-ran. Parts of Brampton where Punjabi holds sway, for instance; pockets of Woodbridge where Italian is the language of choice; and Markham, home to one of the GTA's many "Chinatowns."

Name another North American city that can boast multiple Chinatowns. It's not for nothing that the United Nations has called Toronto the world's most ethnically diverse city. For the most part, the cosmopolitan shading is subtle. It's often less than apparent that English has been overtaken as the lingua franca.

Perhaps a handful of stores with unfamiliar signs (unfamiliar to you, anyway), selling unfamiliar things. A church with its name in a script unknown to you.

The conversation on a street corner or park bench. Otherwise, it's a neighbourhood probably little different from your own — whatever language you speak first by choice.

Then there's Dragon City, in Markham, said to be the largest Chinese mall in North America. No mistaking

it: a little kingdom of mythical beasts and extravagance, emblazoned in red and gold. Subtle, it is not. But part of Greater Toronto, it most definitely is.

Seen one airport, seen 'em all? Pearson International looks much like any other. But it's hard to imagine another one — not JFK in New York or London's Heathrow or Charles de Gaulle in Paris or Hong Kong's Chek Lap Kok — that can match Pearson for its ethnic mix.

Airport officials boast that their staff can speak more than two dozen languages and have access to around-the-clock translation services for more than 150 tongues.

(The TTC goes them one better, promising the ability to communicate in more than 170 languages and dialects.) From Afrikaans to Zulu, ethnologists say that there are some 6,800 languages spoken around the world. It's not hard to imagine 416 of them in Toronto and perhaps 905 in the 905.

Stand in the arrivals area at Pearson on a busy Saturday and you will see people from, literally, everywhere. Coming home.

Home being where the heart is — a conurbation of neighbourhoods, rather than ghettos. A giant quilt, where the patterns and shadings flow and merge into a marvellous map of who we are.

You can say that any way you want to and in the language of your choice; it means the same.

Or you could organize a quilting bee and make the word flesh.