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# "Has anyone seen my ancestral language?" Italian linguistic suicide and the transmission of the Italian language in Canada, 1935-1947

Ryan Shadford  
*Ryerson University*

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'HAS ANYONE SEEN MY ANCESTRAL LANGUAGE?' ITALIAN LINGUISTIC  
SUICIDE AND THE TRANSMISSION OF THE ITALIAN LANGUAGE IN  
CANADA, 1935-1947

by

Ryan Shadford, BMus, McGill University, 2006  
BA, University of Windsor, 2008

A Major Research Paper  
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Master of Arts  
in the Program of  
Immigration and Settlement Studies

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## Author's Declaration

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Ryan Shadford  
Master of Arts, 2009  
Immigration and Settlement Studies  
Ryerson University

ABSTRACT

Very little research, if any at all, has been conducted on the ancestral language retention of Italian-Canadians during World War Two. The aim of this research study was to compile a body of literature that would begin to support the notion that World War Two Italophobic policies inflicted by the Canadian government on the Italian-Canadian community could have negatively affected the intergenerational transmission of the Italian language in Canada, 1935-1947. In order to introduce the topic, a 'boxed-in' literature review was conducted by compiling research on Italian-Canadians during the war that spanned many topics. By grouping the material into specific themes, a structure for Italian linguistic suicide began to emerge. Two sections on theoretical perspectives and oral histories precede an analysis of three interviews conducted in the Greater Toronto area that serve to bring reality and correlational evidence to the literature review.

Key Words: "Linguistic Suicide" "Italophobia" "Italian-Canadian"  
"World War Two"

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## Preface

To my current knowledge, there does not exist a literature that serves to explore the possibility of Italian language decline in Canada during World War Two. In reference to the disappearance of my own family's ancestral Italian language, I suspect that upon Mussolini's declaration of war on the side of Germany and against Britain and France in 1940, the generally Italophobic policies inflicted by the Canadian government, coupled with the backlash imposed by the Anglo-Canadian citizenry, encouraged a decline in the use and transmission of the Italian language by the Italian-Canadian populace, otherwise known as linguistic suicide (Beck and Lam, 2008).

Not only does this research paper serve to explore a portion of Canadian history that is relatively unknown to the general populace, it serves a personal purpose that, in part, is aiming to mend an inadequacy that I have harboured for many years. For the first 19 years of my life, residing in the small town of Ingersoll, Ontario, I was never faced with a pressure to understand multiple languages, nor was my upbringing in a community where any of my peers spoke anything more than Standard English. One to two hours of French instruction per week was a standard part of my primary schooling but it did not register as being an important part of my life and in retrospect, I wish I had paid more attention. Not until I made the difficult transition of moving away from home to attend university in Montreal, did I

begin to comprehend and witness the awesome ability of understanding multiple languages. Slowly, the amazement I felt for my university peers' abilities at multilingualism turned into a 'why me' outlook on language.

"Mom, why didn't you send me to French Immersion, you must have known the benefits of bilingualism?" To which my Mother responded "the only French Immersion School was in the next town over and I wasn't prepared to send my four year old on a one hour bus ride everyday when there was a school nearby." I have since accepted this explanation, realizing that I would likely make the same decision regarding my own children. However, these feelings of inadequacy became so intense that they soon developed into strong feelings of embarrassment.

On my first day of graduate studies at Ryerson University, during an orientation for all those registered in the Immigration and Settlement Studies program, our Director asked an appropriate question for students eager to study such topics as immigration policy and settlement issues: "Who in this room speaks two or more languages, hands up? Three or more? Four or more? Five or more?" My embarrassment of not being multilingual, not even fluent in French, reached its peak; I recall hoping that all of my new classmates, with their hands raised high, would not notice the lone, solitary student who kept his hand pursed tightly on his knee. This began the



organic development of my current research topic, beginning with the question 'why do I not speak Sicilian?'

I am a Canadian citizen, born and raised, but despite a 4<sup>th</sup> generation status, I do not deny my Sicilian roots. My great-grandparents came to Canada from Sicily shortly before the First World War as young children and were raised speaking both English and the Sicilian dialect. Their children, my grandparents, were born in Kingston and Toronto in 1932 and 1935 respectively; however, the dialect was not completely transmitted to my grandparents, aside from gaining the use of basic words and phrases. Therefore, I found myself eager to understand how and why my ancestral language was lost from my family's lexicon over the years.

There are many linguistic studies that seek to understand how languages evolve, change, shift and die, but upon preliminary study, I was introduced to a new concept that has since paved the way for this paper: language suicide. Coined by Norman Denison (1977), language suicide refers to the conscious decision to stop speaking a language, often in favour of another language, or to cease the transmission of a particular language to one's children. With a basic knowledge of Italian-Canadian history during World War Two, it became clear to me that there was a strong possibility that my great-grandparents committed language suicide--since updated by Beck and Lam (2008) to the term linguistic suicide--by halting the transmission of

the Sicilian language to their children, my grandparents. But, why would they do this? Literature shows that natal languages do tend to be used less frequently after the second and third generation, but why would my great-grandparents choose not to pass on their ancestral language to their children (Portes and Schauffler, 1994; Portes and Hao, 1998)?

In Kingston, Ontario, where my Poppa was raised, it was imperative that his family learn English quickly because they were one of only a few Italian families that migrated to the area; there was little community on which to fall back for support. However, I was still interested in why they would not pass on their ancestral language, ensured that their children, born in Canada, were learning English at school and outside of the home. Comparatively, why did my Grandma's parents, having moved from Sicily to Toronto, choose not to pass Sicilian on to their child, despite there being a large Sicilian community with which to associate and make part of their lives?

There are numerous possible answers to these questions that I do not have the time or the experience in linguistic theories to fully research in this paper. However, the more I read about Italians in Canada in the 1940's, the more I began to see a picture that was more disturbing than I had initially expected.

## Introduction

The Italian community in Canada is a large and vibrant one, with prominent Little Italy's in cities from the shores of Nova Scotia to the coast of British Columbia. Italian cultures are alive and well, with many Italian cultural clubs in existence, providing services and space for the Italian community to cater events, socialize and use their ancestral languages with one another. Despite the success of Italian cultural life in Canada today, the Canadian government has not always been accepting of Italians. After Italian leader Benito Mussolini entered World War Two on the side of Germany and against Britain and France on June 10, 1940, the Canadian government, in a swift judgment fuelled by a war mentality that was driven by a 'fear of the other', labeled all Italians enemy aliens for seven years. One result was the devastation of the lives of many Italians in Canada, the majority of whom faithfully swore allegiances to their adoptive country.

Before the war, however, Mussolini was often lauded as a hero, highly praised by the leaders of countries throughout the world for his fascist regime beginning in 1922, which saw immediate results of law and order, an impressive feat of progress in the eyes of Canada's elite (Principe, 2000). Despite this, Canadian immigration policy made clear that Southern Europeans were far from desirable immigrants, and coupled with Mussolini's halt on emigration to racist countries that treated Italians as

inferior beings, Canada saw very little migration of Italians across its borders in this decade (Clifford, 1988). For Italians already residing in Canada, many saw fascism not as an important political ideology, but a form of newfound *italianità* (Italianess), which Italians of lower status in Canada (namely Southern Italians) readily adopted, serving to strengthen the reputation of fascism in Canada (Spada, 1969). However, by 1935, when Mussolini attacked Ethiopia, the world's view on Italy's dictator and fascism itself began to shift. Italian-Canadians began to feel pressure from Anglo-Canadians who were nervous of Mussolini's aggression and intentions (Ciccocelli, 1977). Many Italian groups, including the Italian Cultural Club of Windsor, Ontario, refused to support Mussolini's aggression in Ethiopia (Temelini, 1985). Other major Italian centers in cities throughout the country were steeped in *italianità* and respected the fascism that brought them together as a community. However, despite simultaneously maintaining allegiances to Canada, many Italian-Canadians found themselves facing the wrath of the Canadian government and their Anglo-Canadian neighbours after June 10, 1940 (Ramirez, 1988).

Immediately following Mussolini's declaration of war in 1940, the government launched an operation that sought control and surveillance over all Italian communities coast to coast. The Defense of Canada Regulations (DOCR) and general atmosphere of wartime hysteria allowed government

officials and RCMP to use excessive surveillance and force over all groups it found to be suspicious, without the usual peacetime constraints (Whitaker and Kealey, 2000). The use of such surveillance and force was a deep-seated fear of a fifth column within the United States and Canada, a threat to both nations' national security that would undermine the safety of the state. By order-in-council signed by Justice Minister Ernest LaPointe in 1940, all Italian Canadians naturalized after September 1<sup>st</sup>, 1929, were labeled enemy aliens and required to report to RCMP headquarters for finger printing, photographs and to report back monthly for routine check-in (Wood, 2002). Others were arrested and interrogated and of these men and women, some were released while others were sent to internment camps (Ramirez, 1988).

Prior to this, in anticipation of Italy's alliance with Germany, the RCMP had been preparing lists of Italian-Canadian individuals that they perceived may have represented a threat to national security. Arrests began immediately following Mussolini's declaration of war, throwing Italian-Canadian communities into disarray. Italian-Canadians quickly became unwanted and unwelcome on Canadian soil and any attempt to define themselves as an ethnic community was violently suppressed by Anglo-Canadian citizenry and authorities. During this period in Canadian history, Italians were neither Canadian nor Italian, as they could not, out of fear,

profess to belong to either group publicly (Wood, 2002) and would not be able to do so until the enemy alien designation was rescinded in 1947.

These events left many Italian-Canadians shocked and disoriented, unsure of the locations of their arrested loved ones and furthermore, unsure of the safety of themselves and their families. It is on this wartime hysteria that I have chosen to focus my attention. This paper is not a detailed account of the history of Italian Canadians during World War Two, nor does it aim to provide evidence for a causal relationship between linguistic suicide and Italophobic Canadian policies. Rather it serves as an introduction to the possibility of Italian linguistic suicide caused by the rapid ideological change in Canada from pro-fascist to anti-fascist ideologies and the generally Italophobic policies of the Canadian government, inflicted on the Italian-Canadian community less for political reasons than ethnic racialism (Principe, 1985). Currently, and to my knowledge, research on Italian linguistic suicide in Canada does not exist; therefore, I have put together a 'boxed-in' literature review that will aid researchers in easily accessing this topic. The difficulty in undertaking an area of study such as this stems from a dearth of literature. In order to overcome this potential difficulty, I have chosen to scan the literature on Italian-Canadians during World War Two and uncover the many details that, when assembled, may help to create a case for Italian linguistic suicide. While scanning the literature, I searched

for details that fit into the following themes: Early Canadian Italophobia, Canadian government policies and Italophobia, Anglo-Canadian Italophobic newspaper press, Anglo-Canadian Italophobia, Italian-Canadian informants, Italian-Canadian fear of persecution, the disruption of Italian organizations and social activities, and the disruption of Italian language classes. I believe these themes to represent a balanced combination of negative disruptions in the Italian-Canadian communities of Canada, sufficient to provide correlational evidence for the plausibility of Italian linguistic suicide during this period, leading to the question: could World War Two Italophobic policies inflicted by the Canadian government have negatively affected the intergenerational transmission of the Italian language in Canada, 1935-1947?

## Literature Review

### Early Canadian Italophobia

Ciccocelli (1977) states that throughout history, immigrant groups have often encountered hostility and negative response from host countries when choosing to relocate to foreign lands. Italians in Canada faced similar pressures long before Mussolini's attack on Ethiopia in 1935, albeit to a lesser degree. Some historians argue that Italophobia, the irrational fear and/or discrimination against Italian individuals, had been present in Canada for generations before World War Two, making the case that Italophobia has long been present in the moral fabric of Canadian society (Harney, 1985). Temelini (1985) argues that deep-seated racist thought within the Canadian government and citizenry was responsible for limited Italian immigration between 1901-1910. During this decade, the United States saw two million Italians cross into its borders, while in Canada, various restrictions against Southern Europeans allowed only 60,000 Italians during the same period. Similarly, Harney (1978) states that when reservists were returning home from fighting in World War One, Canada was not immune to xenophobia and racism, enacting legislation and regulations that made it difficult for Italians to immigrate in 1919, 1924 and again in 1929.

Due in part to the experience of xenophobia, Iacovetta and Perin (2000) argue that it is not surprising that Italians were so eager to live by



fascist principles because it was their way of countering the stereotypes that had permeated Canadian society for many years, well before fascism's introduction into Canadian society in 1925. Italian Canadians were well aware of their status in Canada as blackhanders, dirty foreigners and wetbacks, therefore, fascism's ability to bring together the Italian-Canadian community strengthened their presence to the point where they could proudly demonstrate their loyalties to both Italy and their host country. Pennacchio's (2000) paper regarding fascism in Toronto's Little Italy provides evidence of similar sentiments. Italians were disconnected from a pre-fascist Italian government that ignored them and were made to feel akin to foreigners in Toronto, therefore, fascism was the recognition they needed to display their worth as Italians while developing the courage necessary to profess their loyalties to Canada.

However, Liberati (2000) argues that even while fascism was enjoying a surge of popularity in Canada, the RCMP were using Italian informants as early as 1926 to spy on the community and report regularly about their activities in Montreal. There was respect for Mussolini's abilities as a leader, but this did not rid Canadian society of racialism, which provided a foundation for the intense Italophobia of the 1940's and the possibility of Italian linguistic suicide. Interestingly, Principe (1985) provides evidence of the Canadian government being harsh towards anti-fascists between 1925

and 1935. Authorities acted fiercely towards anti-fascists, considering an act against fascism to be a direct act against the Canadian government and Harney (1981) states that the anti-fascists in Toronto were looked upon as a cranky leftist minority. Change occurred only when Mussolini attacked Ethiopia in 1935, encouraging a shift in the minds of Anglo-Canadians regarding Mussolini's intentions, fascism and evidently Italian-Canadians themselves.

#### Canadian Government Policies and Italophobia

In the documentary *Barbed Wire and Mandolins*, Grana (1997) paints a picture of government officials and RCMP who, on June 10, 1940, were not focused only on arresting fascist agitators, but targeted anyone with Italian features, who frequently arrested without identification, because under the War Measures Act, RCMP powers were limitless in the name of national security. Soldiers were witnessed, at the Canadian National Exhibition grounds in Toronto, surrounding groups of Italian men waiting to be shipped to Camp Petawawa for internment, shouting racial slurs and taunting them with threats of being shot. In addition to this harassment, families were not told where their arrested loved ones were and some did not find out until three to four weeks later. These draconian treatments may have ignited the desire to escape such an intense backlash against one's ethnicity and limit the display of ethnic indicators and the Italian language.

Principe (2000), on the other hand, argues that all states have the right to self-defense, as long as the force that they use does not exceed the threat that it is facing. He believes Canada's internment of Italian Canadian fascists was a necessary means for national security, but that the internment should have been more selective and aimed at fascist leaders, instead of sending the public the wrong message, that they were interning Italians simply because they were Italian, lumping together fascists, anti-fascists and Mafiosi under one designation: enemy alien. From interviews with Italian-Canadians affected by the arrests, Grana (1997) argues that indeed the government did send the public the message that they were interning Italians simply because they were Italian and that this was exactly what they were doing. Many Italian-Canadians were not fearful about being arrested for fascist dealings per se, but due in part to their Italian ethnicity and the language that so easily informed the public of this. Furthermore, commenting on the confusion and fear facing the Italian communities in Canada, McBride (2000) states that none of the high-ranking women from the National Unity Party, a fascist organization, were interned, while many others were arrested for non-political, ethnic reasons. The lists containing the names of Italians for arrest also included non-fascist women who ran successful businesses and those afflicted with venereal diseases. Similarly, Zucchi (1994) and Ramirez (1989) continue along this line by stating that of the thousands of Italian-Canadians

who were interned, many did not pose much of a threat to the security of the Canadian state and did not deserve the mass searches, arrests, internment and seizure of properties and assets that occurred; a clear incentive for innocent victims to play down their ethnicity by reducing the use of the Italian language spoken and transmitted.

According to Ciccocelli (1977), Mitchell Hepburn, premiere of Ontario in 1940, purposefully spread rumours that he was informed by reliable sources that a well armed and organized Nazi and Fascist group was hiding in the United States, waiting for orders from Europe to attack Canada. Hepburn and his followers succeeded in convincing a portion of the Canadian public of this falsity, which in turn caused havoc in the Italian community by angered Anglo-Canadians. The Canadian government's Italophobic policies directly influenced the fear and hysteria of the Anglo-Canadian citizenry, causing constant duress on the Italian-Canadian community and effectively limiting the overt demonstration of Italian ethnicity and language.

Following the declaration of war on June 10, 1940, the Canadian government moved to deny habeas corpus, civil liberties, and ordered the arrest of over one thousand Italian men and women designated enemy aliens, including those who naturalized after September 1<sup>st</sup>, 1929. Due to the low levels of Italian immigration to Canada after 1929, it is possible to

correlate a decline of the Italian language with the enforced enemy alien status. Having resided in Canada for up to 11 years, some Italian-Canadians may have seen this turn of events as one directly related to their ethnicity and aimed to decrease the gaze of the government, RCMP and Anglo-Canadians by limiting the use of their ancestral language. In addition, the Canadian government took all affected Italian families off of city relief because they were a burden on the city's finances (Harney, 1978). Cumbo (2000) informs us that with the breadwinners arrested, family businesses were lost and all assets were legally frozen, leaving many Italian families destitute and without the financial means of survival. Further, Wood (2002) provides evidence that Italian-Canadians were removed from welfare programs, pension and unemployment insurance, while liquor licenses were rescinded to further undermine Italian businesses and the Italian-Canadian population in general. One could argue that in order to ensure the safety and future success of their children, Italian-Canadians, adults and children alike, might have made the conscious choice to limit the outward indicators of Italian ethnicity that was causing strife for so many, including limiting the use of the Italian language.

Bagnell (1989) paints an interesting picture that reinforces the notion that the Canadian government went too far by arresting and interning over one thousand Italian-Canadian men and women. Norman Robertson, chair

of the federal committee overseeing the potential internal threats list, had been collecting information and names of possible saboteurs and fascist agitators since September, 1939. In the report handed to government officials shortly before June 10, 1940, Robertson and his team stated that while some of the people on the list were fanatical members of fascism, most were not and that they recommended that it would not be in the public's best interest if arrests were carried out on the outbreak of war, unless prima facie evidence were provided against particular individuals. However, Ng (1976) takes an opposing viewpoint in this situation. Instead, she notes the expelling of all Italians from countries such as Egypt, Tunisia, Algeria and Morocco, stating that Italian-Canadians should be happy they were not forced out of the country by the thousands. She continues her point by arguing that no country would tolerate the presence of enemy aliens, especially those Italians who had sworn their allegiances to Italy. Regardless of who is correct in their interpretation of past events, it is clear that there is a link between Norman Robertson's denial of a strong fifth column in Canada and the confusion and frustration experienced by many innocent Italian-Canadians being arrested, questioned, fingerprinted and in some cases, interned. The confusion and frustration felt by the Italian-Canadian population correlates directly to the possibility of choosing to inhibit the use

of the Italian language out of fear of further exacerbating an already volatile situation.

Pennacchio (2000) provides the oath that was to be sworn at all Italian social clubs that were funded by Mussolini, regardless of their political intentions: "I swear to execute without discussion the orders of the Duce and to serve with all my strength and if necessary my blood the cause of the Fascist Revolution." Unfortunately, as Liberati (1989) discusses, membership in fascist sponsored cultural organizations, such as Fasci Italiani all'Estero, Dopolavoro and the Casa d'Italia, was often opportunistic rather than based on any true political loyalties. Duliani (1994), also believed that Canadian officials did what they had to do under the circumstances, but since Italian social clubs were specifically attacked, this may have been an indicator to the Italian-Canadian population to refrain from any outward expression of *italianità*, including the use of the Italian language.

Liberati (2000) contradicts himself by arguing that there was misinformation collected and used in the RCMP's lists of fascist agitators or those posing a threat to internal security. There was no way to cross check the information that was used and there was very little reliability, causing more fear, frustration and confusion among the Italian-Canadian people. However, he believes the RCMP did not act in an indiscriminate way, seeing as though only .44% of the Italian-Canadian community was interned and

based on the sizeable amount of information the RCMP possessed, the arrests were legitimate. Mazza (1994), in his introductory essay of Duliani's *The City Without Women*, notes historian Kirkconnel's contestations regarding this issue, concluding that the Canadian government failed in protecting its citizens against foreign influence. In comparison, Whitaker and Kealey (2000) believe that those rounded up for internment did constitute prima facie threats to Canada's national security, despite the constant pleadings of innocence. Liberati (2000) concurs, stating that there were many fascists in Canada who were willing to resort to acts of violence, therefore, they had to make the arrests to ensure there was no internal security threats. But as Harney points out (1981) the RCMP were inclusive in their definition of 'fascist' and that they did not detach 'Italian as an ethnicity' from 'fascist agitator.' Liberati believes that since the arrests were insignificant in number, the community had the ability to overcome this period in Canadian history, but Ramirez (1989) counters this by arguing that it was the immense post-war migration of Italians to Canada that allowed for the avoidance of irreparable damage to the greater Italian-Canadian community, including the reparation of a possible decline in the use and transmission of the Italian language during the war.

Di Sciascio-Andrews (2007) argues that the Canadian government specifically targeted the Italian community after June 10, 1940, on the basis of



selective racism against one, already disliked, ethnic group. She argues that Italy was only an ally in the Axis Powers, unlike Germany, the leading country in the enemy alliance. Therefore, why were the Germans not targeted at this particular time? She elaborates by accusing the Canadian government of intensifying Anglo-Canadian citizens' rapid aggression toward Italian store fronts, verbally and physically attacking Italian-Canadians on the streets and vandalizing private Italian homes. However, as the literature tells us, the government and the RCMP were not alone in their attacks on enemy aliens and played only one part in the encouragement of Italian linguistic suicide.

*Anglo-Canadian Italophobic Newspaper Press*

Canadian newspapers from Nova Scotia to British Columbia, including the Toronto Star, Telegram and Globe and Mail, began a campaign in 1935 against Mussolini's aggression in East Africa, which effectively instigated a turn in the Canadian public's compliant outlook on fascism and the greater Italian-Canadian population. Principe (2000) states that people from various political beliefs, anti-fascist and communist alike, rallied together against Mussolini and fascist Italy. This had serious repercussions for the Italian-Canadian community, which peaked on June 10, 1940. Liberati (2000) affirms that beginning in 1936, the Canadian government began compiling information about Italian-Canadian communities and

translating Italian newspapers across the country for analysis. Further evidence of these acts is put forth by Whitaker and Kealey (2000) who discuss both Canada and the United States' practice of translating Italian language newspapers and magazines. Harney (1978) continues this line of thought by discussing English Canadian Press' denouncement of Mussolini's aggression in East Africa and that by 1938, Italian-Canadians were feeling intense pressure, sensing the ultimatum that was soon to be forced upon them: whether their true allegiances lay with Italy the motherland or Canada the host country, a heavy burden that may have effected the position some took on the role that their ancestral language played in their everyday lives in Canada.

The Anglo-Canadian press was strategic in maintaining a strong sense of fear among the Anglo-Canadian citizenry regarding Italian-Canadians.

The Montreal Daily Star Newspaper from June 12, 1940 states:

a number of fascist homes yielded guns and ammunition, ranging from rifles, revolvers, automatic pistols, and sawed-off shotguns, while shortened baseball bats and other home-made black jacks were among the potential weapons of offence that were seized (Ciccocelli, 1977, pp 5).

Ciccocelli (1977) argues that by not disclosing how many homes in which weapons were found, this allowed for wild speculation among the Anglo-Canadian population of whether their Italian neighbours were harbouring weapons and other means of destruction, paying little attention to the legal

practice of owning weapons for hunting, which Canadians of all ethnicities often participated.

### Anglo-Canadian Italophobia

The conflict of allegiances would only grow stronger as Italian-Canadians began to witness Anglo-Canadian Italophobia with greater frequency and intensity, up to and beyond 1940. Ciccocelli (1977), Zucchi (1994) and Clifford (1988) documented the broken windows in grocery stores, particularly Sicilian fruit stores, as well as in civilian households, while verbal and physical abuse kept Italian families in constant fear. Furthermore, Ciccocelli states that for every reported case of damage to an Italian store, dozens of cases would go unreported, probably due to the fact that the Anglo-Canadian police forces would do little to stop such crimes. Wood (2002) and Harney (1978) continue this thought by arguing that the Anglo-Canadian civilian backlash was swift and intense, describing how Anglo-Canadians would throw bricks through Italian owned store fronts, alter all musical programs to exclude any Italian compositions, dismiss Italian employees from businesses solely based on ethnicity and to avoid purchasing products from Italian owned stores, leaving many families without any source of income. Clifford (1988) continues by stating that some Anglo-Canadians blacklisted Italian-Canadians, ensuring they would not be hired by any businesses in the community. Principe (2000) summarized the

situation by offering the viewpoint that Anglo-Canadians held the widespread belief that Italian-Canadian communities were merely an extension of Fascist Italy and this sentiment was in turn felt by the Italian-Canadian community, who may have resorted to remaining under the radar of their suspecting neighbours, not willing to draw any undeserved attention to themselves through outward displays of ethnicity and the use of the Italian language.

In his oral history on Italians in Montreal, Salvatore (1998) briefly states that school children were subject to overt discrimination by classmates and the general Anglo-Canadian public. deRoche (1999) quotes Anglo-Canadian insults toward Italian-Canadians, "we're gonna get your home...we're gonna starve you to death" (pp 102). This quote is directly related to Wood, Harney and Clifford's comments above, regarding blacklisting and the lack of money to pay for one's home and food for one's family. Serious threats such as these may have contributed to a decline in the use of the Italian language, because since it was Italian ethnicity that was spurring such hatred, it would have been a logical response to protecting oneself and family.

In his analysis of World War Two anti-fascist newspaper press, Principe (1985) describes an attempt by an Italian newspaper to unify all Italians, maintain their culture and endeavour to mend the severe

Italophobia that was sweeping the country. However, the paper failed to meet its goals; anti-Italianism was too strong and prevailed. In respect to the strength of Italophobia in Canada, Harney (1985) quotes a 1946 poll conducted by the Canadian Institute of Public Opinion which found that 25% wished they could keep Italians out of Canada, seeing Southern Europeans as unkempt and violent, using knives and other weapons as means to illegally acquiring what they sought, a description that many Italian-Canadians would likely not wish to have as the characterization of their ethnicity.

As discussed, Anglo-Canadian civilian Italophobia was swift and intense, especially among the country's eastern coal miners. Bagnell (1989) discusses the Cape Breton coal miners who chose not to work alongside Italians because of their enemy alien status, causing the mine to remain idle for six weeks. Miners cursed, swore and threatened the lives of any Italians that stepped near the work sites. However, due to the need for coal throughout the country, the Dominion Coal Company banned all Italians from working in the mines for nine months and resumed mining. Wood (2002) provides evidence that nearly 1,150 Canadian born workers refused to work alongside a mere 50 Italian miners. Stephenson (1999) argues that this was a traumatic experience for the Italian miners and their families; with no money and prospects for any other employment, Italian families were forced

to survive without income. Migliore (1999) contributes by stating that the miners used to beat the Italian-Canadians in the village, spreading fear throughout the community, ensuring that no one left their homes unescorted or after dark. A combination of physical and emotional abuse inflicted by Anglo-Canadian communities may have had the ability to inflict such intense fear on the Italian-Canadian community that suppression of the Italian language, an easily identified ethnic indicator, was the first step in ensuring the safety of oneself and family.

#### Italian-Canadian Informants

The fear of physical and verbal assault had a detrimental impact on the community. However, there is another piece to this story that potentially damaged the Italian-Canadian community from within, the RCMP and local police use of Italian informants. Temelini (1985) argues that the pro-fascist/anti-fascist divide in Canada created deep divisions in the already fragile Italian-Canadian community after Mussolini's campaign in Ethiopia, creating a fissure that would fracture the community in five short years. Principe (2000) argues that Anglo-Canadians and Italian-Canadians, obsessed with the possibility of a fifth column and provided the RCMP with information about enemy fascists, saboteurs and spies. Conversely, fascist groups intimidated, persecuted and blackmailed many Italian-Canadians who resisted the regime and its conduct, further fracturing the community.

Cumbo (2000) offers further analysis arguing that by spying on their own families, friends and neighbours, Italian-Canadian informants created deep fissures of intra-group conflict, calling this the lowest point in Italian-Canadian history. For example, the Hamilton police agreed to pay \$50 to anyone who supplied them with information that resulted in the arrest of fascist spies and saboteurs, an amount of money difficult for any family during this period to ignore.

Recounting Italian-Canadian narratives, Ramirez (1988) discusses the fear felt by the community being due to the fact that no charges were ever provided by the RCMP; a legal aspect of the DOCR and War Measures Act, authorities merely acted on tips by anonymous Italian/ Anglo-Canadian informants, which created a climate of fear, apprehension and suspicion, leaving a crippling effect on the entire Italian-Canadian community. Despite this hardship, Whittaker and Kealey (2000) argue that Italian-Canadian informants yielded increasingly detailed reports and because willing collaboration with the RCMP was so widespread, this may have reflected growing anti-fascist sentiment of the time. They go on to say that it is hard to imagine an RCMP force, without the necessary information, to have carried out such a plan and that most of those arrested were likely threats to Canada's internal security. However, Ciccocelli (1977) argues that the fear of reprisal following the declaration of war was fear enough to cause Italian-

Canadians to turn on one another and not necessarily a show of rising anti-fascism in Canada. Cumbo (2000) provides contrary evidence to Whittaker and Kealey, stating that of the 38 fascist officials of the Sons of Italy in Hamilton, only 13 were arrested and some were let out early, fuelling further rumours in the community of underhanded contacts and unsavoury dealings. Fox (2000) continues with this tone by stating that there were two forms of betrayal leading to the fear and disjuncture of the Italian American community, betrayal from the government that was meant to protect them and betrayal from the community that was supposed to support them. "Vigilantism became the unseemly offspring of panic" (pp. 409) and coupled with the very real fear of community informants, Italian-Canadians likely resorted to drastic measures of ethnic and language suppression.

In Harney's paper on Italophobia (1985) he discusses J.S. Woodsworth's comments that argue the discussion of discrimination against Italians to be the same in Canada as the United States when he says, "change the word American to Canadian and it applies to this side of the line as well as the other" (pp. 24). With this in mind, Fox (2000), during an interview with one Alessandro Baccari Jr., states that Italian-American informants gave information about their own friends and family, making for many innocent victims. However, as the hysteria of a fifth column became more severe and intense, the United States government began to assume that the best practice



during this time of war would be to intern all Italians and even the Italian-American informers themselves became wary of their unstable position in society.

McBride (2000) argues that Anglo-Canadians and Italian-Canadians were both ready to exploit internment in order to benefit their own personal gains. In an interview with one Maria Pressello, she agreed, stating she had never made a pro-fascist statement in her life, nor could there have been any evidence that she was part of a fascist group or a fascist leader, therefore, who informed on her and why? Maria was interned for one year. To comment further, Grana's (1997) interviews with Italian families affected during the war contribute to our understanding of people such as Maria Pressello's case. One woman noted that the only mistake her father made was being part of the fascist funded social club, the Son's of Italy.

Ciccocelli (1977) states that whether or not the RCMP did arrest without verifying informants' information is difficult to uncover, but the fear of retaliation by Anglo-Canadians was enough impetus to turn on their own brothers and sisters. Cumbo (2000) says that "Italians were too terrified to speak or to trust anyone; say the wrong thing to the wrong person and you could be next" (pp. 107). As discussed earlier, Liberati (1989) argues that membership in Italian social clubs were for social reasons, rarely due to any strong political affiliations. Despite this, membership in such clubs was a

reason for informing and eventual internment. Ramirez (1989) discusses *campanilismo* (pride in one's own village or regional origin) as being an early phenomenon in Italian-Canadian settlements and communities. He argues that *campanilismo* may be why certain people informed on their own communities and friends. The declaration of war in 1940 exacerbated the already deep divisions of a community steeped in *campanilismo* and fractured by a pro-fascist/anti-fascist divide. Principe (1985) argues that when Hitler and Stalin attacked Poland in 1939, many Italian groups and anti-fascist newspapers aligned themselves with the communist side of the capitalist war, further dividing the Italian community and making it susceptible to increased separation and hardship in the years to come.

So effective was the quick response of the RCMP and tips from Italian-Canadian informants that Ciccocelli (1977) describes a situation where within hours of receiving the news of Mussolini's declaration of war with Germany on June 10, 1940, Dr. Sansone, a medical physician in Montreal, was arrested while making a house call to a local patient. Cumbo (2000) sums up the general atmosphere of the Italian-Canadian community in Hamilton, Ontario at this time by quoting a local Anglo-Canadian man, "the Italian community did not come together in this time of crisis" (pp. 107). The intense fear of informants that permeated the lives of many Italian-Canadians during this time provides strong possibility for the decision to stop speaking the Italian

language and to ensure one's children do not speak the language outside of the home, or at all. Furthermore, the possibility of Anglo-Canadians assuming Italian-Canadian ties to fascism or a fifth column based solely on the use of the Italian language may have been fear enough to curtail the use of one's natal tongue. In present day Hamilton, there are still bitter feelings lingering with many of the older Italians who went through this dark period of Italian-Canadian history. Rivalries still exist between men and women who informed on friends and family to obtain revenge, settle a debt or rid a worthy competitor for means of attaining a job (Cumbo, 2000).

#### *Italian-Canadian Fear of Persecution*

As shown, Italian-Canadian and Anglo-Canadian informants helped create a sense of fear and apprehension throughout the Italian-Canadian community that may have contributed to a decline in the use of the Italian language. Unsure of who to trust, the community resorted to hiding their culture in fear of arrest, internment, being informed upon, and the safety of their children and families. Fearful of the many hostile Anglo-Canadians, Italian-Canadian families often did their best to hide their Italian language and ethnicity, or at least draw as little attention to it as possible. In an interview with Grana (1997), members of the Italian community discussed their difficulty fitting into Anglo-Canadian neighbourhoods. A month after one respondent's husband was sent to Petawawa, she began receiving letters

from him, however, the envelopes were purposefully black with 'POW' stamped on the front. Bringing unwanted attention to the family's Italian ethnicity and ties to an interned enemy alien and fearing backlash from the community, the family moved eight times in 2.5 years, drastic measures that likely would have followed the suppression of outward Italian indicators and languages. Cumbo (2000) argues that these events left indelible marks on the Italian-Canadian community and are still fresh in many people's memories. Slogans such as 'down with the jackals' that were printed in daily newspapers in reference to the Italian Canadian community, have yet to be forgotten according to Harney (1978).

Clifford (1988) argues that many Italian-Canadians lied about their ethnic origin in the 1941 census. The census shows 112,625 people admitted to being 'Italian', but historians suspect that the numbers might have been much higher. Clifford offers another interesting analysis of the Italian-Canadian community in 1941. He argues that the picture of the community that emerges at this time in Canadian history is one of considerable assimilation, especially regarding language spoken, intermarriages, rates of naturalization and even income levels. By the end of 1947, only 2% could not converse in English or French and while 64% of all foreign born individuals had acquired citizenship by this point, the Italian community maintained an impressive 81%. He goes on to argue that if it were not for the massive post-

war movement of Italians to Canada, "Italians would have melted completely into the Canadian mosaic and would most likely not be an identifiable ethnic group today" (pp. 29). Whether this exemplifies a community fearful of being ostracized in a repressive host environment or merely a minority culture heavily influenced by a majority culture, it at least questions the speed at which the Italian-Canadian community was assimilating, which in turn may support the possibility of linguistic suicide.

As arrests, abductions and internments continued for weeks following June 10, 1940, worry and disillusionment turned to fear. Ramirez (1988) depicts the fear that those arrested and their families felt for their safety and even their lives. When a group of arrested Italians were lined up at the Windsor train station en route to Camp Petawawa, Anglo-Canadians gathered and could be heard shouting, "Kill them! Shoot them...these traitors of Canada" (pp. 74). In an interview conducted by Ramirez, one of the respondents who was sent to Petawawa and faced the verbal insults, said this was the worst moment of his life; regarding the insults, he wrote, "I really wept" (pp. 74).

Ciccocelli (1977) continues by elaborating on the necessary means by which Italian families felt they must protect themselves. Many played down their ethnic Italian heritage, changing their first and last names and claiming Anglo-Saxon heritage. Desperate to support their families, Harney (1985)

states that Italian-Canadians would change their names and their religion in order to be eligible to work in large Protestant owned department stores in downtown Toronto. In Hamilton, Ontario, Cumbo (2000) deduces that despite a lack of physical assault on Italian owned store windows, the Italian-Canadian community feared for their family's safety and livelihood, especially after losing their jobs due to their Italian names. There was widespread rumour in Hamilton that the RCMP was paying \$25-\$50 for informants to divulge information and despite any factual evidence of this occurring, the rumours fuelled suspicion and heightened the level of fear in which the community was currently living. It is possible to correlate the levels of fear and name changes to a decline in the use of the Italian language, because it is unlikely that Italian-Canadians would have initiated protective measures such as the Anglicization of names, meanwhile continuing to speak Italian in public.

As discussed, with the dismantling of many Italian language newspapers, Ramirez (1988) states that Italian families turned to the English language press in order to remain current on events in the city and throughout the country. However, the community was confronted with newspaper slogans that read, "Mopping up of Italians is Started," sending the Italian-Canadian communities strong messages of their worth and place in Canadian society. Grana (1999) puts into perspective the fear of reprisal,

verbal and physical abuse that many Italian-Canadians experienced. In interviews with Italian-Canadians who lived through the war in Canada, Grana described how a young girl was denied pierced ears by her mother because they looked too Italian. None of the young Anglo-Canadian girls had their ears pierced and this family wanted their children to fit in with the Anglo children. Further still, mothers would instruct their children not to tell the truth in regards to what they ate at home. If asked, they were not to say pasta or spaghetti, so as to give away their Italian heritage. One man went as far as removing all Italian ornaments, pictures of the Pope and Madonna, nativity scene, and all of his homemade wine from the household. In place of these ethnic indicators, he hung a large photo of the Royal Family on his living room wall, in order to protect his family from any police or Italian/ Anglo-Canadian informants who might be suspicious of his allegiances to Canada. Though it is rarely discussed in the literature, the length some Italian-Canadian families went to hide their ethnicity speaks directly to the possibility of Italian linguistic suicide during this time. It is very likely, for example, that the family discussed above would have limited the use of their ancestral language and possibly halted the transmission to their daughter out of fear for her safety and future prospects.

### Disruption of Italian Organizations and Social Activities

Similarly, the Canadian government's intense campaign against fascism, coupled with the fear of expressing one's Italian identity and fear of informants, created an environment that was often free of any Italian cultural associations and social gatherings and therefore, a limited forum from which to practice and converse in the Italian language. Ramirez (1988) states that Italian-Canadian informants played a major part in crippling the social and religious functions, festivals and public Italian activities that kept the community together and supportive, free to speak their native tongue and enjoy their friends and families. Wood (2002) describes the situation before 1940 by stating that women were the ones who kept the community close, free to speak Italian and organize for community dances, picnics and religious events. Wood states that the men would occasionally gather for bocce games, speaking Italian and socializing in small groups, but it was the women who ensured the maintenance of Italian culture, food, dress and language. She continues by arguing that on June 10, 1940, everything changed; all Italian clubs, lodges and mutual aids were closed down, disrupting the social dimension of Italian life. Pennacchio (2000) states that when the Casa d'Italia was forcibly shut down by the Canadian government, all clubs housed underneath this umbrella organization were deemed illegal and "collapsed like a house of cards" (pp. 66). Cumbo (1985) continues by



arguing that the 1935 attack on Ethiopia, the Axis Pact of 1938 and Italy's declaration of war in 1940, ended all Italian organizational life in Hamilton, Ontario. Even after the release of internees years later, organizational life in the community did not resume until after 1950 with the new wave of Italian immigrants to Canada.

Cumbo (2000) describes how Italian-Canadian children were also affected by the absence of social life within their community. Prior to 1940, there were many Italian sports groups, theater groups, and language classes offered to Italian youth in Canada that were sponsored by the Italian government. Pennacchio (2000) describes those students with the best sports and language performances being sent to Cortina d'Ampezzo, Italy to participate in a *bagno d'italianita* (immersion in Italianess). Between 1934-1939, 500 Italian children across Canada took part in the opportunity in Italy, while thousands more took part in the camps on Canadian soil. However, in 1940, the Canadian government was suspicious of these organizations and immediately shut them down, leaving Italian-Canadian children with few social activities with which to participate. The negative impact this may have had on Italian youths' abilities and desires to practice and maintain their ancestral language could have been lasting. Having only parents and grandparents with which to speak and practice Italian, it is likely that the effect the Canadian government had on Italian organizational life may have

been detrimental to the transmission and maintenance of the Italian language during this time, therefore disrupting the transmission to future generations.

### *Disruption of Italian Language Classes*

The previous themes were used to organize arguments and evidence that would provide correlational support to the main theme of Italian linguistic suicide. The Italian language during this time could have been affected by the many themes discussed above, leading to an overall decline in its use and transmission, but for those families who feared for their safety and hid their nationality from the rest of the community, the use of the Italian language and all of its dialects was easily avoidable, unless choosing to converse in private. To begin, Cumbo (2000) describes how municipal officials of Hamilton, Ontario hung placards throughout the city that read, 'English language only to be spoken,' clearly exemplifying the Italophobic tendencies of government officials towards the ancestral languages of enemy aliens. Ciccocelli (1977) states that German and Italian priests refrained from conducting their masses in German and Italian as of June 10, 1940, choosing to protect themselves and their congregation from further exploitation of the RCMP and the Anglo-Canadian citizenry. Grana's interviews (1997) tell a similar story, where priests were eventually banned from conducting mass in Italian, effectively halting yet another forum for Italian language conversational practice. The Italian-Canadian community feared to speak

their ancestral language, aware that Anglo-Canadian citizens would assume their membership in a fifth column, plotting and undermining Canada's internal security.

The RCMP and many Anglo-Canadians were fearful of an internal fifth column and therefore, according to Liberati (2000), paid extra attention and devoted special surveillance to all Italian language schools and special classes across Canada. There was concern that Italian youth were being educated secretly in the ways of fascism and not in the British democratic tradition, but through Italian government subsidized teachers and text books. As Liberati describes, the fundamental problem concerning the Canadian government was political, not the existence of a fifth column. However, there was extensive focus on schoolchildren, as Temelini (1985) argues, and Italian language schools in Windsor, Ontario were closed immediately. Large investigations found that the Windsor Italian schools were part of a program of fascist indoctrination, especially regarding the patriotic cartoon depictions found in the fascist funded text books, causing an uproar throughout the city, further alienating the Italian-Canadian community from its ancestral language, many of whom might not have been aware of any wrongdoing.

Pennacchio (2000) and Fox (2000) argue that in Toronto and San Francisco, teachers were literate members of the Italian community and

concur that the texts funded by the Italian government did depict patriotic illustrations of fascism. In 1938-39, over 600 students were taking part in Italian language programs, occurring throughout Toronto in schools and people's homes. Italian language schools were closed immediately following the outbreak of war in Toronto, Windsor and Hamilton, according to Principe (2000), who argues that the anti-fascist newspaper, *Il Lavoratore*, led an attack on Italian language schools, further dividing the Italian-Canadian community and bringing the Italian language to the forefront of controversy. According to Cumbo (2000), on the day of the outbreak of war, frightened parents in Hamilton, Ontario gathered Italian language, spelling, grammar, and history texts and burnt them in their fireplaces, acts of fear that clearly show the negative connection between speakers of the Italian language and supposed participation in fifth column fascist organizations.

Despite a dearth of literature dealing specifically with the effects of Italophobia on Italian language retention during World War Two, it is possible to make a connection to the Italian-Canadian literature that does exist. For example, Cumbo (2000) states that people noticed a marked increase in the use of the English language in the years following 1940 in Hamilton, especially by young children; "even old fellows...who probably only speak four or five words of English a day, became quite fluent speaking English among themselves" (pp. 106). By using the themes mentioned

above, one may choose to accept the correlation of a general fear of persecution by one's citizenry and government and linguistic suicide, in particular, halting the transmission of the Italian language to one's children. However, more research is needed in this area if a strong conclusion is to be made. The aim of this review was to amass a literature of Italian-Canadian historical essays regarding World War Two, of various topics and focuses, and begin to build a structure that will help support further research regarding the Canadian government's Italophobic policies inhibiting the free use of the Italian language and Italian linguistic suicide.

## Linguistic Suicide and Other Theoretical Perspectives

Before discussing the relatively under-researched topic of linguistic suicide, it is important to note that there are many varying and overlapping definitions contained under the overarching discipline that seeks to understand the constantly changing nature of languages. In his seminal article introducing the term 'language suicide,' Denison (1977) discusses the problem of definition, which over the years has led to much confusion among varying scholars with regards to the similarities and differences of terminology such as language loss, language death, language change, language transfer, language replacement, language assimilation, language shift, language attrition, language genocide, language suicide, language extinction, linguicide, etc. Despite overlapping definitions, I am concerned only with language suicide and its more modern terminology, linguistic suicide.

Denison uses language suicide as a term to argue that it is not languages that live and die, but the people or speech communities that use them who live and die. It is this very understanding of agency that has convinced Beck and Lam (2008) to update the term to linguistic suicide. They argue that the term language suicide gives agency to the language itself, independent of the speaker, and that linguistic suicide better reflects the agency of the individual speaker and/or speech community: "...a social

process that is the net result of the behaviour of individual speakers as willful agents within a speech community” (pp 5). Therefore, linguistic suicide is the older generation’s willful interruption of a language to the younger generation for specific reasons. Unlike the unfortunate Canadian case of Aboriginal languages, where government policy specifically interrupted the transmission of Aboriginal languages from one generation to the other, certain Italian-Canadians in the 1940’s may have felt the pressure of Italophobic policies imposed by the Canadian government and made the choice to protect themselves and their children by ceasing the transmission of Italian and its various dialects (Beck and Lam, 2008).

To describe the possibility of a language shift among Italian-Canadians during World War Two would not be unfounded, because the very definition of the term, “the process by which minority language groups are assimilated to the...language majority”, is very plausible (Veltman, 1983, pp 1). However, language shift is often described as a process induced by language contact, which is the contact of two languages where one takes an inferior position to a more dominant or well established language gradually over a period of generations. In the case of Italian-Canadians during World War Two, it is possible that such a phenomenon might have occurred, but the reason I have chosen to focus on the concept of linguistic suicide is due to the fact that if Italian-Canadian citizens chose to limit their use of the Italian

language and its dialects, they made the abrupt and conscious decision to do so encouraged by coercive government policy, not a naturally occurring organic process that is often witnessed in socio-linguistic research dealing with natural language contact, multilingualism and an eventual shift (Kuncha and Bathula, 2004).

Studies show that many immigrant parents feel that by teaching their children their own mother tongue, they are providing them with an asset that will be with them throughout their lifetime. Despite the obvious cultural values provided through maintaining ancestral languages, research studies are offering further benefits, such as socio-economic and academic success, as well as a strong identity and improved social skills (Turcotte, 2006). But what events and pressures encourage the older generation to deem the aforementioned values less important and stem the transmission of their ancestral language to the younger generation?

The principle reasons for linguistic suicide as seen in the literature are often due to the low prestige and status of the ancestral language and concern for the children's future fluency of the dominant language. Denison (1977) argues that language death and language suicide are both social and psychological, where the loss of language is in direct relation to a loss of speakers and if the speakers have experienced some form of trauma, it is consequential that they may cease to transmit their ancestral language to



their children for reasons of functional economy. The first phase of language loss is the interruption of transmission by the older generation to the younger, therefore, it is interesting to speculate what would have happened to the Italian language in Canada if there was not such a successful post-war emigration from Italy (Denison, 1977).

Children often neglect to learn or use ancestral languages as they grow older, not only because of a lack of prestige, but because they are attached to older ways of life, lower standards of living and economic poverty that often comes with being an excluded minority group (Sasse, 1992). If this is true, coupled with the many disturbing accounts in the previous literature review, then many Italian-Canadian children might see their ancestral language as a painful memory of their and their parents' past. Furthermore, with a ban of the Italian language in places such as Hamilton, Ontario (as discussed earlier) it is possible that there were very few places for young children to practice their ancestral languages. Jones (1996) argues that this is one of the main reasons that minority languages do not survive; speaking with parents and grand-parents alone is often not enough to maintain a minority language because the draw from the socially, and often economically, superior majority language is much too strong.

There are two categories that must be present for a language to fall out of use and die: the environment, including political, historical, economic

and linguistic issues, and the speech community itself, with its attitudes, strategies and patterns of language use (Brenzinger and Dimmendaal, 1993). If we are to assume the first level affects the second, then we could argue that with the fear of arrest, internment and abuse by Anglo-Canadians and state repression, some of the Italian-Canadian speech community could have ceased to use the Italian language in direct response to the political situation in Canada at the time. The changes within a speech community must always be understood in relation to outside environmental changes (Sasse, 1992). There is no proof that the Italian language would have ceased to exist in Canada were it not for second wave post-war immigration; however, we can assume that Brenzinger and Dimmendaal's model relating to language death has some merit with regards to the possibility of Italian linguistic suicide during World War Two when coercive factors are present to speed up the transition from multilingualism to full language shift. They use the term 'radical death' to describe a community that, due to severe political repression, stops speaking their indigenous language as a form of self-defense. It can not be proven that this would have happened over the next generation of Italians in Canada without post-war immigration, but it seems that in terms of the negative effects that internment had on the Italian-Canadian community, this very well could have been a possibility.

Further to this model, Beck and Lam (2008) provide two criteria that can also be used for understanding the possibility of Italian linguistic suicide in Canada during World War Two. First, the prestige and prejudice of the majority and minority language provide strong impetus for parents to commit linguistic suicide. A strong desire for their children to succeed in school and the greater community is often a key factor in halting the transmission of a minority ancestral language. In extreme cases, when a language is deemed inferior and spoken by enemy aliens –as was the case for Italian Canadians – the older generation will often make the choice to focus the younger generation on learning the majority language, due to the generally negative view of the minority language in the greater community. Secondly, if the minority language is associated with old world views, pre-industrial living styles and hard times, parents will shield their children from the language to free them from a world of poverty, shame, and exclusion; a utilitarian view that will see their children function in the greater society. For Italian-Canadians during World War Two, it is plausible to argue that the older generation made the conscious decision to speak English at home because the fear of repression and discrimination were strongly present in many of their lives.

Psychological theories also play a role in understanding linguistic suicide and language attrition, but more specifically, the role that the

children may have played in this process. In his literature review on theories of forgetting and language attrition, Ecke (2004) offers the theories of suppression, repression and decay to try to explain reasons for language loss. Originating in the area of psychoanalysis, repression and suppression are used to describe a human defense mechanism where a language can be suppressed or repressed, the difference lying in the ability of a repressed language to be re-accessed, an impossibility for a suppressed language. Ecke argues that immigrant children tend to give up their ancestral language more readily and completely than adults, due to a strong desire to assimilate with peers and teachers, especially if the minority language is of low ethnic status. Over the five years of World War Two, it is plausible to argue that parents who ceased transmission of the Italian language to their children during this time could have had a lifelong effect on their children's abilities or desires to learn the ancestral language. Despite their previous knowledge of the language or the parent's choice to resume speaking Italian after the end of the war and the rescinding of the enemy alien status, Italian-Canadian children in this situation may have suppressed or repressed their abilities at speaking Italian in place of a desire to assimilate with peers and teachers.

In the decay theory of language attrition, it is assumed that information decays or declines in the memory over time through lack of use. Further still, contact with dominant languages contributes to the decay of a

minority language. We can, therefore, argue that children whose parents ceased the transmission of the Italian language might be examples of the decay theory of language attrition. With the foreclosure of Italian language schools, Italian sports programs and a general dissuasion for speaking Italian in public in Canada during the war, it is plausible that Italian-Canadian children would have been negatively affected by the Italophobic policies of the Canadian government and susceptible to a decay of the Italian language or dialect, failing to solidify a proficiency in their ancestral language before the events of 1940; however, this theory must also take into account the age of the children in question and theories on language acquisition and puberty (Ecke, 2004).

Lastly, a further theory regarding education levels must also be considered when assessing the response of Italian linguistic suicide among Italian-Canadians during World War Two. Jaspaert, Koen and Sjaak Kroon (1987) argue that the level of education held by the older generation will affect the level of language loss that occurs in times of difficulty. They argue the possibility that people with lower levels of education do not have the tools necessary to maintain their ancestral language, such as proficiency in reading and writing while simultaneously learning the majority language, and ability to travel back and forth to the home country. While there were many regions of Italy represented in Canada before and during World War

Two, a large percentage were made up of poor Southern Italian farmers with very little education, coming to Canada in search of a better life. It is possible that education levels may have played a role in the retention levels of the Italian language during this difficult time, but this explanation requires further study of the educational levels and dialects of the various regions of Italy represented in Canada during the War.

Although linguistic suicide is a rare topic of interest in language studies today, it deserves attention because "it is likely no less common on the world stage and is probably typical of many situations in which speakers of a minority language perceive, rightly or wrongly, that the shift to the dominant language is in the short-term best interests of the next generation" (Beck and Lam, 2008, pg 11).

## Methodology and the Use of Oral Histories

The experiences of Italian-Canadians during World War Two are of great interest to me. Not only do their life stories provide me with the information necessary to bring a sense of reality and humanism to the literature, but their stories deserve to be heard because it is these people who created and experienced the very history in which I am presently interested (Thompson, 2006). Italian-Canadians who lived through the War are roughly 70-95+ years old today and in order to recount the histories of the nonhegemonic classes of this time, researchers must act quickly in order to document the stories of those who suffered through the Italophobia that was so widespread throughout the country. The major aim of this paper was to organize a body of World War Two literature regarding Italian-Canadians in order to try and make a case for the possibility of Italian linguistic suicide. Further to this, I have decided to conduct three interviews in order to show how some Italian-Canadians' personal histories and stories fit into the wider literature, because often, it is the nonhegemonic classes that are missing from the wider historical picture.

The focus of history as a discipline has until recently centered primarily on the documentation of the struggle for power (Thompson, 2006). It is frequently the case that historical writing of this nature often neglected the pertinent role that ordinary people played in past events and periods of

history. The reason for this often stems from the fact that historians themselves were from the governing classes and, therefore, detailed what they deemed to be the most important of events (Thompson, 2006). For that reason, Portelli (2006) argues that oral sources are of vital importance today in order to create a richer documentation of historical events and past eras.

Oral histories are vital to the historical literature because they provide a voice to anyone who has witnessed and lived through specific events important to the research in question. They provide a glimpse into personal lives, work, families, and communities, adding a richness and element of human life that is often missing from the traditional repertoire. Different from autobiographies, where the individual in question is often someone of political importance, oral historians have greater opportunity to introduce new evidence and history from the bottom up. By doing so, oral and working class historians are challenging the often accepted histories of historians past, recognizing those who have for so long gone unrecognized and are making the process of historical writing more democratic, altering the very writing of history itself (Thompson, 2006; Portelli, 2006). However, these changes mean that historical work is never complete; the nature of the sources means there are always more histories and herstories to discover. By using oral history techniques, historians can incorporate the stories of those whose histories have been ignored or lost over the years due to their neglect



and/or perceived insignificance and contribute to the gathering of rich life stories (Portelli, 2006).

Oral histories allow the community in question the opportunity to share its voice and its personal stories with researchers, and all communities with stories to share should be afforded such opportunities. Italian-Canadians deserve the right to have their personal stories heard in regards to the period of fear and uncertainty through which they might have lived during World War Two and their narratives will contribute to an understanding of the abovementioned themes and their contributions to linguistic suicide and government-induced Italian language decline. Rather than having the Italian community in Canada served a streamlined version of the events that occurred some 70 years ago, they deserve the entire picture to be utilized in academic historical research, which would include all of the evidence and interpretations that are available. Iacovetta and Ventresca (2000) argue that Italian-Canadians must be given the opportunity to informally reflect and debate on how best to understand this period of history without resorting to written political histories that neither touch upon nor attempt to understand the personal reflections that make up the other half of this historical tale.

In order to ensure this research paper was well rounded in its approach, I felt it necessary to conduct three interviews that would begin to

tell the story of some Italian-Canadians during World War Two relating to ancestral language. In order to accomplish this, I created a questionnaire with 18 open-ended questions that would allow the research participants to openly discuss their lives according to the themes divided in the literature review. My choice of qualitative data analysis technique was thematic analysis because I believe it to be the most efficient way to situate the data with the literature. In order to best connect the interviews to the literature, I utilized most of the themes used in the review in order to easily correlate the experiences of the respondents with as much of the material from the review as possible. Some new sub-themes developed upon initial analysis of the data and have been added into the thematic framework of the following section, while conversely, some of the information from the review did not come up in any meaningful way in the interviews.

My fieldwork was conducted between July 20<sup>th</sup> and August 12<sup>th</sup>, 2009 in Toronto, Ontario. I interviewed two women and one man. All of the interviews were conducted by the author in English, without the use of translators or interpreters.

## Interviews

My decision to conduct only three interviews stems from the overall purpose of this paper. In order to provide future researchers with a body of literature from which to launch their own similar interests, I included a limited number of oral histories that would help to situate the literature used in the review and offer a human perspective that can better illustrate the story of Italian-Canadians during the War. The respondents' stories will aid in supplementing the previous correlational evidence provided for both the possibility of Italian language decline caused by Italophobic government policies and Italian linguistic suicide.

Two women and one man agreed to discuss various aspects of their lives in the 1930's and 1940's. Mrs. A is 78 years old, born in Windsor, Ontario, speaks fluent Trevisani and standard Italian; Mrs. B is 94 years old and was born in Abruzzo, Italy, immigrating to Canada in 1922, speaking fluent Abruzzo and standard Italian; and Mr. C is 77 years old and was born in Kingston, Ontario, speaking no Italian, nor the Sicilian dialect spoken by his parents. The confidentiality of all three research participants is protected and their first and/or last name does not correspond in any way to the pseudonyms used in this paper. All three research participants were eager to discuss relevant aspects of their lives according to my research, showing me pictures, newspaper articles, letters and sharing many enlightening

stories. Despite coming from many different walks of life and experiences, the information provided by the respondents was very similar to some aspects of the literature discussed previously in the review.

### Early Canadian Life

June 10, 1940 changed the lives of many Italian-Canadians, but before Mussolini's declaration of war, all three respondents agreed that life before the war was calm and relatively peaceful. Despite being contrary to the information provided in the literature review, of the many similarities in the responses of the three research participants, none are as similar as their portrayal of life before the war. Mr. C describes the atmosphere for Italians by stating:

the Italians got more known as a race when the war started, but before that, immigrants were coming in and opening businesses and they were Italian...my grandfather opened a grocery store in Kingston, Ontario...the farmers would come in and joke around with my grandfather about 'this spaghetti stuff'...but one day he showed them some orzo and told them it was a seed and they planted it and came back weeks later and said 'it's not growing' to which my grandfather replied 'oh you didn't plant it deep enough.' They thought they would come in and play jokes on the foreigner, but the foreigner was one step ahead of them. He amassed quite a fortune in property, his fruit store was booming and they (properties) were all paid off and clear, so he was doing well, even as an Italian foreigner. They (Italians) all did well...they had their own stores and they all did well.

Mr. C's description of life before June 10, 1940 is important because it gives us an example of the status Italian foreigners occupied in Canadian society.

Although their social status was not on par with Anglo-Canadian, the wealth and ownership of business is a good indication that some Italians were functioning smoothly in Anglo-Canadian society, irrespective of ethnic origin and likely speaking their ancestral languages and displaying outward signs of ethnicity without fear of reprisal. Furthermore, Mr. C's recount of his grandfather's practical joke on the Anglo-Canadian farmers is an important indicator that Italians, despite being teased about 'this spaghetti stuff', were in a position where the comfort level with Anglo-Canadian neighbours was quite high and practical jokes were an acceptable form of friendly camaraderie and connections between the Italian-Canadian and Anglo-Canadian communities.

Mrs. A and Mrs. B provided similar comments, stating that "it (Italian community) was a very strong community, nothing really made you feel different" and "everything was peaceful and fine...there were few reasons to be fearful or ashamed of your Italian ethnicity." Therefore, there is disconnect between the literature and the respondents description of life pre-1940 in Canada. It is possible that, aware the topic of my research and ready to discuss the hardships they may have faced, the respondents described their lives pre-1940 in direct comparison to post June 10, 1940. There also exists the possibility that the milder form of Italophobia that existed in Canada pre-1940 did not specifically affect my research participants in any

meaningful way, therefore responding positively to their and their family's time spent in Canada up until Mussolini's declaration of war.

### Canadian Government Policies and Italophobia

Any positive discussions drastically shifted as June 10, 1940 became the topic of the interview. Mrs. A describes June 11<sup>th</sup>, 1940 in great detail as it is a day she will never forget. Upon arriving home from primary school, she found her father missing from their Windsor, Ontario home and a group of RCMP searching through her family's belongings. She recalls the fear she felt as she watched these strange men rifle through their cupboards and closets, asking her mother where her father was and receiving no answer, unaware that she would not know of his whereabouts for three weeks. Mrs. A recounted the embarrassment in the eyes of the RCMP when they discovered the arm band her father wore one year previous when he was chosen to be a special guard for the royal visit of King George and Queen Elizabeth. She recounts, "I remember standing on my mom's shoulders in order to see my Dad." Mrs. A showed me the very arm band her father wore as a special guard, safely stored in protective plastic. Three weeks after the search of their home, Mrs. A and her family still did not know the whereabouts of her father, until they happened across a picture of him lined up with other men on their way to Camp Petawawa in the local newspaper. Mrs. A would not see her father again for 8 months, but this story illustrates

the quickness and intensity of the arrest and seizure of Italian-Canadian civilians. Not one year earlier, Italian-Canadians were proudly participating in important national events, foreshadowing the multiculturalism that was to become one of Canada's most important international claims to fame.

Mrs. B did not experience the effects of internment as immediately as Mrs. A. However, she does describe the arrests and internments as fearful times for the Italian-Canadian community. She recalls close male friends being arrested while at work, in the middle of the night and with no information or explanations given, often arrested on grounds of Italian features and ancestral names in regards to the limitless powers of the RCMP under the DOCR. She believes to this day that the RCMP were not arresting individuals based on anything more than membership in social clubs, stating that she knows the very secretary at the Casa d'Italia in Toronto who willingly handed over lists containing the names of the entire membership at the club, effectively causing the arrest and internment of hundreds of individuals.

Internment was terrible, so many innocent, hardworking men were arrested...and it shortened their lives, many of them got sick in the camp. Everyone was fearful...you didn't know if you'd be next, they arrested without any reasons and arrested so many innocent men. The secretary gave the names, at the Casa in Toronto, she handed over the lists to the police.

During our interview, Mrs. B spent more time recounting her frustrations after 1940 concerning her inability to find work: "I remember being so angry and bitter about this." Mrs. B showed her frustration by hitting her fist on the desk during the interview while discussing this topic. Despite being a very kind woman, you could see the anger and resentment that she felt towards her enemy alien status and her inability to find work. She recalls being very bitter every time she was forced to the station for fingerprinting: "My mother would try to calm me down, but I remember being so bitter when I had my fingerprints taken." Similarly, Mr. C states that his mother-in-law was furious that she had to report to the police station for fingerprinting, insisting that she was a British citizen, but was forced to report to authorities despite her angered pleas. For many Italian-Canadian civilians, reporting to the police was unnecessary and unfair treatment, because according to the respondents, many of those forced to comply with the newly imposed government policies were hardworking innocent men and women.

Forcing Italian-Canadians to be photographed and fingerprinted caused strife for some of my participants and their families, however, this often paled in comparison to their descriptions of financial troubles and destitute Italian-Canadian families during the war. Access to personal bank accounts was frozen for many in the Italian community and opportunities for



city relief and welfare were routinely denied on the basis that they were a burden on the city. Mrs. B remembers her mother desperately trying to make money to support her four children, selling baked goods and doing alterations for those who would supply her with work. Similarly, Mrs. A's father returned from internment after eight months and because of their ability to do so, the family provided the most destitute with baked goods and extra produce grown in their backyard, despite losing his pension and being forced by the government to start from scratch. Not only did these government policies make life difficult for many Italian-Canadian families, they instilled a fear that would become the basis for the potential choice to commit Italian linguistic suicide and according to Mrs. B, "caused the (Anglo-Canadian) community to act so cruel."

#### Anglo-Canadian Italophobia

But this fear was not only inflicted by government actions and policies, Italian as an ethnicity also provoked the hatred of some of the Anglo-Canadian citizenry. Blacklisting was one of the ways in which Anglo-Canadian citizenry and business owners retaliated against Italian-Canadians, undermining their chances for employment and survival. Mrs. B describes one of her most frustrating experiences as a young 25 year old woman trying to support her destitute mother and younger siblings after June 10, 1940:

It was impossible to find work. Whenever you went for work they would ask your name and if it were an Italian name, they would not hire you. I was working at the Post Office and at the outbreak of war I was immediately fired because of my last name. I was still the same person, we hadn't done anything wrong, but it didn't matter, we were still fired.

Mrs. B's difficulty finding work is exemplified by the literature provided and experienced by many Italian-Canadians at this time. As she noted, one day she was working and enjoying her job, the next she was deemed unsuitable for employment and fired because of the spelling of her last name. At seven years old, Mrs. A was not in the market for employment, but she remembers her older sister looking for work: "My sister, Mrs. D, tried to get a job, but in an interview, as soon as they heard the Italian name, they said the job was filled." Their stories are indicative of the fear and hate that quickly spread throughout the Anglo-Canadian community in regards to Italian-Canadians and may have provided the impetus necessary for the Italian community to halt the transmission and use of the Italian language for fear of further hardships.

Further to this, Mrs. A, Mrs. B and Mr. C recall how Sicilian fruit store fronts were vandalized and produce was destroyed by throwing bushels of apples and oranges into the streets. Mr. C's wife's family opened a fruit store in Toronto shortly before Mussolini's declaration of war and had a sizeable clientele that provided well for their family. Only after June 10, 1940

did the family experience misfortune in their business when Anglo-Canadian and foreign-Canadians alike refused to shop at their store, putting them out of business within weeks. Mrs. B laments the damage inflicted by hard working Italian store owners: "Sicilians in the fruit business had a terrible time...the people would take the produce from out front and throw it all over the streets and throw things through storefront windows. It was terrible for those poor people." However, harassment was not felt only by Italian-Canadian store owners, but the general Italian community in their day to day lives.

Mrs. A recalls being called WOP and Dago by Anglo-Canadian children and adults, people who a short time earlier had no problems with her as an Italian-Canadian neighbour. However, it was her older sister, 14 years old in 1940, who experienced the most harassment, being called WOP, Dago and spat on by local Anglo-Canadian children. Any child experiencing such harassment will likely fear attending school or Anglo-Canadian populated centers. The intensity of these terms have lasted until this day when Mrs. A's husband recalled a story: "We (Mr. A and Mrs. A's sister) always used to fight and bicker back and forth, it was all in good fun. But one day when we were in a playful spat, I called her a Wop and boy did I ever get it. She was truly mad." Mrs. A went on to say that as a child those names were very hurtful and her sister carried that hurt with her for a very

long time. She continued by saying that for children, there was always the desire to belong and fit in and when other children would treat you poorly, not only were you fearful of reprisal due to your ethnicity, but there was a long-lasting sense of hurt, one strong enough to contribute to the desire to hide your Italian ethnicity and language from the public.

Mr. C told me that despite a relatively calm life in Kingston, Ontario during the war years, you "had to be hush, you would never show any outward Italian ethnicity." He describes an Anglo-Canadian farmer spying on his family having a picnic on a Sunday afternoon:

he (the farmer) alerted the RCMP to come and break up this fascist meeting that we were apparently having shortly after Mussolini's declaration of war. When the RCMP showed up, my dad had to explain and convince them that we were only having a family party and that we were not fascists. My father had a knack for getting his way.

Mr. C explains that this was the only time they had any problem with the RCMP in regards to their Italian heritage and he attributes this to the watered down Italian ethnicity that existed in Kingston, Ontario, probably due to the fact that there were far fewer Italian families residing in the area as compared to Toronto or Montreal. However, fear of the other still managed to seep into the smaller communities and many Italian-Canadian families were watched closely by their Anglo-Canadian neighbours, as exemplified in Mr. C's story. Even in a small Italian community such as

Kingston, Ontario, families such as Mr. C's were aware that their ethnicity was cause for some concern and the best way to avoid hardships was to hide any outward displays of Italian ethnicity, which included the Italian language: "They (parents) didn't want us to appear to be Italian on the street after the war, so we acted just like the other kids (Anglo-Canadians)."

The stories provided speak to the swiftness and intensity of the fear that spread throughout Canada in regards to fascism and the belief that many Italian-Canadians posed a threat to Canada's internal security. The role that ethnicity played post 1940 is indicated by the research participant's stories and shows how fragile the Anglo- Canadian community was at this time in terms of fearing people deemed different than them.

#### *Fear of the Unknown and Italian-Canadian Informants*

The shift to enemy alien status was a shock for many Italian-Canadian families. Accompanied by their disbelief at how quickly they were deemed enemy aliens, the respondents spoke also of a fear of not knowing, unaware of what would happen next, even a fear of one's family and friends who, in some instances, turned against them out of their own fear or spitefulness. Mrs. B told me that despite her anger about lack of employment, she was always fearful of the unknown. It was mostly the men that had to watch their backs, but because innocent women were also interned at Camp

Petawawa, everyone lived in a state of fear. She describes the state of fear in which many people lived:

Internment was terrible. People's fathers and brothers were picked up and arrested and no one knew where they were for weeks. No one told us anything and we didn't know if they were safe or even dead. No one knew what to do or what would happen next and because we weren't told anything, we (the Italian-Canadian community) lived without knowing for years.

Mrs. B's father had passed years previous to this, but she did recall knowing family friends who were arrested and interned for many months. The Italian-Canadian community was shocked and in a state of disarray and fear, unaware of what was occurring, why they were being targeted specifically and what was to become of them. Mrs. A illustrates a similar situation:

They took my father away and they wouldn't tell me where...we were very scared and nobody knew who would be next, why they were going (to internment camps) and who would be next...the only criteria the RCMP seemed to have was that he (her father) was part of an Italian language school for youth and that made him an enemy.

Mrs. A's comments illustrate a climate of fear by describing the many unknowns faced by her community. The government and RCMP were swift in their descent upon enemy aliens and gave little information as to what was happening and why. The above testimonies are witness to keeping the Italian-Canadian communities in a state of fear and questioning, all in the

name of internal Canadian security. However, the fear of the unknown did not stop at the initial arrests and home searches. Italian-Canadian informants played a major role in keeping the community in a state of apprehension and fracturing any sense of togetherness and support that remained during this difficult time. Mrs. A told me that her family, to this day, can almost pinpoint the very person who informed on her father:

“There was lots of jealousy and old feuds that went way back. It was a good way to get back at someone...” Mrs. A described these old feuds and jealousy as the perfect revenge or *vendetta*, the perfect way to settle a debt. Her father was released from the internment camps early:

“There is some suspicion as to why my father was let out after only 8 months...Paul Martin was the MPP at the time and my father knew him and we’re not sure if there was some intervention involved...6-8 months he was there, some were there for 2-4 years!”

However, the literature has shown that early release from internment camps fuelled community rumours and further suspicion as to who had ties with who and who was working for who, and the fear of being informed upon fractured the Italian-Canadian community. These testimonies bring to the surface the fear that was experienced by many Italian-Canadians during this time, leaving me to wonder how the Italian community managed to protect themselves and avert negative attention towards their ethnicity and ultimately themselves.

### Italian-Canadian Fear of Persecution

Mr. C's comment on 'acting like the other kids' introduces this theme that emerged in discussions with all three respondents, including name, culture and language suppression and change. Living in a state of fear and apprehension, many Italian-Canadian families resorted to survival techniques that would protect themselves and their children. Mr. C remembers a time shortly after June 10, 1940 when his aunt was visiting from Toronto: "My Aunt E came to visit us in Kingston from Toronto and she said we should all go out into the streets and sing God Save the Queen so that everyone would know which side you were on, and I don't think she was joking." Mr. C also described his wife who was born with an Italian first name but always resented it. "...changed it from "Filippa" to "Janine" because she hated that name, she wasn't proud of the Italian name..." There are many reasons for a young child to announce the dislike of her given name, but it is interesting that Mr. C said she was not proud of that name, opposed to simply desiring a new name, as many children do at a young age. Mr. C's wife would have been six years old by 1940, therefore, this surely could have been the case. However, "Janine's" case is similar to discussions with my other respondents. Mrs. A described her brother's decision to change his name from "Giancarlo" to "Mark" and similarly, Mrs. B's close friend changed his name from "Marco" to "John," out of fear of internment.



Mrs. B told me that half of her family has a different last name because soon after arriving in Canada:

“One of my dad’s brothers shortened his name, many Italians shortened their names, especially after the war. My last name is “Bellini” (pseudonym) and the other half of my husband’s family are “Bell,” but we’re all the same.”

Name changes, language and culture suppression and public pronouncements of allegiances were all ways of trying to ensure the safety of the respondent’s families and themselves. Mrs. B, who was 25 in 1940, sums up the situation by saying:

“You didn’t want anyone to know (you were Italian). You would never speak Italian in public, or do anything that would bring attention to you. It hurt us (the Italian-Canadian community) and we quickly became Canadians I’ll tell ya...this hurt the culture and the language because no one would speak it anymore, everyone was afraid (of informants)...the children weren’t learning about where they came from.”

The above discussions lead one to believe that the Italian culture, especially the Italian language, suffered during the war years in Canada. Certain aspects of culture, such as food and dress, are easier to mimic and represent later in life than language, especially if a generation of young speakers live a portion of their lives aware that their ancestral language and culture are detrimental to their and their family’s safety. This aids an understanding of the argument that Italian linguistic suicide may have been

a necessary factor in ensuring one's safety against the retaliation of the government and Anglo-Canadian community.

*Disruption of Italian Organizations, Social Activities and Language Classes*

Both Mrs. A and Mrs. B spoke about the Italian language schools and programs that were held in Windsor and Toronto, Ontario, designed to supplement children's education regarding their ancestral culture and language through grammar and diction classes taught by local community members, including Mrs. A's father. Mr. C was not affected by the foreclosure of Italian schools and programs because they did not exist in Kingston, Ontario at the time, however, he did remind me that despite a lack of present Italian culture in the community, after the war you would never show any outward Italian ethnicity or Italian language use amongst your Anglo-Canadian peers, for fear of reprisal.

Mrs. B recalls all of the Italian programs across the city of Toronto where many students would study after school. She was forced to leave school at age 14 to work in order to help her mother support the family during the depression, however, she still recalls the programs at the Casa d'Italia that were offered, such as sports, drama and day camps:

These were all programs that helped to bring the Italian community together and when June 10, 1940 happened, they were all closed down, just like that, gone. It was the children that were affected most. They were the ones that were learning skills, they were learning the Italian language, grammar,

history, because many of them only spoke some Italian at home, most parents wanted them to learn English, too.

Mrs. A provides a similar story from Windsor, Ontario:

We used to go to Italian language classes everyday after school and on Saturdays. We went because my dad was a part of the school. We spoke Italian fluently at home because we lived with my grandfather and he didn't speak any English so we had to communicate with him in Italian. But when the war started, everything was shut right down and this would have affected other children as well.

Although this did not affect Mrs. A or Mrs. B in learning the Italian language as children, their descriptions of closed language schools and programs point to a possibility for Italian language disruption among Italian-Canadian children. All three respondents agreed that speaking Italian in public was not recommended; Anglo-Canadian and Italian-Canadian alike might assume one's membership in a secret fascist organization, so to avoid this, the Italian language was spoken infrequently and the children were advised to refrain from conversing in public. Mrs. B: "You would always hesitate before you spoke Italian out of fear of what others might do or call you."

Mrs. A:

As a child, I was afraid to speak my language in public and embarrassed to speak my language in public, especially if you lived in an Anglo-Saxon community, because people might become suspicious and you never knew who was watching (Anglo-Canadian and Italian-Canadian informants alike).

Mr. C who was not raised speaking Italian said: "They (parents) didn't want us to appear to be Italian on the street after the war, so we acted just like the other kids (Anglo-Canadians)." Understanding the nature of my research, both respondents spoke about the effect these closures would have had on the education and transmission of the Italian language and agreed that it would have been one aspect in the contribution to current and future generations' reduction in the ability to speak the Italian language.

*Survival of the Italian Language without Strong Post-War Italian Immigration*

As one of the final questions of the interview, I asked the respondents if they felt the Italian language would have survived in Canada were it not for a sizeable post-war emigration from Italy, with regards to the events that occurred in Canada between 1940 and 1947. Of the two respondents who commented, they agreed that they did not think it would have survived much past the younger generation of the time. Mr. C said:

Personally, I believe it would have quickly died off and assimilated to English. Even in a very small town (Kingston) with few other Italians and we weren't supposed to absorb it, they (parents) spoke Sicilian only to argue, so I say it would have died right off.

Lastly, Mrs. B said

Oh Yes, I think it would have died off. The Italians held back because of the war, cut their names short and held back their culture and language...this would have definitely affected the language if there was no immigration in the 50's.

All three respondents were interested in the focus of my research project and made clear to me that it was a definite possibility that some families neglected the transmission of their ancestral language to subsequent generations due to Italophobic government policies and the choices of adults and children alike to commit Italian linguistic suicide. Their final comments regarding the future of the Italian language were it not for a sizeable post-war emigration from Italy is a strong indication to future researchers that the plausibility of Italian linguistic suicide is very real and should be better represented within the greater Italian-Canadian historical literature.

## Summary and Conclusion

Canada is home to an impressive Italian population rich in varying dialects, culture and prominent Little Italy's across the nation. Italian clubs and community centers are vibrant examples of a flourishing culture among many within Canada's borders. However, the Italian community in Canada has not always held a place of equal status as it enjoys today. With the development of fascism in Canada in the mid 1920's and Mussolini's declaration of war on the side of Germany against Britain and France on June 10, 1940, Italians became a threat to the Canadian government, the Anglo-Canadian citizenry and subsequently labeled enemy aliens.

Fearing the compromise of Canada's internal security, the government launched a widespread campaign against Italian-Canadians which saw the arrest and internment of thousands of civilians. This campaign has been documented in various studies, however, currently and to my knowledge, there has not been any discussion of the effects of the Italophobic policies of the Canadian government on Italian language decline. Specifically, I have proposed a structure that attempts to correlate Italian linguistic suicide with a combination of negative disruptions in the Italian-Canadian communities of Canada, providing evidence sufficient to agreeing with the following statement: World War Two Italophobic policies inflicted

by the Canadian government may have negatively affected the intergenerational transmission of the Italian language in Canada, 1935-1947.

The Canadian government was not immune to Italophobia after June 10, 1940, arresting not only known fascist agitators, but anyone with Italian features, exercising limitless control under the War Measures Act in the name of national security. Following suit, much of the Anglo-Canadian newspaper press targeted Italian-Canadians, often on unfounded grounds, furthering the Italophobia and fear of the other that was sweeping through Anglo-Canadian communities. Vandalism towards Italian-Canadian properties would escalate in the weeks following Mussolini's declaration of war, with reports of smashed grocery windows and destroyed produce by Anglo-Canadian citizenry. Their frustration and hate toward the Italian-Canadian community stemmed from a belief that all Italians were merely an extension of fascist Italy, leading willing Anglo-Canadian and Italian Canadian informants to provide RCMP and local police with information regarding fascists, spies and saboteurs. However, informants often took the opportunity to falsely inform upon friends and family in order to obtain revenge, settle a debt or rid a worthy competitor, effects that saw many innocent Italian-Canadians interned. The climate that existed was one of fear and apprehension, fracturing the Italian-Canadian community so badly that some families resorted to the Anglicization of ancestral names and reducing

any visible ethnic indicators, including the use and transmission of the Italian language, often out of fear of being accused of membership within a fascist organization. The government's Italophobia and fear of a fifth column initiated the close of all Italian organizations and social clubs, effectively removing the forum for which the Italian language was used and practiced by adults and children alike. With the removal of these programs and all Italian language classes throughout the city, children were not able to practice Italian in public and were either forbidden from speaking the language or relegated its use to the household, all of which correlate to the possibility of Italian linguistic suicide, effectively damaging the transmission to future generations.

Linguistic suicide relates not only to the willing halt in transmission of an ancestral language to one's children, but the conscious decision to stop speaking the language itself. Children are often known to neglect the use of their ancestral language as they age, especially if the language lacks prestige and holds an inferior standing within a particular society, correlating directly to the case of the Italian language in Canada during World War Two.

Similarly, parents who choose to commit linguistic suicide often do so as a means to ensuring their children's future success, freeing them from a life of poverty, shame and exclusion. However, this may also be affected by higher education levels held by the parents, playing a role in the ability to maintain



a language, therefore simultaneously fostering the ancestral language and the majority language in the child.

This is an initial project on a topic that has received little, if no, attention and in order to support this notion of Italian linguistic suicide, many more interviews must be completed in order to gather a better picture of Italian-Canadians during the 1940's and how their ancestral language was affected by the negative climate in which they lived. Furthermore, future researchers should be aware of *campanilismo*, the many regions of Italy and dialects of Italian that may contribute to a better understanding of the loss or retention of the Italian language during this time. Italians in Canada before the War were of varying backgrounds and the distinction between their way of life, their levels of education and the differences that may occur between being born in Canada versus Italy, must be considered before coming to any concrete conclusions regarding Italian linguistic suicide. Further study into various linguistic theories and definitions will be essential to making any finite statements regarding this phenomenon, especially language maintenance, acquisition, shift, and loss.

In order to properly assess the effects of the enemy alien status on Italian-Canadians in the 1940's and the possibility of a loss of the Italian language for the younger generation, researchers must act quickly to access the life stories of those Italian individuals who lived through this period of

Canadian history and allow them to share their experiences with the world. Ultimately, my aim for this paper was to begin the process of doing just that, unearthing an idea that, whether proven true for the greater Italian-Canadian community or not, has potential to not only give linguistic researchers new tools towards reversing language shift or linguistic suicide in an atmosphere of political coercion, but to uncover new stories about Italian-Canadian lives during World War Two, stories that belong in the greater historical literature.

Future research on the topic of Italian linguistic suicide will benefit a comparative analysis of other ethnic groups that have experienced similar persecution in Canada at the hands of government policies and hostile Canadian citizenry. The similarities in treatment regarding Aboriginal groups in early Canada and Japanese Canadians during World War Two will strengthen the argument that accuses the Canadian government of willfully imposing racially motivated policies that fuelled the Anglo-Canadian populations' lack of tolerance toward enemy alien languages and cultures within its communities.

Japanese Canadians suffered severe indignities that coincide with the experiences of Italian-Canadians during World War Two and in many cases rival in severity the injustices committed against them, including physical and verbal assault and vandalism to Japanese owned businesses and homes.

Roy (1990) and Taylor (2004) outline these abuses imposed upon the community in Western Canada and detail the uprooting of thousands of families who were forced to repatriate or move eastward, losing all of their worldly possessions including their homes and businesses. Makabe (1998) argues that the abuse and dispersal that Japanese-Canadians experienced during World War Two has negatively affected the Sansei generation, children of the many thousands of individuals who were interned. Through a detailed sample of third generation Japanese in Canada, Makabe found that most of this generation does not speak Japanese and are embarrassed of their cultural practices, stemming directly from the abuses and internment experienced by their Nisei parents.

Similarly, the varying languages and cultures of Aboriginal Canadians have suffered at the hands of early Canadian policies. Pressures from the government and authority figures have wreaked havoc on Aboriginal languages, but none more severely than the residential school system imposed upon Aboriginal children. This carefully crafted system of Anglicization effectively halted the transmission of language and culture by forcibly removing children from their families and sending them to schools that were purposefully located great distances from their homes. Similar tactics discussed throughout this paper, including fear, physical and emotional abuse, were used as strategies to forcibly remove all indicators of

Aboriginal culture and language from the children, which in this case could arguably be termed Aboriginal linguistic murder (Deiter, 1999; Milloy, 1999; Ing, 1991).

Presently, in an era of intense global migration, the possibility of linguistic suicide or linguistic murder being carried out on the world stage is very real. As portrayed throughout this paper, governments wield the power necessary to inflict damage on the transmission of culture and language from one generation to the next, often under the guise of national security. Historical and present day conflicts throughout the world show an undeniable fear and discomfort toward cultures different to one's own, sparking abuse and even genocide against those deemed different or unsuitable to assimilate. In order to fully understand the complex nature of racial and ethnic discrimination, especially in an age of intense global migration, there must be an understanding of the events of the past that are possibly being mimicked on today's world stage.

If Beck and Lam (2008) are correct in their assumption that linguistic suicide may currently be practiced throughout the world, then Canadian policymakers must educate themselves on the nature of linguistic suicide and further investigate the efficacy of, for example, multiculturalism policy, in light of increased language shift among second and third generation immigrants (Portes and Schauffler, 1994; Portes and Hao, 1998). In order to

ensure newcomers to Canada that committing linguistic suicide is not in the best interest of their children's future success, Canadian policymakers must make certain that this is indeed the case and that multiculturalism policy is not deficient in its claim that newcomers are free to maintain their ancestral languages, when in reality, full integration and future success is often based on embracing Canadian values, practices and complete fluency in the English and/or French languages. One could argue that linguistic suicide may still play a part in language shift in Canada, albeit coerced by a set of pressures less visible than those of the 1940's and affecting not only the Italian language, but the myriad of languages and dialects presently spoken throughout the country.

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## Appendix A

1. In what country were you born?
2. In what year were you born?
3. Did your parents speak Italian? If so, which dialect?
4. Can you currently speak Italian? If you have children or grandchildren, do they speak Italian?
5. Did your parents speak to you in Italian as a child?
6. What was the atmosphere for Italians and Italian speaking people in Toronto before 1935? Do you have any stories that may help answer this question?
7. Were there any changes in the treatment of Italians in Toronto after 1940 when Italy joined the war?
8. What was the atmosphere for Italians and Italian speaking people in Toronto after 1940?
9. What obstacles, if any, did you, your family, or the greater Italian community encounter after 1940 regarding your Italian ethnicity or use of an Italian dialect?
10. Was there ever a time you felt that you could not use the Italian language in public in Canada?
11. Did you or your family ever feel judged or alienated in the greater Toronto community regarding your Italian heritage and language?
12. Did the possibility of arrests and internments faced by Italians in the 1940's affect you or your family?
13. How did the Italian community deal with the possibility of arrest, internment, and being labeled 'the enemy'?

14. Do you recall any Italian newspapers or such means of communication within the community? If so, was there a decline in the production and consumption of Italian newspapers and Italian media after 1940?
15. Do you recall any Italian language schools or Italian language programs, either full time or part time, in Toronto before 1940? If so, was there a decline in the use of these schools and/or school programs after 1940?
16. Do you recall a time and place when you could not speak Italian or be proud of your Italian heritage in the general public?
17. Do you think that the spoken Italian language within the family has declined in Canada? If so, why?
18. Do you think the Italian language would have survived in Canada were it not for a sizeable post-war emigration from Italy, with regards to the events that occurred in Canada between 1940 and 1947?

