
A Seat At "La Tavola"

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Introduction

In Italian, *il tavolo* means 'the table', but *la tavola*, the feminine form, is 'the sense of family felt around the dinner table'. My grandparents taught me the meaning of *la tavola* first-hand; they emigrated from Italy in 1959. Through my research, I document the Italian dialect of immigrants in Sarnia, Ontario, Canada. Through community collaboration, we work to preserve their stories.

What?

Heritage languages are those brought by immigrants to a new place, and now spoken as a minority language by that community (Fishman, 2001). There are two parts of this research: to record the histories of this community in their native Italian dialect; and second, to create a permanent and public digital archive to preserve this Heritage Language. The research question is: What is the best approach to create a community-university partnership that will benefit both the heritage and academic communities?

Why?

From 1950-1969, at Halifax's Pier 21, 20,000-30,000 Italians arrived each year in search of a better life (pier21.ca). Today, 1.4 million Canadians identify with an Italian heritage (StatsCan, 2013). Almost all Canadians have a 'hyphenated' identity: Italian-, Dutch-, French-, etc. By collaborating with the university and heritage community to build a digital archive, I will establish an interdisciplinary means to preserve Heritage Languages and the histories of Heritage Communities throughout Canada.

Where?

I have signed a two-year partnership with the Archives of Sarnia and Lambton County to create an online archive. Through this project, I digitized and uploaded hundreds of recordings, videos, images, and documents recently collected by myself, and by Caroline Di Cocco since the 1980s. Caroline is a local

community historian who has contributed what she collected over the past 40 years. We will formally present the archive to Sarnia's Italian community in June, 2017. This serves as a starting point showing the project's feasibility.

I have been given permission by Western University's Libraries to host this archive, permanently, at the University. The *Western Archive of Dialects and Languages* (WADL) is available for other language projects, and my Italian research is the initial project to be hosted there (www.ir.lib.uwo.ca/wadl). Western University is only an hour from Sarnia, which allows me to remain an active member of Sarnia's Italian community, and to keep the digital archive local.

How?

With the support of Western Libraries and Sarnia's Italian community, the archive is being created through my coordination of the community and academia. Through my work with Lambton County Archives: I code the website; use *Dublin Core* standards for metadata (Kunze et al., 1998); and digitize materials. I use Omeka software for the framework.

The archive is made up of many photographs, documents, and videos. I have collected and digitized just under 500 photographs so far. It is also made up of documents: digitized copies of boat tickets to cross to Canada, citizenship papers, letters, (delicious) recipes, and other ephemera of their Italian and Canadian experiences. I have just under 200 documents so far.

I am currently recording interviews with Ciociaria dialect speakers, using sociolinguistic techniques to collect life histories. I also have 47 interviews I've digitized that were conducted in the 1980s by Caroline di Cocco.

Conclusion

WADL ensures that the community directly benefits from sharing their stories, materials, and time with the researcher. The information they share is returned in a permanent, secure, and digital way. This ensures that future generations will be able to access their heritage and history.

The goal of this research is to show the importance of heritage—a significant part of the Canadian identity. My work will produce a collaborative partnership between Western University and Sarnia's Italian community. This framework can be applied to

preserve and promote other communities across Canada.

In summary, the stories, culture, and language of this community cannot wait any longer to be recorded and digitized. There is an urgency as Sarnia's original Italian community is reaching an advanced age. Now is the time to create an online presence: both for academics and for the public. There are research opportunities in this data, from a great number of disciplines. The community and broader public is interested in hearing these stories, seeing these photos, and cooking some of the recipes.

I study how Sarnia's Ciociaria pronounce "la tawola", and ensure the survival of what they mean when they say it.

Bibliography

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