

# LANGUAGE MAINTENANCE AND LANGUAGE SHIFT OF MALTESE MIGRANTS IN TORONTO : A FOLLOW-UP TO SCIRIHA<sup>1</sup>

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*Abstract - This author investigates the levels of language maintenance and language shift among Maltese-Canadian immigrants living in Toronto, Ontario. The author's research on language use is compared with a similar study carried out by Sciriha in 1989. The results of the more recent study show that the Maltese language is used widely among first generation migrants, but the majority of second generation respondents do not use Maltese in many domains, if at all. Although most respondents believe that it is important to maintain the Maltese language and pass it on to their children, few actually speak Maltese to their children. As predicted by Sciriha (1989) the process of shift from Maltese to English is well underway for the Maltese living in Toronto.*

## Introduction

During the decades following the Second World War, thousands of Maltese emigrated to Australia (York 1986, 1990), the United Kingdom (Attard 1998; Dench 1975), the United States (Attard 1983, 1989, 1997) and Canada (Attard 1983, 1989, 1997; Bonavia 1980). In Canada, most joined the small but well-established community of Maltese in the Junction area of Toronto. The Maltese in Canada were faced with the same question that faces all immigrant communities : how can the immigrant community maintain something of its cultural heritage and identity and at the same time integrate into the host society? The Maltese in Canada have established an ethnic church, clubs, Maltese language press, radio, television and a language school in order to help maintain their cultural heritage. However, participation in these organisations has dropped in the past few decades due to the spread of Mal-

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<sup>1</sup> Lydia Sciriha first investigated the maintenance and shift of the Maltese language among the Maltese-Canadian community in Toronto. She conducted her fieldwork in 1988 and the results of her study were subsequently published in the *Journal of Maltese Studies*, 19-20, pp. 34-41 in 1989.

tese-Canadians to the suburbs of Toronto. The Junction area has lost its unique Maltese atmosphere. Second and third generation Maltese-Canadians have adopted a Canadian identity and have little interest in learning the language or culture of their parents.

In 1989 Sciriha investigated the level of Maltese language maintenance among first, second and third generation Maltese migrants in the Junction area of Toronto. Sciriha (1989 : 40) concluded that language shift was well underway in the Maltese community of Toronto, and “*that Maltese language death in the community studied seems to be inevitable within twenty or thirty years*”. This paper, based on M.A. thesis research conducted during October and November 1998, seeks to assess the situation ten years after Sciriha’s study. Although the scope of the thesis research was wider than that of Sciriha’s study, specific relevant information is selected for comparison. Such a comparison serves two purposes : first, it will establish the extent to which Sciriha’s predictions are being realised, and secondly, comparison to the previous study can support the validity of the present study.

### **Language maintenance and language shift**

The term language maintenance describes a stable situation where a group of speakers of one language living with speakers of another language continue to use their own language, at least some of the time, in some domains. The term language shift describes a process whereby a group of speakers of one language give up their language and begin to use another (Fasold 1984; Holmes 1992; Romaine 1994). Sociolinguists have studied language maintenance and language shift in communities worldwide (Aliaga 1994; Dorian 1981; Gal 1979; Hofman and Fisherman 1972; Lewis 1972; Lieberson 1972; Sachdev, Bourhis, Phang and D’Eye 1988).

### **The Maltese in Canada**

The Maltese are a small but well-established ethnic group in Canada. The first Maltese arrived in Canada before the year 1900 (Attard 1989; Bonavia 1980; Cumbo and Portelli 1997). The 1996 Canadian census reports 29,820 people of Maltese ethnic origin in Canada. Of these, 9,445 were born in Malta and the rest are second or third generation, born in Canada. Maltese was reported as a mother tongue by 7,115 people, 6,590 of whom were born in Malta. Only 1,520 reported Maltese as their only home language

(Statistics Canada 1998). The vast majority of Maltese-Canadians, 26,250 live in Ontario (Toronto, Mississauga, Hamilton, London, Windsor, etc.).

Until recently, a large Maltese community of over 6,000 could be found in an area of West Toronto known as 'the Junction'; in the last 20 years this community has largely dispersed to the suburbs of Toronto, especially to Mississauga and Brampton. Today, probably 2,000 Maltese live in the Junction area, near to the Maltese church of St. Paul the Apostle and the several remaining Maltese owned businesses.<sup>2</sup>

The early Maltese established several Maltese institutions which still exist. The Maltese church of St. Paul the Apostle was built in 1930 by the Toronto Maltese community. The church offers four masses a week in Maltese, which are well attended by older community members. The Maltese-Canadian Society of Toronto was established in 1922. In the 1960s and 1970s a band club, soccer club and other clubs were established. All had the aim to bringing community members together, helping new migrants adjust to life in Canada, and maintaining Maltese culture (Cumbo 1984). The Maltese Heritage Programme was established in the 1970s to provide Maltese language lessons (Cumbo 1989). Presently half an hour of Maltese language television programming is broadcast weekly. A Maltese language newspaper, the only one in North America, is published monthly in Toronto.

### **Survey methodology**

This analysis is based on the results of 100 questionnaires distributed by mail to first and second generation Maltese-Canadians in Toronto and suburbs (Mississauga, Brampton). Respondents were asked questions of a demographic nature, about language use with various family members, and about their attitudes towards the importance of maintaining the Maltese language in Canada. Participation in the survey was entirely voluntary. Results were confidential and all respondents had the option of returning surveys anonymously, in unmarked envelopes.

Several different means of distribution were used in an attempt to cover a wide range of population : the questionnaires were distributed first through the Maltese-Canadian clubs and personal contacts in the Maltese-Canadian community. Second, the Bank of Valletta in Canada sent out ques-

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<sup>2</sup> Interview with Richard Cumbo, 8 October 1998

tionnaires to a random list of Maltese-Canadians, and finally surveys were sent by e-mail to Maltese-Canadians listed on the website <http://www.searchmalta.com>. Because the sample population is not representative, the survey results cannot be said to predict the future of the Maltese language in Toronto with any certainty; however, they can be used to make strong suggestions.

Sciriha's (1989) survey included a smaller number of respondents : 20 from each of the three generations. Sciriha's method of recruitment, solely through the Maltese-Canadian church and clubs, was narrower than that of the present survey, and included only Junction area residents.

### Survey results

Survey results cover language use and language attitudes. In each section results are described, discussed, and compared to Sciriha's results.<sup>3</sup> The sample population consists of 77 first generation Maltese respondents and 23 second generation respondents, born in Canada. Of the 100 respondents, 62 are male and 38 female, reflecting the fact that more Maltese men emigrated than women. Most of the first generation respondents fall between the ages of 41 and 60 while most of the second generation respondents fall between the ages of 19 and 40.

Some 76.8% of married respondents are married to a Maltese person : 78.5% of first generation respondents and 72.7% of second generation respondents. However, as only 11 second generation respondents are married this number is perhaps too small to draw conclusions. In contrast, Sciriha found that all of her first generation respondents had a Maltese spouse while 40% of second generation respondents had a Maltese spouse.

Sciriha noted a trend of upward mobility among her respondents : although second generation male respondents tended to adopt the profession of their fathers, 30% of third generation respondents were university students following an education which would lead to higher status employment than that of their fathers. The present study confirms the trend of upward mobility both in occupation and in education levels starting in the second generation. Table 1 shows the occupational distribution of the

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<sup>3</sup> Some respondents did not answer every question. When the results are summarised, the total number may not add up to 100, but to the total number of respondents who answered that particular question. Percentages given are calculated based on the total number of people answering each question rather than on the total sample size of 100.

two generations of Maltese-Canadians and of the group as a whole.<sup>4</sup> Table 2 shows the educational level distribution of the two generations of Maltese-Canadians and of the group as a whole. It should be noted that the high percentage of respondents falling into the upper occupation and educational level groups is probably unrepresentative of the Maltese-Canadian population as a whole due to the non-representative sampling methods used. The contact people in the Maltese-Canadian community were largely professionals and apparently most likely to associate with and pass the questionnaire on to other professionals.

**Table 1 : Occupational Distribution**

|         | 1 <sup>st</sup> generation | 2 <sup>nd</sup> generation | Total |
|---------|----------------------------|----------------------------|-------|
| N=      | 75                         | 23                         | 98    |
|         | %                          | %                          | %     |
| Group 1 | 24.0                       | 60.9                       | 32.7  |
| Group 2 | 30.7                       | 34.8                       | 31.6  |
| Group 3 | 21.3                       | 4.3                        | 17.3  |
| Group 4 | 24.0                       | 0.0                        | 18.4  |

**Table 2 : Educational Level Distribution**

| Educational level                       | 1 <sup>st</sup> generation | 2 <sup>nd</sup> generation | Total |
|---|----------------------------|----------------------------|-------|
| N=                                      | 75                         | 23                         | 100   |
|   | %                          | %                          | %     |
| Elementary                              | 18.7                       | 0.0                        | 14.3  |
| Part of high school                     | 21.3                       | 4.3                        | 17.3  |
| High school                             | 33.3                       | 34.8                       | 33.7  |
| College/part of university/trade school | 13.3                       | 34.8                       | 18.4  |
| University graduate                     | 10.7                       | 17.4                       | 12.2  |
| Graduate degree                         | 2.7                        | 8.7                        | 4.1   |

<sup>4</sup> Occupations were divided into four categories, adapted from Vassallo, Sant'Angelo and Sciriha (1994: 26): Group 1: professional, managerial, administrative occupations, university students; Group 2: high clerical, clerical, supervisor, skilled craftsman, technical, small business owner or manager, high school students; Group 3: skilled manual workers, foremen; Group 4: semi-skilled and unskilled labourers, casual workers, those whose income is provided by the state.

## Language use

When one examines the first language learned by Maltese-Canadians of different generations a discrepancy appears between the two studies. Sciriha found that 95% of first generation respondents learned Maltese as their first language and 55% of second generation respondents learned Maltese as their first language. It was not until the third generation that the number of those learning Maltese as a first language fell sharply, to 10%.

The present study found, similarly, that 94.8% of first generation respondents learned Maltese as a first language. However, only 26.1% of second generation respondents learned Maltese as a first language. One possible explanation for this discrepancy is the different sampling methods used : as previously mentioned, all of Sciriha's respondents came from the Junction area. A second possible explanation is the passage of time. Respondents from the present study are probably younger in general than those of Sciriha's study which required families of three generations. Very few of the first generation respondents in the present study report having grandchildren. Thus, the respondents in the present study brought their children up on average probably 10 to 20 years later than those of Sciriha's study in an environment less conducive to language maintenance.

Tables 3, 4, 5 and 6 compare the language spoken with various family members by the three generations of respondents in Sciriha's study and the two generations of respondents in the present study (referred to as 1989 and 1998, respectively).<sup>5</sup>

**Table 3 : Language Spoken with Father and Mother**

|         | 1989                       |                            |                            | 1998                       |                            |
|---------|----------------------------|----------------------------|----------------------------|----------------------------|----------------------------|
|         | 1 <sup>st</sup> generation | 2 <sup>nd</sup> generation | 3 <sup>rd</sup> generation | 1 <sup>st</sup> generation | 2 <sup>nd</sup> generation |
| N=      | 20                         | 20                         | 20                         | 62                         | 20                         |
| Maltese | 95%                        | 50%                        | 10%                        | 69%                        | 151%                       |
| ME      | 5%                         | 10%                        | 20%                        | 20.9%                      | 12.4%                      |
| EM      | -                          | -                          | -                          | 6.5%                       | 42.5%                      |
| English | 0%                         | 40%                        | 70%                        | 3.3%                       | 30.0%                      |

<sup>5</sup> When investigating language spoken to family members Sciriha divided language use into three categories: Maltese (M), Maltese and English (ME) and English (E), while the present study made four distinctions: Maltese (M), Maltese with some English (ME), English with some Maltese (EM), and English (E). The reader should be aware of these different methods of categorisation.

The difference between the language spoken to parents by the first generation and the second generation in the 1998 study is striking. The second generation is clearly more comfortable speaking English, perhaps with a little Maltese. Maltese language use with parents is also clearly less than in Sciriha’s study, where the third generation is almost as likely to use Maltese as the second generation in the 1998 study.

**Table 4 : Language Spoken with Spouse**

|         | 1989                       |                            |                            | 1998                       |                            |
|---------|----------------------------|----------------------------|----------------------------|----------------------------|----------------------------|
|         | 1 <sup>st</sup> generation | 2 <sup>nd</sup> generation | 3 <sup>rd</sup> generation | 1 <sup>st</sup> generation | 2 <sup>nd</sup> generation |
| N=      | 20                         | 20                         | N/A                        | 62                         | 12                         |
| Maltese | 90%                        | 45%                        | N/A                        | 50%                        | 16.7%                      |
| ME      | 5%                         | -                          | N/A                        | 21.0%                      | -                          |
| EM      | -                          | -                          | -                          | 11.3%                      | 41.7%                      |
| English | 5%                         | 50%                        | N/A                        | 17.7%                      | 41.7%                      |

The percentage of first generation respondents in the 1998 study using Maltese or Maltese with some English with spouses is very similar to the percentage of first generation Maltese-Canadians with Maltese spouses. However, while 72.7% of second generation respondents also have Maltese spouses, only 16.7% use Maltese or Maltese with some English with their spouses. Again, significantly fewer in the 1998 study use Maltese with spouses than in the 1989 study.

**Table 5 : Language Spoken with Siblings**

|         | 1989                       |                            |                            | 1998                       |                            |
|---------|----------------------------|----------------------------|----------------------------|----------------------------|----------------------------|
|         | 1 <sup>st</sup> generation | 2 <sup>nd</sup> generation | 3 <sup>rd</sup> generation | 1 <sup>st</sup> generation | 2 <sup>nd</sup> generation |
| N=      | 20                         | 20                         | 20                         | 74                         | 22                         |
| Maltese | 80%                        | 40%                        | 5%                         | 59.5%                      | 13.6%                      |
| ME      | 0%                         | 5%                         | 15%                        | 21.6%                      | 4.5%                       |
| EM      | -                          | -                          | -                          | 13.5%                      | 13.6%                      |
| English | 20%                        | 55%                        | 80%                        | 5.4%                       | 68.3%                      |

Language use with siblings follows a similar pattern. Few second generation respondents use Maltese or even Maltese with some English with siblings and Maltese language use is less than Sciriha found in 1989.

**Table 6 : Language Spoken with Children**

|         | 1989                       |                            |                            | 1998                       |                            |
|---------|----------------------------|----------------------------|----------------------------|----------------------------|----------------------------|
|         | 1 <sup>st</sup> generation | 2 <sup>nd</sup> generation | 3 <sup>rd</sup> generation | 1 <sup>st</sup> generation | 2 <sup>nd</sup> generation |
| N=      | 20                         | 20                         | N/A                        | 59                         | 8                          |
| Maltese | 65%                        | 15%                        | N/A                        | 6.8%                       | 12.5%                      |
| ME      | 5%                         | 20%                        | N/A                        | 13.6%                      | -                          |
| EM      | -                          | -                          | -                          | 44.1%                      | 50.0%                      |
| English | 30%                        | 65%                        | N/A                        | 35.6%                      | 37.5%                      |

Language maintenance is not possible unless parents pass on their language to their children. The low number of first generation Maltese-Canadians who speak Maltese to their children indicates that the use of Maltese rarely passes even into the second generation. Significantly fewer report using Maltese in the 1998 study than in the 1989 study.

Sciriha found that 85% of first generation respondents, 20% of second generation respondents and 10% of third generation respondents read Maltese books or newspapers. Results from this question in the present study are presented in Table 7.

**Table 7 : Frequency of Reading in Maltese**

|              | 1 <sup>st</sup> generation | 2 <sup>nd</sup> generation | Total |
|--------------|----------------------------|----------------------------|-------|
| N=           | 77                         | 23                         | 100   |
|              | %                          | %                          | %     |
| Never        | 13.0                       | 43.5                       | 20.0  |
| Occasionally | 35.1                       | 34.8                       | 35.0  |
| Sometimes    | 32.5                       | 13.0                       | 28.0  |
| Frequently   | 14.3                       | 8.7                        | 13.0  |
| Always       | 5.2                        | 0.0                        | 4.0   |

Although comparison is difficult due to the different categories used, the two studies found similar results for the first generation, but the present study found a higher frequency of Maltese reading in the second generation. This could be related to the difference in categories : many of the



second generation who read Maltese materials occasionally do so to practise or improve their Maltese. Given the choice of only yes or no, they might have answered no. Many of the respondents who never read in Maltese explained that this is because they do not read Maltese or read Maltese well. Many of these were first generation respondents who had learned Maltese as a first language : they were never taught to read Maltese, although they spoke fluently. Others mentioned the difficulty of reading Maltese compared to speaking.

In contrast, most respondents watch some Maltese television : only 10% never watch Maltese television. Respondents are more likely to watch Maltese television than to read in Maltese. This may be related to the fact that television viewing does not require literacy. Also, a person with limited ability in Maltese can probably enjoy Maltese television programming, while reading a paper would be difficult and therefore not enjoyable. Although the second generation seems slightly less likely to watch Maltese programming than the first generation, differences are not striking.

### Language attitudes

Sciriha asked only one question related to language attitudes : whether parents encouraged their children to speak Maltese. Some 40% of the first generation responded that they encourage their children to speak Maltese, while 20% of second generation parents responded that they encourage their children to speak Maltese. The present study showed much stronger levels of support for children learning Maltese : 80.3% of the first generation and 66.7% of the second generation responded that it is important to them that their children learn Maltese.

The reason most Maltese-Canadians believe it is important that their children learn Maltese is to keep the Maltese heritage alive and pass it on to the next generation. Language is seen as strongly tied to culture and identity. One first generation respondent articulated this point of view clearly : *"It is important for my children to learn Maltese because I believe we are defined by the language we speak, and I don't want my daughter to lose touch with Malta and her background"*. Reasons for not considering it important that children learn Maltese include the belief that Maltese is not a useful language in Canada or the world, and that children are unlikely to meet other Maltese people in Canada. A first generation respondent commented, *"I feel Maltese is a dead-end language. Outside of*

*the narrow confines of Malta and Maltese culture, it is simply useless as a second language”.*

In 1989, 130 students attended Maltese Heritage Program language classes, held in the Junction area : a rather low percentage compared to the Maltese population of Toronto. At present, only 70 students attend these classes : the decrease in attendance reflecting the dispersion of Maltese from the Junction area to the suburbs. Despite a growth in the numbers with an interest in having their children learn Maltese, the number willing to take active steps to ensure this happens seems to be decreasing. Fewer speak Maltese to their children and few are willing to make the effort to bring their children in from the suburbs once a week for Maltese language classes.<sup>6</sup>

The present study went further than Sciriha’s in investigating attitudes towards the maintenance of Maltese. The questionnaire asked respondents whether it is important to them to maintain their own ability to speak Maltese. The overwhelmingly positive results are summarised in Table 8.

**Table 8 : Importance of Maintaining Maltese**

|                    | 1 <sup>st</sup> generation | 2 <sup>nd</sup> generation | Total |
|--------------------|----------------------------|----------------------------|-------|
| N=                 | 75                         | 23                         | 98    |
|                    | %                          | %                          | %     |
| Important          | 88.0                       | 73.9                       | 84.7  |
| Somewhat important | -                          | 4.3                        | 1.0   |
| Not important      | 120                        | 21.7                       | 14.3  |

It is interesting to note that the positive attitudes towards maintaining Maltese far exceed Maltese language ability in the second generation. The most frequent reason respondents feel it is important to maintain their ability in Maltese is a feeling of pride or awareness of their Maltese identity, strongly linked to ability in the Maltese language. As one first generation respondent said, *“How can anyone stop speaking his/her first language? It’s what defines us”.*

Contrary to the researcher’s expectations, positive attitudes towards Maltese language maintenance do not lead directly to efforts to maintain and pass on the language to subsequent generations. This is illustrated by

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<sup>6</sup> Interview with Maria Vella, 13 October, 1998.

the present study : most parents (73.5%) believe it is important for their children to learn Maltese but few (9.7%) make the effort to speak Maltese to their children thus ensuring that they learn. Those with positive attitudes towards passing Maltese on to their children, however, do tend to use English with some Maltese rather than pure English with children, demonstrating some relationship between attitudes and behaviour. The overall discrepancy is further demonstrated by a comparison of the two studies : the present study found lower levels of Maltese language use than Sciriha's study, but more positive attitudes towards language maintenance. Fishman (1972 : 105) has found among pre-World War One migrants in the United States from rural Eastern and Southern Europe, a

*Long-term distinction between attitudes and use, namely, an increased esteem for non-English mother tongues concomitant with the increased relegation of these languages to fewer and narrower domains of language use.*

One can observe a negative relationship between ethnic language use and positive attitudes over time : the languages are used less now but held in higher regard than previously.

Generation clearly relates to levels of language use and to a lesser degree, to attitudes towards language maintenance. Another variable that affects Maltese language use and attitudes is participation in Maltese community activities. Sciriha recruited her respondents through the Maltese-Canadian church and clubs, therefore we can assume that all of her respondents participated in Maltese community activities. Due to the variety of methods of distribution, 22% of the respondents of the present study do not participate in community activities. Of the first generation respondents, 83% participate while of the second generation, 60% participate.

Those respondents who participate in community events are those most likely to use the Maltese language with their children : 69.4% use at least some Maltese with their children (predominantly English with some Maltese – 42.9%), while only 29.4% of those who do not participate use any Maltese with children. Of those who participate in community activities, 54.1% use only Maltese with siblings, while of those who do not participate, 30.0% use only Maltese with siblings. Some 86.0% of those who participate believe that it is important to maintain their ability in Maltese, while 68.2% of those who do not participate believe that it is important to maintain their ability to speak Maltese. Finally, 86.0% of

those who participate in Maltese community activities feel that it is important that their children learn Maltese, while only 50.0% of those who do not participate feel it is important.

Language use, attitudes and participation in Maltese community activities are probably related in several, intertwined ways. Maltese-Canadians who are interested in maintaining Maltese culture, including language, are those who are most likely to join a Maltese community club. Those who attend a club have many opportunities to use Maltese, thus keeping in practice. Club policy and other club members may encourage and support language maintenance efforts. For those who participate in community activities, other Maltese speakers are readily available.

## Conclusions

The results of the questionnaire distributed to Maltese-Canadians in the Toronto area are clear and unambiguous. The use of the Maltese language is still predominant among first generation immigrants when speaking to other first generation Maltese immigrants. Most first generation Maltese-Canadians read at least occasionally in Maltese. Almost all first generation Maltese-Canadians feel that it is important to retain their ability to speak Maltese and most feel that it is important that their children learn to speak Maltese.

However, few first generation Maltese-Canadians speak Maltese to their children. Thus only 26.1% of second generation Maltese-Canadians learned Maltese as a mother tongue. Most second generation Maltese-Canadians do not use Maltese when speaking to others of the same generation or even to first generation Maltese migrants. Most do not read in Maltese. Somewhat paradoxically, second generation Maltese-Canadians claim that they feel it important to maintain the Maltese language, yet the majority do not speak Maltese fluently. The low levels of Maltese language use in the second generation suggest that language shift is well underway.

A major factor often leading to language shift is socio-economic pressure : the majority language must be learned to function successfully and move up in the majority culture (Fasold 1984; Holmes 1992). This is true of the Maltese and all immigrant groups in Canada. Workers in any field except the most manual need to speak English. The Maltese migrants in Canada tend to be upwardly mobile : children are more educated than their parents and tend to occupy higher status jobs. Parents may speak

only English in the home, hoping to give their children an advantage from an early stage.

Demographic factors such as settlement patterns and group size can be decisive (Fasold 1984; Fishman 1972; Holmes 1992). Many Maltese-Canadians commented on the negative effects of the shift of Maltese population from the Junction area to the suburbs. Small group size may promote language maintenance if the group is geographically concentrated. In the Maltese-Canadian community the trend is towards dispersal, so small group size is not an asset.

Fishman (1985) and Holmes (1992) mention that government policy can support shift to the majority language even if the minority language is not actively discouraged. This is certainly the case in Canada. Although the government supports language maintenance efforts such as heritage language classes, all public education is in the official languages : English and French. Public education has gone a long way to encourage shift from immigrant languages to the official languages for Maltese-Canadians and other immigrant groups in North America.

The support of ethnic institutions such as clubs, church, press, radio, television and language classes can strongly promote language maintenance (Holmes 1992). The Maltese-Canadians are fortunate to have several such strong institutions; the positive effects of these institutions on Maltese language use and attitudes can be seen in survey results. However, even these institutions face the diminishing use of the Maltese language in Canada and many have adjusted their policy accordingly. The clubs publish newsletters and hold meetings mainly in English. If all institutions eventually shift completely to English, their role as promoters of the Maltese language will end, even if they continue to promote Maltese culture.

These common factors promoting language shift may explain the occurrence of language shift among the Maltese migrants, but do not explain the rapidity of such change. While some migrant groups in Canada retain their ethnic language through the second generation (O'Bryan, Reitz and Kuplowska 1976; Pendakur 1990), the Maltese have largely lost the Maltese language by the second generation. Several additional factors more specific to the Maltese may explain the rapidity of such shift.

As a British colony, Malta has long been exposed to the English language. By the post-World War Two period, when most emigration to Canada took place, English was taught in state schools. Thus, most Maltese migrants arriving in Canada already spoke some English. This ability aided

in their easy integration into Canadian society, allowing them to quickly obtain higher status employment. Quick integration into Canadian society led to quick abandonment of the Maltese language. Those immigrants with no exposure to the English language or British lifestyle take longer to integrate, tending to rely more on ethnic group support to get them through the difficult transitional period of learning English and adjusting to a different lifestyle. The Maltese migrants, on the other hand, quickly blended in and had less need for group support. In fact, several Maltese-Canadians mentioned with pride the ability of the Maltese to quickly blend in and adopt the Canadian language, culture and lifestyle.

Positive attitudes within a group towards its language may slow shift while negative attitudes may lead to a lack of effort towards active language maintenance (Holmes 1992; Romaine 1994). Probably the strongest factor contributing to the rapid shift to English among Maltese migrants in Canada is the negative attitudes many Maltese hold towards the Maltese language. Language attitudes in Malta have traditionally been quite negative towards Maltese (Aquilina 1975; Frendo 1993; Hull 1993). Although this has started to change in recent years, during the period of mass immigration from Malta, Maltese was considered by many to be a less valuable language than English. Emigrants brought these attitudes with them to Canada.

In contradiction to this statement, the majority of the Maltese-Canadian interviewees and survey respondents stated that it was important to them to maintain their own ability in Maltese and to pass Maltese on to their children. This contradiction can be explained in several ways. First, the interviewees, and many survey respondents are actively involved in the Maltese community. Of all Maltese-Canadians, these are the ones most likely to have positive attitudes and to support Maltese language maintenance. The strong negative attitudes expressed by a minority of respondents may be in reality more representative of the feelings of most Maltese-Canadians. Second, as Fishman (1972) and Fasold (1984) point out, overt positive attitudes towards a language do not necessarily lead to maintenance efforts. In the case of the Maltese-Canadians, stated positive attitudes towards language maintenance have only minimal relationship to Maltese language use.

In addition, negative attitudes are not always overtly expressed. Many Maltese-Canadians claim that it is important to them that their children learn Maltese yet they do not speak any Maltese to their children. One possible explanation for this discrepancy between stated positive attitudes

and behaviour is a deeper, unstated or even unacknowledged negative attitude towards the Maltese language. Comments from several respondents reveal the feeling that Maltese is not an important language internationally and therefore not worth learning outside of Malta. One first generation respondent expressed this view thus :

*The languages spoken here are English and/or French, as in most of the rest of the world outside of Malta. I wish someone pointed that out to me, or at least emphasised it more, when I was growing up. Perhaps I would have paid more attention to those subjects in school.*

These Maltese-Canadians may still feel pride in their cultural heritage and even in the Maltese language as a symbol of their identity. However, the feeling that the Maltese language is not valuable in any larger sense and not worth taking the time to learn has led to a lack of effort on the part of Maltese-Canadians to maintain and pass on their language. While positive attitudes may not lead to language maintenance efforts, negative attitudes almost certainly lead to a lack of such efforts.

One final factor may have affected the speed of language shift among Maltese-Canadians. Many Maltese-Canadians expressed their loyalty to their adopted home, Canada. Borg and Mayo (1994 : 216) write :

*These people (second and third generation Maltese-Canadians) see themselves as Canadian and refer only to their parents and grandparents as being Maltese. The sense of Maltese identity, therefore, gets progressively lost within the family across generations.*

One first generation respondent commented that “*at this point in my life being able to speak Maltese or not is a non-issue. Canada is my home*”. Thus, partially out of loyalty to their new home, some Maltese-Canadians feel that it is more important for their children to learn English and French than Maltese. Maltese-Canadians speak fondly of Malta, but most do not intend to return, having settled permanently in Canada. When this step has been made, no practical and few idealistic reasons remain to maintain the Maltese language.

On the basis of her 1989 study of Maltese-Canadians living in the Junction area and recruited from the Maltese-Canadian church and clubs, Sciriha noted that the shift to English was at an advanced stage. She predicted the death of the Maltese language in the Toronto Maltese commu-

nity within 20 to 30 years, despite the support of various institutions. If this is the prognosis for the Maltese language in the most concentrated Maltese area, with the support of various institutions, even less hope exists for the maintenance of Maltese by those Maltese living away from Toronto.

Results of the survey conducted in October 1998 point to a process of advanced and irreversible shift. Statistics on home language use of Maltese-Canadians further support this conclusion. Although a direct comparison with Sciriha's study is difficult due to differences in the sample population, it appears that the Maltese language is used less than it was ten years ago among Maltese-Canadian families. As the first generation of Maltese-Canadians ages and disperses, increasingly fewer find Maltese a practical means of communication. The second generation simply has no practical need for the Maltese language. Although both first and second generation Maltese-Canadians still feel a sentimental attachment to Maltese, faced with the need to fit in and move up in Canadian society, this attachment leads to positive attitudes but very little action in maintaining the Maltese language in Canada.

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