

## The project ImmiGrec: a brief overview

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Greek immigration to Canada dates back to the early 20<sup>th</sup> century, culminating between 1945 and 1975, when more than 107,000 Greek citizens arrived in Canada for economic and political reasons. According to the 2011 census, 350,000 Canadian citizens described themselves as Greeks or of Greek origin.

Currently, Greek-speaking communities and organizations are a dynamic component of a multicultural and multilingual Canadian society. These communities can be located in all major Canadian cities, Toronto, Montreal, Ottawa, Vancouver, Calgary, Edmonton, Halifax, Victoria, Regina and Winnipeg. The Greek communities' contribution to the Canadian social, cultural and linguistic milieu has been significant. It is clearly demonstrated in the transatlantic relations between Canada and Greece as well as in the political and social conditions of post-war Greece that steered so many people towards migration.

Greek-Canadian communities and organizations have attracted scientific interest in the past (see, among others, Gavaki 1977; Liodakis 1998; Chimbos 1999; Constantinides & Micheladaki 2014; Aravossitas 2016), but crucial issues regarding the adaptation and assimilation of Greek immigrants to the Canadian society have not been sufficiently explored. More specifically, the issue of language remains relatively unknown, particularly in the domain of contact of Greek with English or French, the two official languages of Canada.

The project *Immigration and Language in Canada. Greeks and Greek-Canadians*,<sup>1</sup> sponsored by the *Stavros Niarchos Foundation*, was implemented with the cooperation between three Canadian universities and a Greek one, McGill University, Simon Fraser University, York University and the University of Patras. The project's main aim is to document and investigate the history and language of Greek immigrants in Canada between 1945 and 1975. This program covers a unique interdisciplinary field that links history and social history with linguistics and sociolinguistics. For this purpose, the primary objective was to collect material from many Greek-speaking communities in Canada, both oral (narratives of the experiences of first-generation Greek immigrants) and printed (letters, newspaper clippings, photos, etc.), following the rules and regulations of scientific ethics and the protection of personal data.

As a result, printed material and about 350 hours of narratives have been collected primarily by the research teams of the three Canadian universities. In addition, past individual efforts to document the life of Greek Canadians (e.g. *Maniakas archive*, Maniakas 1991) and the University of Patras have contributed to the total number of the data collected for the project.

As a first step, the data were registered in an electronic repository and then integrated into a specially designed database (see articles by Tsimpouris *et al.* in this volume), while for the oral part there was transcription with the characters of the Greek alphabet. A small part of the material supplied the exhibits of a digital museum.<sup>2</sup> Preliminary attempts to

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<sup>1</sup> Available at <https://immigrec.com/en>.

<sup>2</sup> Available at <https://virtual.immigrec.com>.

analyze the available data led to the publication of articles, which are currently limited to the issue of language of first-generation immigrants.

With regard to language, which is the main topic of this volume, the sociolinguistic conditions in Canada highlight the Greek-Canadian communities and organizations as an important case study. There are three main linguistic questions that are explored within the context of Greek immigrants' historical experience:

- (i) *How did the removal from Greece affect Greek and its dialectal varieties in a situation of language contact, where English (or French in the province of Québec) is the dominant language?*

First-generation immigrants live in a stable multilingual environment where they speak Greek at home or with other Greeks, while English (or partly French in recent years in Québec) is used for communicative purposes with non-Greeks or under official circumstances. In this environment, borrowing is natural (see Thomason 2001; Matras 2009; Ralli *et al.* in this volume), which is often lexical (transfer of words from the source language to the target language), but also structural when there is bilingualism and a situation of intense linguistic contact. Crucially, concerning first-generation Greek-Canadian immigrants, no structural transfer has been observed, which, however, seems to be the case for second-generation immigrants, as their Greek belongs to the so-called "heritage" language.

- (ii) *The likelihood that a language of the Greek-Canadian community has begun to develop, which retains many elements of Standard Modern Greek, selected dialectal features and several components from English.*

This issue stems from the specific linguistic characteristics of immigrants due to their place of origin, since the vast majority of them come from rural classes. The case of dialectal Greek-Canadian enclaves is of particular interest in studying the long-term mechanisms of the contact of dialects with Standard Modern Greek and the dominant language of the new homeland. This contact has possibly led to simplification, redistribution or the creation of a new Standard Greek Canadian (see articles by Tsolakidis *et al.* in this volume).

- (iii) *How does the language reflect identity issues?*

Regarding their self-representation, first-generation immigrants avoid characterizing themselves as individuals with monocultural, either Greek or Canadian, identities. Relying on a variety of discursive resources, such as the disclaimer *I am/feel Greek, but...*, metaphors, small stories, and repair mechanisms (either separately or combined), they present themselves as individuals who experience cultural hybridity. Through their hybrid identity constructions, first-generation immigrants manage to oscillate between Greekness and Canadian-ness, distance and proximity, familiarity and estrangement in a creative way (see article by Karachaliou *et al.* in this volume).

As can be seen from the contents of this volume, the repository, the database and the technical part of the digital museum have been developed and implemented by the research team of the University of Patras (McGill's research team was responsible for the selection

of exhibits (except those of room 7), the graphics and music of the digital museum). Additionally, the language studies are the result of a collaborative work between the research team of the University of Patras and the research team of Simon Fraser University.

The volume consists of two parts: Part I contains the linguistic studies conducted at the University of Patras and SFU, written in the Greek language. Part II involves the English version of a number of works, which have been already published in edited volumes (permission has been granted by the publishers), journals, or conference proceedings. The linguistic studies are followed by copies of two papers, describing the technical details of the creation of the database and those of a first version of the digital museum, which have been developed at the University of Patras. The volume is rounded off with Appendix, which comprises the titles of publications within the context of the *ImmiGrec* research program for the years 2017-2018.

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