# LANGUAGE CONTACT AND LANGUAGE DECAY

## SOCIO-POLITICAL AND LINGUISTIC PERSPECTIVES

edited by

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# Bilingualism and language policy in Malta
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## 0. Introduction

The Constitution of the Republic of Malta (1974) recognises Maltese, a Semitic language which "typologically ... fits well into the general characteristics of Maghrebi dialects" (Mifsud 2008:146), as the national language of the island. In this Constitution both Maltese and English have the status of 'official' languages of Malta. Maltese is the local vernacular, used extensively for immediate communicative purposes; English, an inheritance of Malta's colonial past, is used widely in writing. As documented in various studies (Sciriha 2001; Micheli 2001; Caruana 2007; Brincat 2007; Peska 2009) most Maltese nationals harbour integrative attitudes towards the Maltese language, seen as an essential feature of one's identity, and instrumental attitudes towards English, a language which enables one to reach beyond local shores and which can be of great importance to further one's studies and to improve one's professional and socio-economic status.

The present linguistic situation in Malta is a reflection of historical and political permutations of the past. The simultaneous presence of two languages in Malta – generally described as a bilingual situation, but which in fact includes a number of features which can be defined more appropriately through diglossia – gives rise to a context wherein language contact is extremely frequent: this occurs through both inter- and intrasentential code-switching as well as through the constant integration of foreign terms, mainly from Italian and English, into Maltese.

The Arabic main stratum of Maltese, which has historically been exposed to Sicilian, as a superstratum, and to Italian as a first adsratum, has more recently acquired another adstratum through regular contact with English (Brincat 2003a:24). Today the number of Maltese terms of Italian and English origin outnumbers significantly terms from other sources, thereby contributing to a dynamic process of language change.

However, most closed-class words (including articles, prepositions, pronouns and conjunctions) derive from Arabic and are thereby used more frequently than lexemes of other origin.[1] As Mifsud (2008:146) explains: "Maltese has gone through a long and close contact and the Arabic dialect rooted on the island has gone through a fusion with the European languages which came in contact with it ... the changes have brought the general sound of the language closer to that of its languages of contact, from which only the glottal stop now sets it apart". Mifsud (2008:146) also states that Maltese has lost a number of consonantal phonemes, (seven of which are recorded in old Maltese documents) whilst it added seven new phonemes from non-Arabic sources.

Language policies in Malta are frequently caught in the midst of these dynamic diachronic and synchronic linguistic processes and often operate on two fronts: on the one hand internal changes inherent to the Maltese language must be taken into consideration, on the other hand language use, characterized by the presence of both English and Maltese, also must be accounted for.

In this paper I will illustrate how the linguistic situation in Malta is described in official documentation: I will deal both with issues related to 'internal' changes and how these have come to determine some features of standard Maltese, as well as with 'external' situations mainly related to the bilingual-diglottic relationship between Maltese and English. In the course of this paper I will provide some examples from the present-day Maltese linguistic scene, focussing mainly on language use in Maltese educational institutions, in order to discuss whether policies established in official documentation mirror language use in Malta today.

## 1. Language use in Malta

Malta, a small island in the Mediterranean, covering an area of around 316 square kilometers (see Figure 1 below), has a rich and chequered history which has inevitably influenced language use on the island in the course of the years. As stated earlier, currently Maltese and English are actively used in both their spoken and written forms.

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[1] See Brincat (2003a:360) for further statistical details on tallies of Maltese lexemes of different origin.

©Oxford Cartographers

*Gozo*
Victoria

*Comino*

36°N

Mellieha

**MALTA**

*Mediterranean*

*Sea*

Sliema
Mosta
*Malta*
Rabat    Hamrun    Valletta

253m    Luqa    Marsaxlokk

0 ————————— 5 miles
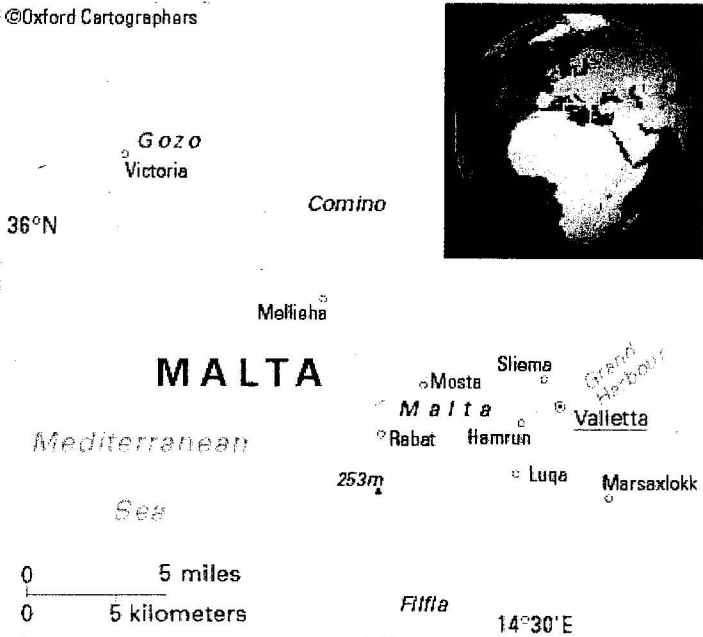0 ————————— 5 kilometers    *Filfla*

14°30'E

*Figure 1 - The geography of the Maltese islands.*[2]

Figures from the 2005 census[3] reveal that the total population of Malta stands at 404,962, out of which 12,112 (3%) are foreigners residing on the island. This figure is much higher than the one registered ten years earlier, when the total number of foreigners residing in Malta stood at 7,231. The 2005 census indicates that 4,713 (39%) of these foreigners are British.

Maltese owes its origins to the period of time (870-1090 A.D.) when the Arabs took over Malta, possibly in a violent manner, and thereby introduced their own vernacular which eventually took over any pre-existing language (Brincat 1995; 2003a:53-64). The Arabic variety of Malta was originally a "dialect of North African type, possibly with strong ties with the Arabic of Sicily" (Mifsud 1995:23), and the Romance

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[2]The map has been reproduced from: www.thecommonwealth.org, access date 20th June 2010.

[3] www.census2005.gov.mt, access date 23rd June 2010.

element eventually started reappearing in the language following the colonization of Malta by the Normans in 1090 A.D. and Malta's subsequent inclusion in the Kingdom of Sicily. Italian language varieties (most notably Sicilian), therefore gradually acquired an increasingly more central role in the Maltese linguistic scene. Some use of these varieties as a written medium alongside Latin has also been documented.[4] Eventually, Malta passed into the hands of the Knights of the Order of St. John and during their rule (1530-1798) documents were mainly published in Latin, although Italian (in its Tuscan variety) and Sicilian were also used in writing.

The situation changed drastically during the British colonial period (1800-1964) when English was introduced slowly but surely in Malta, eventually replacing Italian as the country's official language[5] after a lengthy struggle known as the 'language question'. As time passed, the status of Maltese improved and the language acquired a standardized written form. Notwithstanding this progress, up to the 1930s it was often defined as "*il-lingwa tal-kċina*", [the language of the kitchen] and "though Maltese was taught in Government schools, it was taught not so much for its own sake as for the sake of learning Italian through it" (Aquilina 1961:76). After World War II pressures to obtain Independence (achieved in 1964) mounted slowly and use of the language became more widespread among individuals of all social classes and from different educational backgrounds. Maltese is presently an official language of the European Union, in the wake of Malta's accession in 2004.

Maltese is the mother tongue of the vast majority of the population and is spoken all over the island. However, a number of Maltese citizens also claim that either English, or Maltese and English simultaneously, are their first language. In this respect data included in studies vary considerably and are inevitably influenced by the social and educational background of the respondents taken into consideration. Studies by Sciriha and Vassallo (2001 & 2006), however, indicate that Maltese is the native language of around 96% of the population.

A closer look at the current sociolinguistic situation in Malta reveals that Maltese is still used extensively as a spoken variety and that it is used

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[4] See Cassola (1998) for further details.
[5] Italian was Malta's official language till 1936, when, following a series of decisions which were the result of the political strife of those times, (see Hull 1993 on the 'language question' in Malta), it was demoted and substituted by English and Maltese.

to a somewhat lesser extent as a written medium, although this situation is subject to dynamic change. Maltese is used to communicate orally in most circumstances, especially at informal levels. It is used almost exclusively on local television and radio stations[6]. It is also used very frequently in modern means of communication which require a written variety, such as Internet Relay Chat (Brincat/Caruana, in print) and mobile phone texting. Furthermore, Maltese is also used regularly: "in Parliament, the Law Courts, the Church, all government offices, and in banks and private firms" (Brincat 2008:144). Official governmental and legal documentation is written in both Maltese and English.

English, on the other hand, is used frequently in writing. The most popular local daily newspaper (*The Times of Malta*) is in English and so are most textbooks used in schools. As a consequence, English gains ground over Maltese in certain contexts, including higher education. Though both English and Maltese are the official languages of the University of Malta, the language of assessment (bar some exceptions) is English,[7] as textbooks used in most courses are not available in Maltese. The increasing number of foreign students attending courses at the University of Malta also necessitates that many lectures are delivered entirely in English. Therefore, proficency in both spoken and written English constitutes an advantage to those Maltese students who pursue their studies beyond secondary level and, as a direct consequence of this, regular use of English in Malta, especially as a spoken medium, is often associated with families having a higher socio-economic background.

Though the Maltese society may be defined as bilingual, the linguistic situation on the island is more complex than this definition may suggest

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[6] Though Maltese is widely used on local media, in this domain the presence of English is also considerable. For example: on television, local programmes are transmitted in Maltese but there is no dubbing when foreign transmissions are screened; most radio programmes are in Maltese but very few songs in Maltese are aired on the radio; newspapers are published in both languages; films in cinemas are exclusively in English, except in some few isolated cases; there are a number of Internet websites in Maltese although most computer browsing is done on websites in English. See Borg, Lauri & Hillman (2009) for further details regarding the media in Malta.

[7] The following extract is taken from the University Assessment Regulations, 2009: "The language of assessment shall be English, except that for areas of study involving a language or when Senate approves the delivery of a Study-Unit in Maltese or in any other language, students shall be assessed in that language".

as the situation is characterized by frequent interplay between bilingualism and diglossia. In addition to this, Italian still has a significant role in Malta. In fact, Italian television channels, received in Malta via antennae, cable television or satellite, are quite popular amongst the Maltese despite the decline registered in popularity over the recent years (Caruana 2009b). As documented in a number of studies (Brincat 1998; 2003a; Caruana 2003; 2006) the degree of spontaneous acquisition of Italian via contact with native-speakers and through the media (especially television) gave new life to the presence of this language in Malta, following its demotion in 1936. A considerable number of Maltese nationals comprehend Italian well and some of them also claim to speak the language quite fluently, as indicated in recent studies, including Scrinzi (2010).

## 2. The standardization of Maltese: some diachronic and synchronic considerations

Although written documentation in Maltese is historically rich, and dates back to the 15th century (the earliest text in Maltese is the *Cantilena*, by Pietru Caxaru),[8] throughout the course of the centuries the language was largely limited to the spoken form. Having been largely overshadowed, especially in the higher echelons of society, by Italian (till the early decades of the 20th century) and by English during the colonial period, the process of the standardization of Maltese was heavily motivated by a patriotic quest to improve its status.

In 1920 *L-Għaqda tal-Kittieba tal-Malti* [The Association of Maltese Writers] was founded by a group of highly-esteemed literary figures[9]. One of the aims of this *Għaqda* was to initiate the process of standardizing Maltese writing, besides promoting Maltese literature and language. This led to the publication, in 1924, of the *Tagħrif fuq il-Kitba Maltija*[10] [Information on Maltese Writing] which till the present day is considered to be a reference point for standard Maltese and which enabled Maltese to find its way out of what Aquilina (1961:101) describes as "the jungle of

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[8] Wettinger & Fsadni (1968).

[9] Including the National Poet, Dun Karm Psaila (1871-1961), and other prominent literary figures such as Ninu Cremona (1880-1972) and Ġużè Muscat Azzopardi (1853-1927).

[10] L-Għaqda tal-Kittieba tal-Malti (1924).

Maltese letter-making". By means of the *Tagħrif*, a standardised Maltese alphabet was devised. This alphabet was based on the principle that: "l-kitba Maltija jeħtiġilha tkun mibnija fuq Alfabett li fih kull ittra għandha tidher għal leħen wieħed, u fejn kull leħen għandu jiġi miftiehem b'ittra waħda" [it is necessary that Maltese writing is built on an alphabet in which every letter is to represent a sound (*leħen*, literally 'voice'), and in which every sound is to be interpreted through a single letter] (*L-Għaqda tal-Kittieba tal-Malti* 1924:85-86). This principle, which was revised during subsequent additions and modifications to the *Tagħrif*, was adopted to eliminate inconsistencies present at the time (e.g. Italian <ch> and <sc> were officially replaced respectively by <k> for the voiceless velar plosive and by <x> for the voiceless postalveolar fricative; the <j> was introduced as a palatal approximant to be used in diphthongs) and also served as a basis for the adoption of characters for the Maltese alphabet which are still used today (see Appendix 2).

## 2.1. The integration of loanwords into the Maltese orthographic system

This 1924 *Tagħrif* remained virtually untouched for a number of decades. This does not mean, of course, that the measures regarding Maltese orthography included in this document were readily accepted. On the other hand, in some cases they were refused outwardly and as Aquilina (1961:76) illustrates: "from 1921 to 1934 the Ghaqda's orthography was limited to its own organ *Il-Malti, Leħen il-Malti*". In other cases there were outright counterproposals such as the one made by the pro-Italian 1932 Minister of Education, Dr. Enrico Mizzi who: "ordered the suppression of the letter *j* in such words as *pulizija* ('police'), *burokrazija* ('bureaucracy') etc., the change of the letter *j* to *i* in such words as *Kummissarju* ('Commissioner'), *ufficċju* ('office') etc." (Aquilina, 1961:76). This shows that the standardisation of Maltese, as well as consensus on how to represent loanwords, involved a number of politically motivated struggles from its very onset.

An official addition to the *Tagħrif*, which was deemed to be necessary to take into account phenomena of language change which Maltese encountered over the course of time, was made in 1984. In the meantime, in 1964, the *Għaqda tal-Kittieba tal-Malti*, following a change in statute, had become *L-Akkademja tal-Malti* (The Maltese Academy). The 1984

amendments and additions to the *Tagħrif* produced a document entitled "*L-Ortografija ta' Neoloġiżmi*[11] *Anglo-Sassoni u Rumanzi fil-Malti – Żieda mat-Tagħrif fuq il-Kitba Maltija (1924)*" [The orthography of Anglo-Saxon and Romance Neologisms in Maltese – addendum to the *Tagħrif fuq il-Kitba Maltija* (1924)],[12] in which issues related to the inclusion of loanwords in Maltese were addressed.[13] These considerations were of fundamental importance since the Semitic-stratum of Maltese has become largely unproductive and language change occurring in Maltese involves almost exclusively the inclusion of terms of non-Arabic origin.[14] This also applies to technical terms used in specialised and sectorial domains.[15] The following three extracts, with my translations, are taken from the 1984 document mentioned above, and serve to exemplify how some measures were adopted in order to include words of non-Arabic origin in standard Maltese writing:

Extract 1: *Żieda Mat-Tagħrif* (L-Akkademja tal-Malti, 1984) pg. 1

| | |
|---|---|
| 2. Fl-1924, l-Akkademja tal-Malti fasslet alfabett u ortografija ġodda għall-Malti li saru l-alfabett u l-ortografija uffiċjali fl-1934. L-alfabett u l-ortografija tal-Għaqda huma, u għandhom jibqgħu, il-bażi tal-ortografija tal-Malti. Il-biċċa l- | "2. In 1924, the Akkademja tal-Malti determined a new alphabet and orthography for Maltese which became the official alphabet and orthography in 1934. The alphabet and the orthography of the Għaqda are, and should remain, the basis of |

[11] Despite being referred to as neologisms, the words in question are actually borrowings.

[12] L-Akkademja tal-Malti (1984).

[13] The only (few) non-Semitic words mentioned in the 1924 *Tagħrif* are of Italian origin. However, this document is heavily based on a grammatical description of Maltese morphology on the basis of its Arabic origin and the presence of Italian terms, which were undoubtedly present in spoken Maltese at the time (this is evident from some literary works of the time in which colloquial Maltese was represented, such as Juann Mamo's (1886-1941) *Ulied in-nanna Venut*), is largely unaccounted for.

[14] Brincat (2003a:351-362) gives numerous examples of Maltese lexemes from various semantic areas and describes the stratification of the language on chronological grounds.

[15] A noteworthy example of this today is constituted by official documentation of the European Union which is being translated into Maltese. As documented by Caruana (2009a), since these documents involve the use of specialized and technical language, terms of Italian and English origin are used very often and the frequency of these lexemes in Maltese translated versions of EU documents is very high.

| | |
|---|---|
| kbira tal-kliem missellef joqgħod, jew qagħad, għall-ortografija Maltija, u l-lum ma nagħtux kas, meta niktbu l-Malti, jekk kelma hix imnissla mill-ilsien Semitiku jew minn ilsna oħra. | *Maltese orthography. Most loanwords fit in, or have fitted into, Maltese orthography, and today we do not take any notice, when writing in Maltese, if a word is of Semitic origin or if it originates from other languages".* |

Extract 1 constitutes an example of how language policy in Malta was determined in relation to the internal structures of the language. While confirming the decisions accounted for in the 1924 *Tagħrif*, it specifies that words of non-Semitic origin have 'fitted into' the Maltese orthographical system. Though it may seem odd that this was specifically stated as late as 1984, when it actual fact Maltese had been shaped by contact with non-Semitic languages from the initial phases of its history, one must acknowledge that this, among others, was an important step for the integration of loanwords into Maltese. In this respect, probably influenced by the *Tagħrif*, it is necessary to add that up to a few years ago teaching Maltese grammar in local schools was almost entirely based on the morphology of the Semitic structures, with little or no importance given to inflection, derivation and composition of terms of Italian or English origin. The next two extracts (2 & 3) provide further examples related to this policy on integration of loanwords:

Extract 2 *Żieda Mat-Tagħrif* (L-Akkademja tal-Malti, 1984) pgs. 4-5

| **4. *Żewġ vokali ħdejn xulxin f'nofs ta' kelma*** | **"4. *Two vowels next to one another in the middle of a word*** |
|---|---|
| (a) Kliem missellef li jkun fih il-ħoss ta' żewġ vokali ħdejn xulxin li jinħassu mingħajr il-qadi ta' konsonanti dgħajfa, għandhom jinkitbu mingħajr il-konsonanti qaddejja – hekk, p.e. 'ideal' u mhux 'idejal'/'ideali' u mhux 'idejali'; 'idea' u mhux 'ideja'; 'reali' u mhux 'rejali/'realtà' u mhux 'rejaltà'; 'poeta' u mhux 'poweta'. | *(a) Loanwords which have the sound of two vowels next to one another which are pronounced without the use of a weak consonant, are to be written without the use of this helping [qaddejja, lit. 'serving'] consonant – so, e.g.* 'ideal' *and not* 'idejal'/'ideali' *and not* 'idejali'; 'idea' *and not* 'ideja'; 'reali' *and* |

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<table>
<tr><td>

**Nota:** Noqogħdu ftit attenti hawn. Ghandna niktbu/nibqgħu niktbu 'rjal' u mhux 'real' meta din tfisser 'royal', 'fjur' u mhux 'fiur', 'Inkwiżizzjoni' u mhux 'Inkuiżizzjoni'. Jidher li hawn tidħol regola tal-fonetika. Meta l-ħsejjes ta' 'j' u 'w' huma ċari, dawn għandhom jinkitbu flok il-vokali 'i' jew 'u'.

</td><td>

*not* 'rejali/'realtà' *and not* 'rejaltà'; 'poeta' *and not* 'poweta'. **Note:** *We must be a bit careful here. We are to write / continue writing* 'rjal' *and not* 'real' *when this means* 'royal', 'fjur' *and not* 'fiur', 'Inkwiżizzjoni' *and not* 'Inkuiżizzjoni'. *It seems that here phonetic rules are involved. When the 'j' and 'w' sounds are clear, they are to be written instead of the vowels 'i' and 'u' '*.

</td></tr>
</table>

In extract 2 I provide an example regarding the spelling of words of Italian origin in standard Maltese. Words of Arabic origin in Maltese orthography, despite being written in Latin characters, normally preserve the consonant-vowel alternation which is typical of Semitic introflexive morphology, based on triconsonantal or quadriconsonantal structures. This, of course, is not necessarily the case when terms of Italian and English origin are integrated into the language. In some cases these terms are integrated analogically into the Arabic pattern,[16] but in other cases they conserve concatenative features and construct their derivational or inflectional morphology through prefixes and suffixes. Extract 2 provides an example of how the standardisation of Maltese, in this case through the 1984 addition to the *Tagħrif*, regularises spelling of lexemes of Italian origin, by explaining that in the cases such as *realtà* and *poeta* (in which a hiatus, rather than diphthongisation, is present) the inclusion of <j> and <w>, used in diphthongs in standard Maltese, is unnecessary. These graphemes were occasionally placed in intervocalic position probably on the grounds of Arabic vowel-consonant alternation. This, again, is an

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[16] In some cases, words of non-Semitic origin replicate Semitic patterns and are therefore integrated into structures of introflexive morphology. These examples illustrate how this occurs in nominal morphology: Arabic pattern (1): CvCCvC (*ġurdien-ġrieden* "mouse-mice") replicated on Italian forms: *martell-mrietel* "hammer-hammers"; *verdun-vrieden* "greenfinch-greenfinches"; *dublett* (from Sicilian 'dubrettu']-*dbielet* "skirt-skirts". Arabic pattern (2): CvCC (*belt-bliet* "city-cities") replicated on Italian forms and also on some isolated English forms: *serp-sriep* "snake-snakes"; *ċerv-ċriev* "deer-deer"; *kitla-ktieli* "kettle-kettles").

indication of difficulties related to inconsistencies in standard Maltese spelling, wherein the use of <j> for the palatal approximant could produce, for example, *<rejaltà> and *<ideja>, versions which pro-Italian factions in the Thirties would have undoubtedly rebuked, but which must have continued to survive in Maltese writing well beyond this era, if *L-Akkademja* deemed it necessary to provide the clarification represented in extract 2 in 1984.

Extract 3, represented below, provides an example of how words forming part of the most recent adstratum, English, are integrated into standard Maltese spelling:

Extract 3 *Żieda Mat-Tagħrif* (L-Akkademja tal-Malti, 1984) pg. 7

| **9. *Vokali 'i' jew 'u' mkarkrin*** | ***"9. Long vowels 'i' or 'u'*** |
|---|---|
| Xi kliem li daħal mill-Ingliż, fih il-vokali 'i' jew 'u' mkarkrin. Dan m'għandhom qatt jieħdu *j* jew *w* warajhom, imma għandhom isegwu r-regoli normali tal-Malti. Bħalma niktbu 'tmun, snin, inklina, studja' hekk għandna niktbu 'stim (*steam*)', 'tim (*team*)/timijiet', 'skuter (*scooter*)', 'snuker (*snooker*)', 'illidja (*led*)'. | *Some words that originate from English, include long 'i' or 'u' vowels. These are never to be written with* **j** *or* **w** *after them. As we write 'tmun (rudder), snin (years), inklina (he inclined), studja (he studied)' we are to write 'stim (steam)', 'tim (team)/timijiet', 'skuter (scooter)', 'snuker (snooker)', 'illidja (led)'."* |

The integration of most English loanwords into Maltese occurs, as evident from extract 4, on the grounds that they fit into phonetic patterns of the language and that they are also morphologically integrated. This occurs both in the case of verb morphology (e.g. *ipparkja* 'he parked'; *ibbukkja* 'he booked'; *startja* 'he started the car'; *illandja* 'he landed the plane')[17] and of nominal morphology (e.g. *kejk* 'cake' and *kowt* 'coat' are

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[17] One of the hypotheses regarding the morpheme < ja >, through which many borrowings are integrated into the Maltese, is that it is an analogical reproduction of the Italian forms ending in *–iare / - gnare*, or Sicilian *–iari* (e.g. studiare - *studja*; raddoppiare – *irdoppja*; rimediare – *irrimedja*; disegnare – *iddiżinja*). This explanation alone, however, may not be convincing enough in order to explain why so many lexemes of English origin fall into this relatively limited pattern. Mifsud (1995:236) provides further elaboration and illustrates that the Sicilian verbal suffix *-iari*: "...seems to be very

morphologically integrated as it forms the plural through the Maltese suffix: *kejkijiet* 'cakes'; *kowtijiet* 'coats').

It is almost superfluous to say that policies adopted regarding the integration of English terms into the Maltese orthographical system, are not always met favourably and the regular flow of these lexemes into Maltese does not render this on-going standardisation process plain-sailing. Brincat (2003a:378), for example, highlights a number of difficulties when integrating English terms into Maltese spelling on phonetic grounds and explains how this process, which may be relatively simple for Italian loanwords (as this language is phonetically more similar to Maltese than English) presents a number of complexities in the case of English borrowings. The examples I present in the following paragraph provide evidence of the inconsistencies that we witness regularly when English loanwords are represented in Maltese writing.

## 2.2. Recent developments

Further modifications and measures were introduced by *Il-Kunsill Nazzjonali tal-Ilsien Malti* in 1992[18] and in 2008.[19] In both cases they concerned mainly the integration of words of English origin into the Maltese orthographic system. Despite these efforts to provide clear criteria for the spelling of loanwords, in a preliminary working document (Il-Kunsill Nazzjonali tal-Ilsien Malti, 2008b), which served as a basis for a discussion regarding English borrowings, the following corpus (compiled from the Maltese language newspaper *l-Orizzont* in November 2006) reveals numerous spelling inconsistencies. I am limiting the following list to those lexemes in the corpus of which three or more different spelling versions were attested in the single month in which it

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common with monosyllabic stems ending with a double consonant". Examples provided include *pustiari*, 'to place'; *tardiari* 'to become late'; *sirpiari* 'to zig-zag'. The author then adds: "Also in the imported English loan words, the monosyllabic stem ending with a consonant cluster is predominant. It is here suggested that this phonological parallelism was responsible for the fact that practically all English Maltese verbs have been channelled into this small class of verbs and take the stem-extension / - y - /, which has thus become established as the standard ending of English Maltese loan verbs" (Mifsud 1995:236).

[18] *Aġġornament tat-Tagħrif fuq il-Kitba Maltija* [Update to the Information on Maltese Writing], L-Akkademja tal-Malti, (1992).

[19] *Deċiżjonijiet 1* [Decisions 1], Il-Kunsill tal_Ilsien Malti (2008a).

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was gathered:

(1) **basketball**: basketball, Basketball, baskitboll, baskitbol

(2) **chairman**: Chairman, ċermen, ċerman,

(3) **champions**: champions, ċempjins, ċampjins

(4) **coaches** (noun): coaches, 'coaches', kowċes, kowċis

(5) **e-mail**: e-mail, email, *email*, imejl

(6) **football**: football, Football, futbol, futball

(7) **foul**: fawl, fawll, fowl

(8) **free kick**: frikikk, frijkik, frikik

(9) **hat-trick**: hat-trick, hatrik, ħatrik

(10) **leaders**: leaders, lijders, liders

(11) **lecturer**: lecturer, 'lecturer', lekċerer

(12) **management**:[20] management, Management, maniġment, Maniġment

(13) **media**: media, midja, midia, *midja*

(14) **mobile** (noun[21] & adjective): mobile, Mobile, mowbajl, mobajl

(15) **part-time**: part-time, Part-time, *Part Time*, part-tajm, partajm

(16) **round**: round, 'round', rawnd

(17) **shutter/s**: shutters, xatter; xutter

(18) **union**: union, Union, unjin, Unjin

(Kunsill Nazzjonali tal-Ilsien Malti, 2008b: 6-18)

The above list presents a number of inconsistencies in the way these terms have been represented in articles of the above-mentioned Maltese language newspaper. These are not only related to conventions (such as italicisation, capitalisation and use of inverted commas) when these borrowings are used, but also to different versions. For example in some cases the English version is maintained, in others it is adapted to Maltese phonetic features. A feature which is present in a number of inconsistencies is yet again the use of < j > (see also some information on the use of this grapheme in Section 2.1, as well as extracts 2 & 3 presented above): in some cases this replicates the use of standard Maltese diphthongs (for instance, [ɐɪ] and [ɛɪ] (e.g. *tfajla*, 'young girl'; *kejl* 'measure') - *part-tajm, mowbajl, imejl*), whereas in others it is used somewhat questionably in stressed syllables featuring English Received Pronunciation /i:/ - *frijkik, lijders*. These are just a few examples of an

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[20] The form *immaniġġar* is also used besides the English-based terms.

[21] Used in order to refer to a mobile phone.

ongoing debate which is certainly most difficult to address in language policies, not least because of the continuous changes the language goes through. A report (Fabri et al. 2009) was drawn precisely with the intention of addressing these issues, both in the written and in the spoken media. Notwithstanding this, however, inconsistencies are still present and when they are divulged through the media they lead to confusion and inaccuracies.

As far as the media is concerned, as already documented in other contexts (e.g. Anis 2007 for French; Pistolesi 2004 for English; Crystal 2001 and Baron 2008 for English), one cannot ignore the way Maltese is being represented in writing through modern means of communication. A recent study held among university students (Brincat/Caruana, in print) indicates that both Maltese and English are used in Computer Mediated Discourse.[22] Another interesting consideration arises from the fact that whereas English is used more frequently than Maltese when one writes in blogs or when one writes emails, the tendency is reversed in computer chat. This indicates that the chat variety is perceived to be more conducive to the use of one's L1, probably because of its high degree of informality, whereas English is considered to be more appropriate than Maltese in emails and in blogs since these two media are normally slightly more formal than chat.

In extract 4 I present an example of a chat conversation between two university students. This exchange, between interlocutor A and B, is represented as it was produced originally (including capitalisation, italicisation, use of punctuation marks etc.) together with a transcription in standard Maltese (and English) and a literal translation (within brackets):

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[22] The study of Computer Mediated Discourse, as described by Herring (2001:612), is a specialisation within the broader interdisciplinary study of computer-mediated communication, distinguished by its focus on language and language use in computer networked environments, and by its use of methods of discourse analysis. For example, language produced in internet chatting, in emails and in blogs are all considered to be types of Computer Mediated Discourse.

Extract 4: Example of a computer-mediated chat conversation

|   | **Computer chat interaction** | **Transcription in Standard Maltese / English and translation (in brackets)** |
|---|---|---|
| A | pierre?!?!?!? | Pierre? |
| A | fej sejjer pierre\|?? | fejn sejjer, Pierre? (*Where are you going, Pierre?*) |
| B | *u le xejn kbir* | u le xejn kbir (*no, nothing great*) |
| B | *sejjer 2 weeks UK* | sejjer 2 weeks UK (*I'm going 2 weeks UK*) |
| B | *Work* | work |
| A | IL ALLU[23] | il-lallu! (*Great!*) |
| A | bis sens istja[24] | bis-sens, istja! (*that makes sense, bloody hell!*) |
| A | jien fuck up wahda andi biss | jien fuck up waħda għandi biss (*I only have one fuck up*) |
| A | li ada at 8 lecture u andi assignment alija | li għada at 8 lecture u għandi assignment għalija (*that tomorrow at 8 lecture and I have an assignment for me*) |
| A | u adni naqa lura | u għadni naqra lura (*and I'm still quite backward*) |

Needless to say, no attention to language policy will be paid by most interlocutors when chatting on the computer, when texting or when using computer-based social networking.[25] In fact, besides the continuous code-switching from Maltese to English and a fair share of profanities, one may also notice how this Computer Mediated Discourse disregards some basic concepts of standard Maltese writing: special Maltese characters are omitted (e.g *ħ* and *għ* in *wahdi, andi, alija, adni* in Extract 4 above), as

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[23] *il-lallu* is a variant of a taboo expression, normally used in order to express great surprise.

[24] *istja* is also a variant of a taboo expression, also used to express surprise or to emphasize what is being stated.

[25] Similar occurrences are also attested in the variety of Maltese used by youths (Barbara/Scicluna 2002).

well as the dash (also a reminiscence of the language's Arabic roots) between article and noun (*il-lallu, bis-sens...*). In a nutshell, these examples indicate that spelling on computer chat is normally based on purely phonetic grounds and that the etymological element of Maltese standard spelling is ignored, thereby disregarding the process of several years that the language had to go through in order to achieve its standard features. The long-term effects of these versions of written Maltese is yet to be seen but one cannot exclude that they could continue distancing the Maltese language from its Arabic roots, thereby providing a further development in the process that Mifsud (2008:146), quoted in the opening paragraphs of this paper, has already outlined.

Having dealt with aspects of Maltese by illustrating how internal language change occurs as a consequence of contact, I will now proceed to describe some 'external' features, mainly related to the simultaneous use of both Maltese and English in Malta. In the next sections I will therefore deal more specifically on sociolinguistic issues and on their relevance in the light of the developments regarding language use in Malta.

## 3. Socio-political issues

The Constitution of the Republic of Malta, as I already mentioned in the introduction to this paper, outlines the role of Maltese and English quite clearly establishing a difference between Maltese as 'national' language and both Maltese and English as 'official' languages. The fact that the language of the Courts is Maltese (see paragraph (3) below)) is an indication of how the status of the local vernacular has risen remarkably in recent history:

Extract 5[26] (Constitution of the Republic of Malta (1974))

Chapter I, Article 5

(1) The National language of Malta is the Maltese language.
(2) The Maltese and the English languages and such other language as may be prescribed by Parliament (by a law passed by not less than two-thirds of all the members of the House of Representatives) shall be the official languages of Malta and the Administration may for all official purposes use any of such languages: Provided that any person may address the Administration in any of the official languages and the reply of the Administration thereto shall be in such language.
(3) The language of the Courts shall be the Maltese language: Provided that Parliament may make such provision for the use of the English language in such cases and under such conditions as it may prescribe.
(4) The House of Representatives may, in regulating its own procedure, determine the language or languages that shall be used in Parliamentary proceedings and records.

Chapter VI, Part II, Article 74

Save as otherwise provided by Parliament, every law shall be enacted in both the Maltese and English languages and, if there is any conflict between the Maltese and the English texts of any law, the Maltese text shall prevail.

The above extract from the Constitution is the most recent outcome following the struggle that the Maltese language has faced in order to find its role amidst the presence of other languages which were used on the island. If, historically, Italian was the language of the upper classes, thereby forcing Maltese to live in its shadow, today the strength of English as an international lingua franca is undoubtedly a force with which Maltese has to reckon. However, the situation regarding Maltese and English today is very different when compared to the relationship of the local vernacular and other acrolects in the past. In fact, although English is still associated with the higher socio-economic classes, the

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[26] The official English version is represented in this extract.

widespread use of Maltese has positively affected its prestige to the extent that it is now used at all levels of society.

In 2005, following an initiative of the Ministry of Education, *Il-Kunsill Nazzjonali tal-Ilsien Malti* [The Council of the Maltese Language] was founded, after *L-Att tal-Ilsien Malti* [Maltese Language Act] was included as Chapter 470 of the Maltese Laws. This was preceded by the publication, in 2001, of a document outlining a 'strategy' for the Maltese language.[27] This document is not an official policy-making document, but it paved the way for the setting up of the above-mentioned *Kunsill*, which, among other duties also has the role of establishing a national language policy. In the initial section of this 2001 strategy paper the role of Maltese is outlined, including emphasis on its use for immediate communication purposes. This is evident from Extract 6, reproduced below:

Extract 6 *Strateġija Nazzjonali għall-Ilsien Malti* (Bord għall-Ilsien Malti 2001, pg. 9)

| | |
|---|---|
| ... il-Malti huwa wirt nazzjonali ta' importanza kbira, għax fih tinġabar bhal f'mużew l-essenza tat-taqlib u t-tahwir ta' l-istorja tagħna. Imma, bil-maqlub tal-fdalijiet tal-mużew, l-ilsien huwa wirt ħaj, mitkellem u miktub ta' kuljum fil-komunikazzjoni bejn il-kotra l-kbira tal-Maltin u għadu jinterpreta b'simboli qodma u ġodda r-realtà l-iktar attwali u tanġibbli tal-Malti modern. Huwa wkoll l-ilsien li bih hija possibbli l-ikbar komunikazzjoni bejn iċ-ċittadini Maltin kollha. | *"...Maltese is a national heritage of great importance, because in it, just like in a museum, the essence of the changes and variedness of our history are gathered. However, differently to artefacts found in a museum, the language is a living heritage, it is spoken and written everyday through communication between the large extent of the Maltese population and it interprets, through the use of old and new symbols, the most tangible and everyday reality of modern Maltese. It is also the language through which most communication between Maltese citizens is made possible."* |

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[27] Strateġija Nazzjonali għall-Ilsien Malti (2001) [National Strategy for the Maltese Language] (Bord għall-Ilsien Malti 2001).

In this document, there is considerable emphasis on issues related to bilingualism in Malta, as well as on the role of Maltese within the European context. This is a clear example of how the use of both Maltese and English is viewed as advantageous and positive and of how the additive use of both languages should indeed be encouraged in Malta, as hinted in Extract 7 below:

Extract 7 *Strateġija Nazzjonali għall-Ilsien Malti* (Bord għall-Ilsien Malti 2001, pg. 12)

| | |
|---|---|
| Waqt li sa ċertu żmien (nistgħu ngħidu sa qabel it-Tieni Gwerra Dinjija) kull ilsien kien marbut ma' taqsima tal-popolazzjoni, jekk mhux ukoll ma' klassi soċjali waħda, illum nistgħu ngħidu li bid-demokratiżżazzjoni tat-tagħlim il-parti l-kbira tal-poplu Malti hija bilingwi, fis-sens li għandha ħakma ġmielha fuq żewġ ilsna, il-Malti u l-Ingliż. Għalhekk illum, għall-ewwel darba, il-kelliem Malti jista' jagħżel jekk fit-taħdit tiegħu jfissirx ruħu bil-Malti jew bl-Ingliż. Din is-sitwazzjoni ġdida hija riflessa tajjeb fil-Kostituzzjoni ta' Malta li fiha, barra li l-Malti huwa l-ilsien nazzjonali, insibu wkoll li l-Malti u l-Ingliż flimkien huma l-ilsna uffiċjali. Jidhrilna li s-sitwazzjoni bilingwi ta' Malta hija fit-teorija waħda li toqrob lejn l-ideali, u li l-Maltin għandhom japprezzawha u jisfruttawha bis-sħiħ. (p.12) | *"Whereas till some time ago (we may say up to before the Second World War) every language was related to sectors of the population, if not also to one social class, today we may say that with the democratisation of teaching a large part of the Maltese population is bilingual, in the sense that it has a considerable mastery of two languages, Maltese and English. So today, for the first time the Maltese speaker can choose whether to use Maltese or English in his speech. This new situation is well reflected in the Constitution of Malta wherein, beside Maltese as a national language, we find both Maltese and English as official languages. We feel that the bilingual situation of Malta is in theory close to an ideal one, and that the Maltese people should appreciate it and exploit it fully."* |

As outlined in Extract 7 above, while encouraging and promoting the

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use of the local vernacular in all its aspects, and while acknowledging that the sociolinguistic role of Maltese has evolved considerably, one cannot underestimate the importance of English in Malta. Despite being an inheritance of a controversial past, one must also bear in mind that today the presence of English in Malta is a richness which deserves to be protected and promoted. I underline this, not only on the strength of what is reported in Extract 7 above ("We feel that the bilingual situation of Malta is in theory close to an ideal one, and that the Maltese people should appreciate it and exploit it fully") but even on the grounds of indications of contexts wherein there are still negative attitudes harboured towards English. This normally involves language attitudes of individuals, including schoolchildren, who are not exposed to this language at home and who state that they have difficulties at mastering the language, as documented in Brincat, 2007.[28]

As stated previously, the 2001 strategy document led to the introduction of the *Att dwar l-Ilsien Malti* (2005) [Maltese Language Act] and to the founding of *Il-Kunsill Nazzjonali tal-Ilsien Malti* which now is entrusted, in collaboration with other organs, to formulate a language policy, as well as to determine provisions related to the standardisation of Maltese orthography:

Extract 8 *Att dwar l-ilsien Malti* (2005), Ch. 5: *Funzjonijiet tal-Kunsill*, pgs. 4-5

| | |
|---|---|
| Il-Kunsill għandu wkoll jagħmel kull aġġornament li jkun meħtieġ fl-ortografija ta' l-Ilsien Malti u, minn żmien għal ieħor, skond il-ħtieġa, jistabbilixxi l-mod kif għandu jinkiteb il-kliem ġdid fil-Malti u l-kitba korretta ta' kliem u frażijiet li jidħlu fil-Malti minn ilsna oħra. | *The Council shall also update the orthography of the Maltese Language as necessary and, from time to time, establish the correct manner of writing words and phrases which enter the Maltese Language from other tongues.* |
| ... b'konsultazzjoni ma' l-organi mwaqqfa b'dan l-Att, jadotta | *...in consultation with the organs established by this act adopt a* |

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[28] This information was obtained self- report data using a questionnaire and further investigation on this issue is necessary.

| politika, pjan u strateġija lingwistika xierqa u jara li dawn ikunu mwettqa u osservati f'kull qasam tal-ħajja Maltija; | *suitable linguistic policy backed by a strategic plan, and ensure that the same are put into practice and observed in all sectors of the Maltese life.* |
|---|---|

Over the past few years, *Il-Kunsill* has dedicated considerable time and effort to issues related to the inclusion of English loanwords into the Maltese orthographic system, as shown in the previous section. To my knowledge, however, less time and space has been given to policy making and in order to address Malta's bilingual situation, on the lines that had been hinted in the 2001 strategy paper (Bord għall-Ilsien Malti 2001). In the following section I will outline some sociolinguistic facets of language contact between English and Maltese by focussing specifically on how the two languages are used in Malta's educational institutions. The reason for choosing the educational sector lies specifically in the fact that it constitutes an explicit example of how official documentation sometimes finds difficulties in order to represent faithfully what occurs in reality.

## 4. The diglottic relationship between Maltese and English in the Educational Sector

As one might expect, even in view of what is stated in Malta's Constitution, both English and Maltese have central roles in Malta's present educational system. Again this is in stark contrast with the situation of a few decades ago, when Maltese was largely overshadowed by English in local schools. However, despite, this improvement in the status of Maltese, the educational domain is certainly the one in which the diglottic relationship between the two languages is mostly evident, as will be illustrated below.

Language use also reveals a person's underlying culture and background and in this sense Malta is no exception. At times Maltese nationals who speak in English are perceived as *tal-pepè* 'snobs' or *qżież* 'show-offs'. On the other hand, in certain circumstances, these English

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speakers are also prejudiced towards those who find difficulty in expressing themselves in English or are unable to do so, as they automatically consider them to be uneducated or pertaining to a low socioeconomic group. Still, even those who claim to use exclusively Maltese or English at all times are likely to use forms of code-switching, as, whichever the mother tongue, one is inevitably conditioned into using the languages one is regularly in contact with.[29] As Berruto (1998:16) claims, in a bilingual context code-switching is always present, whether to a greater or to a lesser extent, and Malta is no exception to this (Camilleri 1995; Sciriha 2001; Caruana 2002; Neame 2006 on code-switching and Bonnici 2009 on the Maltese-English variety). In this respect, it is necessary to point out that regular use of English in Malta, especially as a spoken medium, is often associated with families pertaining to a higher socioeconomic class. English also gains ground over Maltese in some limited contexts, the most influential of which is the educational sphere.

The National Minimum Curriculum[30] (Ministry of Education 1999) - henceforth NMC - dedicates an entire section to the strengthening of bilingualism in schools, wherein in is stated that:

"The NMC considers bilingualism as the basis of the educational system. This document regards bilingualism as entailing the effective, precise and confident use of the country's two official

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[29] The following exchange provides an example of rather marked code-switching utterances in Malta. In the translation, provided below the exchange, the standard English forms of the words transcribed phonetically are underlined:

- *Ara Carmen, kif int* [dɪsmornɪŋk]
- *Tgħidli xejn imma* [dɪskɔwld] *insejjaħlu* [ʔbnormɪl]. *Fuqi għandi* [trɪpʊlɔwvers] *u xorta nħoss il-bard.*

"Oh Carmen, how are you this morning"

"Better not ask, but I'd say this cold is abnormal. I've put on three pullovers and I still feel cold".

(example, including phonetic transcriptions, from Camilleri/Borg 1992, as quoted in Debrincat 1999:7)

[30] At the time of writing, the present National Minimum Curriculum (Ministry of Education 1999) is apparently in the course of being updated (or of being replaced by a new document). However, to my knowledge, no information has been yet published regarding this new document, nor is there any indication as to any official changes that may be implemented to the policies of language teaching in local schools.

languages: Maltese, the national language, and English. (...) knowledge of foreign languages is developed following one's knowledge of the native and national language, Maltese. (...) While students are in the process of strengthening the first language, the school must ensure that the children are familiarising themselves with the second language.[31] (...) The school could, after all, constitute the only source of learning in the second language. (...) Equal importance should be given to the teaching of the first and second languages at all levels".

(Ministry of Education, 1999:30)

## 4.1. Primary Schooling

Whilst acknowledging that the principles included in this document could be valid, especially from a practical point of view, they are not always a reflection of what occurs in reality. As far as obligatory schooling is concerned, Maltese and English are both compulsory subjects from the start of Primary schooling. The NMC states that at Primary Level (from 5 to 11 years of age) some subjects are to be taught in English as the vehicular language (English, Maths, Science etc.) whereas others (Maltese, Religious Education, Social Studies etc.) are to be taught in Maltese. In reality, the vehicular language used for teaching also depends heavily on the background of the pupils as well as on their abilities. Maltese is used much more frequently as a vehicular language in State schools, whereas English is used more often for this function in Independent schools[32]. This immediately creates differences between the various schooling institutions and, not surprisingly, a number of students in some State schools sometimes find it harder to attain high levels of proficiency in English whereas, conversely, students in some Independent schools encounter problems in Maltese. The situation in Church schools, which offer education free of charge but are traditionally also frequented by students from a number of English-speaking families, is somewhat less

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[31] Second language within this document refers specifically to English.

[32] In Malta schooling is offered free of charge by the State (frequented by the majority of Maltese students) and by the Church, and against payment by Independent institutions. As a consequence of this it is quite common that children from higher income families attend Independent schools. These are families in which English is normally used more frequently when compared to other households on the island.

clear-cut.

The NMC also specifies that, in order to reach the aim of implementing a policy of bilingualism in Primary institutions: "all schools must adopt the policy of using two languages", (Ministry of Education 1999:59). In the same document this policy is elaborated upon:

"In classroom situations when teaching these subjects in English poses difficulties, code switching can be used as a means of communication. These situations apart, the NMC advocates consistency in the use of language during the teaching-learning process."

(Ministry of Education 1999:59)

This very statement, in which it is acknowledged that English can pose difficulties to some students, includes a reference to code-switching between Maltese and English as a strategy which can help the teaching-learning process to progress more smoothly. However, this policy document does not address the fact that code-switching is the rule not the exception in most Maltese Primary classrooms and that its use mirrors the sociolinguistic situation of the island. Furthermore code-switching is viewed as a strategy that is to be resorted to in case of difficulties implying that its role and function in classrooms is limited. Yet, this implication has often been challenged: Cummins (2008:65), for example, states that "when we free ourselves from exclusive reliance on monolingual instructional approaches, a wide variety of opportunities arise for teaching bilingual students by means of bilingual instructional strategies that acknowledge the reality of, and strongly promote, cross language transfer" (Crease/Blackledge 2010) quote a number of studies that hint on the pedagogical validity of code-switching.[33] These advantages are reiterated in conclusion of the same authors' study who also recommend "to explore what "teachable" pedagogic resources are available in flexible concurrent approaches to learning and teaching languages bilingually" (Crease/Blackledge 2010:113). In my view, Malta offers ideal conditions to further this exploration and to create policies in which code-switching is viewed as a help (rather than a last resort) and

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[33] Amongst which Lin/Martin (2005) and Arthur/Martin (2006). See also Macaro (2005) on this topic.

possibly also an enrichment in the bilingual classroom. Camilleri (1995) has already provided significant contributions in this respect and studies have also been carried out in different settings, for example Mati (2004) for the South African context and Chen-On Then & Ting (2009) for the Malaysian one.

## 4.2. Secondary and Tertiary Educational Institutions

Language policy based on what Cummins (2008) calls the "two solitudes assumption" is also present in the sections that the Maltese NMC dedicates to Secondary schooling. Even in this case Maltese and English are considered in separate terms, as if the two languages do not come in contact with one another.

At Secondary level, students start learning one or two other languages, besides Maltese and English, and generally choose between Arabic, French, German, Italian and Spanish. Italian is the most popular choice (around 70% of Maltese students learn this language), whereas Arabic is learnt only by a handful of students every year. Though this may sound surprising, considering that the origin of Maltese is Arabic, the lack of a tradition of teaching this subject in local schools, coupled with religious prejudice and some controversial political decisions, never allowed this language to gain ground in Malta.

As far as language teaching at Secondary level is concerned, the policy included in the NMC states that:

"With regard to language teaching, at Secondary level, one should continue with the strengthening of the students' knowledge of the two official languages and the introduction of teaching of foreign languages. This document obliges teachers of Maltese and English to teach in the language of their subject and recommends teachers of foreign languages to teach in the language of their particular subject. This document recommends that: teachers of Maltese, Social Studies, History, Religion and PSD[34] teach these subjects in Maltese; teachers of foreign languages teach in the language in question; and teachers of the remaining subjects teach in English. Only in those cases where this poses great pedagogical problems,

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[34] PSD = Personal and Social Development, a subject taught in all Maltese schools.

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does the NMC accept code switching as a means of communication".

(Ministry of Education, 1999:62)

This policy, while building on what was previously reported with reference to Primary schooling, states specifically that at Secondary level code-switching is only acceptable in cases which hold 'great pedagogical problems'. However, what really happens in Maltese classrooms? The following considerations are useful to shed light on the situation.

Camilleri (1995:154-160) provides a detailed account of situations related to the use of Maltese and English in local Secondary schools. Teacher-student interactions that took place in a number of lessons were registered, transcribed and analysed. As stated earlier, in Maltese schools though most textbooks are in English, lessons are often carried out in Maltese. This is mainly the case in State schools as in Independent schools, normally frequented by students coming from a high socio-economic background, English is used more frequently. One of Camilleri's (1995) most significant findings is that 'switching from Maltese to English is mainly accounted for by the use of English technical terms and phrases (77.8% of code-switching units)' (Camilleri 1995:216, brackets in the original). Consequently in classes where Maltese is used frequently, English is resorted to whenever a teacher includes aspects related to the content of a subject in his/her explanation. This is illustrated by the following example taken from a Mathematics lesson, followed by my translation:

Extract 9 Maltese-English code-switching in a Mathematics lesson

S:[35] *ma jnaqqsulekx marki*
T: no no no you won't lose marks...*imma* if possible... to show you know what you are really doing...*nippruvaw inniżżlu it*-two *mal-ewwel*...immediately *mal-ewwel inniżżluha t*-two...*kif qed nagħmel il*-formula *inniżżlilha anzi mal*-formula *għax għalhekk qed nagħmel*

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[35] S = student; T = teacher. I have italicised the parts of this utterance which are in Maltese.

semicircle...*biex jiena hawnhekk inniżżel it*-two *mal-ewwel ...orrajt ...*yes

(Camilleri, 1995:116-117, my italics)

*S: they won't deduct marks from you*
*T: no, no, no you won't lose marks... but if possible...to show you know what you're really doing...we try to write the number two immediately. Immediately, we immediately write down the number two. While I am working the formula I write it down or rather at the same time as the formula because this is why I draw a semicircle, so that I write number two here right away. Alright. Yes.*

As seen in Extract 9 above, notwithstanding the fact that the NMC advocates teaching Mathematics through English, this does not always occur. Maltese is generally perceived as necessary for most informal communication, in order to elaborate on teachers' explanations and in certain circumstances also to explain metalinguistic issues. English is generally used in order to refer to content-related (including numerals) and technical terms.

A similar, albeit linguistically more complex situation, is evident when foreign languages (L2) are taught in Malta. Though exposure to foreign languages in the classroom context is greatly encouraged and although the policy of L2 teaching by direct exposure is advocated, in line with the principles of Communicative Language Teaching, one often encounters situations of three languages in contact, as is evident from the example below, taken from an Italian lesson in a Secondary State School:

Extract 10 Maltese-English-Italian code-switching in an Italian lesson

T: scomparsa ...che significa scomparsa ? ...tal-maġiks, hekk ?
S: sir sir
T: è sparita? ... John
S: sparixxiet

*T: scomparsa, what does scomparsa mean, by doing magic, just like that?*
*S: sir, sir [tries to get teacher's attention]*
*T: è sparita?, John*
*S: she disappeared*

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In Extract 10 the teacher of Italian attempts to explain the meaning of the Italian polysemous term *scomparsa* (meaning both 'disappeared' and 'died'). Having introduced the term, he uses an intrasentential Maltese-English code-switch (*tal-maġiks hekk*), after which a student calls his attention by calling him 'sir', the typical appellative used in Malta for male teachers. Finally, the same student provides the Maltese equivalent (*sparixxiet*) for the Italian *scomparsa*.

At higher educational levels, Maltese has limited use as a vehicular language and a sound knowledge of English is important in order to gain access to tertiary education. Textbooks used in the vast majority of university courses are in English and therefore the knowledge of both spoken and written English constitutes an advantage to those students who pursue studies at this level.

## 5. Conclusion: honesty is the best policy

Malta's language policies have undergone major changes over the recent years and undoubtedly, when compared to the past, the number of documents regarding language use in Malta has risen sharply. Furthermore since 2004, when Malta became a full member of the European Union, the policies of this institution, which regularly stress the importance of multilingual competence, also serve as guidelines for policy-makers: "The Commission has worked since 2002 with Member States towards the Barcelona objective of enabling citizens to communicate in two languages in addition to their mother tongue, in particular, by developing an indicator of language competences, by setting out strategic action and recommendations, and by including skills in foreign languages among the key competences for lifelong learning". (Commission of European Communities 2008:4). Malta is undoubtedly in an advantageous position when implementing such policies as its bilingual - and in some instances also trilingual (e.g. Brincat 2003b; Caruana 2006) - context is conducive to language acquisition. On the other hand, recent developments which seem to point to a decline in the competence of Italian (historically one of Malta's most important languages) do not augur well. Neither do some negative attitudes which are sometimes harboured towards English or inconsistencies in the use of Maltese, especially when the latter are divulged via the local media.

In certain respects, as I have attempted to point out in this paper, there is a divergence between considerations included in language policy in Malta and actual language use. I have hinted at the fact that, for example, especially where education is concerned one cannot ignore or over-simplify the role of code-switching between Maltese and English or refer to it solely as a strategy that should only be used in situations where problems of a pedagogical nature are present. Its widespread use in schools has to be acknowledged and possibly also addressed in terms as to how this could be beneficial both to improve language competence as well as to ensure that it can lead to a better understanding of the content of the lessons.

In addition to this, while it is indeed healthy to see how changes in the Maltese language are being included in policy making, one must also account for the fact that the significant number of loanwords used in Maltese today is also a clear sign of its vitality and of its dynamism. Regulating the integration of these terms in writing is indeed a complex task: this challenge must be faced also by considering both the degree of integration of such lexemes within the Maltese language (both from a phonetic and from a morphological point of view) as well as the frequency of use of such terms. *Il-Kunsill Nazzjonali tal-Ilsien Malti* has already shown, in the documentation to which I referred to in this paper, that it is well aware that issues related to recent developments of Maltese are to be seen in this light.

Recent developments of Maltese also point to the possibility that Maltese will continue to distance itself from its Maghrebi origins, although the high frequency of use of invariables which derive from Arabic (especially articles, conjunctions, prepositions and pronouns) still provide a strong link with its Semitic basis. In this respect, the task of Maltese policy makers is not an easy one: on the one hand they have to 'safeguard' the largely unproductive Arabic stratum of the language and on the other hand they are to adopt measures to integrate innovations. In this vein, it may therefore be useful to recall the saying that 'honesty is the best policy': the more language policy takes authentic language use into consideration, the more it becomes legitimate and valid. In this sense it is useful to view language policy as strongly linked with language ecology as it deals with "the given interaction between any language and its environment". (Haugen 1972:325). The following quotation from Spolsky (2005) sums up a number of considerations I have put forward in

this paper and it is relevant for the Maltese context:

"It is important also to realize that language and language policy both exist in (and language management must contend with) highly complex, interacting and dynamic contexts, the modification of any part of which may have correlated effects (and causes) on any other part. A host of non-linguistic factors (political, demographic, social, religious, cultural, psychological, bureaucratic, and so on) regularly account for any attempt of persons or groups to intervene in the language practices and the beliefs of other persons or groups, and for the subsequent changes that do or do not occur. A simple cause-and-effect approach using only language-related data is unlikely to produce useful accounts of language policy, embedded as it is in a "real world" of contextual variables".

(Spolsky 2005:2153)

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## APPENDIX 1

Documentation on Malta's language policy available online:

*Constitution of Malta*
http://docs.justice.gov.mt/lom/legislation/english/leg/vol_1/chapt0.pdf

*Documentation on orthographic variation and on the integration of English borrowings into Maltese*
http://www.kunsilltalmalti.gov.mt/filebank/documents/Decizjonijiet1_25.07.08.pdf
http://www.kunsilltalmalti.gov.mt/filebank/documents/il-ktieb_finali_sa%20 Nov%2008.pdf

*Language use at the University of Malta*
http://www.um.edu.mt/__data/assets/pdf_file/0014/10832/extstatute1.pdf

*It-Taghrif tal-Malti*
http://www.akkademjatalmalti.com/filebank/documents/Taghrif_rivedut.pdf
http://www.akkademjatalmalti.com/filebank/documents/Zieda_rivedut.pdf
http://www.akkademjatalmalti.com/filebank/documents/Aggornament_rivedut.pdf

*Malta Language Act*
http://docs.justice.gov.mt/lom/Legislation/english/Leg/VOL_15/kap470.p

df

*National Minimum Curriculum (Ministry of Education, 1999)*
http://www.curriculum.gov.mt/docs/nmc_english.pdf

*Report on Maltese in the Media*
http://www.kunsilltalmalti.gov.mt/filebank/documents/Rapport%20Xandir
.pdf

*Strateġija għal-lingwa nazzjonali*
http://www.education.gov.mt/ministry/doc/pdf/Strategija_Lingwa_Nazzjo
nali.pdf

## APPENDIX 2

**Maltese characters**:

| | |
|---|---|
| **ċ** = voiceless postalveolar affricate | (ċavetta [tʃɐˈvɛtːɐ], 'key') |
| **ġ** = voiced postalveolar affricate | (ġarra [ˈdʒɐrːɐ], 'jug') |
| **ħ** = voiceless pharyngeal fricative | (ħalib [ħɐˈliːp], 'milk') |
| **j** = palatal approximant | (Jannar [jɐnˈnɐːr] 'January') |
| **k** = voiceless velar plosive | (kulur [kuˈluːr] 'colour') |
| **q** = voiceless glottal plosive | (qalb [ˈʔɐlp], 'heart') |
| **w** = labiovelar approximant | (wejter [ˈwɛɪtɛr] 'waiter') |
| **x** = voiceless postalveolar fricative | (xabla [ˈʃɐːblɐ] 'sword') |
| **ż** = voiced alveolar fricative / | (Żaren [zɐˈrɛːn], 'Żaren (man's name)') |
| voiced alveolar affricate | (gażżetta [gɐˈdzːɛtːɐ] 'newspaper') |
| **z** = voiceless alveolar affricate | (zokkor [ˈtsɔkːɔr] 'sugar') |

NB. **għ / h** = muted in most contexts, serve the prosodic function of lengthening vowels (e.g. logħob [lɔːp] 'games')