Interaction and Approximation to the Target Language During Italian Lessons in Malta

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Abstract: For many years it had been considered axiomatic that in the foreign language classroom exposure to the target language should be emphasized, and that the learners' native language should be banned. However, in recent years, the analysis of classroom discourse has unravelled some essential pedagogical functions of the learners' native language in foreign language teaching (Macaro, 2009). In line with this, the term 'translanguaging' has been introduced in the international literature with reference to the drawing on all of the linguistic resources that one has in order to 'make sense' (Garcia, 2009), and to improve language learning processes and outcomes (Lewis, Jones & Baker, 2012). Taking a sociocultural discourse analysis approach, this contribution shows how Maltese learners of Italian and their teachers interact bilingually to fulfil pedagogical requirements such as the assimilation of grammar points, explaining new vocabulary items, and shifting from formal to informal language. We give examples of how the teacher guides the learners in interaction toward target language approximation.

Keywords: foreign language teaching, Italian, translanguaging, interaction

Qualitative research in the language classroom

Classroom research investigates the processes of teaching and learning as they occur in classrooms, as distinct from research that concentrates, for example, on syllabus quality and teaching material, or on examination results (Karunakaran & Nirmala, 2013). Like other educational research its ultimate aim is to explore the implications of the findings for the benefit of improved pedagogical practices by teachers and more effective learning by students (Allwright & Bailey, 1991). It is not simply research 'in' the classroom, but veritably research 'for' the classroom.

Williams (2012) gives a succinct overview of second language classroom research. She explains that classroom research highlights the role of the teacher and of inter-learner dynamics and investigates questions such as, "What do teachers do and say? How do they respond to learners? How do learners respond to the teacher? What are the patterns of interaction in the classroom?" (ibid., p. 542). These, and similar questions have been researched on the basis of audio-recording and transcription (Ohta, 2000; Gauci, 2011) and conversation analysis (Waring, 2009), among others.

Martin-Jones (1985) provides an overview of the initial research projects that examined code-switching in bilingual classrooms both quantitatively and qualitatively, and which showed for the first time that code-switching is aligned with pedagogical functions in many different classrooms around the world. We feel it is crucial for us, as language educators, to gain a better understanding of what happens in the foreign language (FL) classroom as a matter of course, especially in a plurilingual context where we know from experience that other languages than the target language (TL) are employed.

The description of code-switching in the classroom has now developed into the concept of translanguaging, or the drawing on all of the linguistic resources that one has in order to 'make sense' (Garcia, 2009; Garcia & Li Wei, 2014), and to maximise understanding and achievement (Lewis, Jones & Baker, 2012). Translanguaging is also used to describe a pedagogy of writing whereby shifting from one language to another according to need is viewed as a strategy for scaffolding instruction, self-regulation, meaning-making and an aid to developing metacognitive skills (Velasco & Garcia, 2014; Canagarajah, 2011). Camilleri Grima (2015) explains that in the Maltese classroom context the term translanguaging is appropriate because all the participants are normally bilingual in Maltese and English and move from one code to another dynamically and holistically (Lewis et al., 2012). The term translanguaging is therefore more appropriate than code-switching because the latter is often used by non-specialists who perceive language from a monolingualising perspective, that is, they hold the belief that it is essentially wrong to use more than one language within the same conversation as they think that those who do so show signs of weak proficiency in each one of the languages they use (Camilleri Grima, 2003; 2015). These beliefs have now been superseded (e.g. Garcia and Li Wei, 2014).

In this sense, this article is a further contribution to the growing body of literature on the medium of instruction in Maltese classrooms (Camilleri, 1995; Farrugia, 2009a; 2009b; Farrell & Ventura, 1998: Caruana, 2011; Camilleri Grima, 2013). Specifically, it looks at the second language classroom and follows on from recent studies of the Italian language classroom (Gauci, 2011; Gauci & Camilleri Grima, 2013; Caruana & Camilleri Grima, 2014). It

builds on already existing knowledge by taking the approach of sociocultural discourse analysis (Thoms, 2012; Mercer, 2004). Sociocultural discourse analysis focuses on language as a tool for teaching and learning, and its application involves a combination of qualitative and quantitative methods (Mercer, 2004). We share the view of Swain & Lapkin (1998), Mercer (2004) and Thoms (2012) that language use serves both as a communicative funtion and a cognitive activity in the classroom. Language facilitates task performance and learning outcomes when it is used as a mediating tool by the teacher with the learners, or by learners among themselves. It is necessary, for instance, to look at utterances and their illocutionary force (Tsohadzidid, 2010), and at the verbal and non-verbal interaction patterns and discursive practices of teachers and learners (Thoms, 2012; Poplin, 2011). In the present study our goal is to examine how the dialogue of the teacher with the learners in whole-class activities leads to linguistic approximation to the TL, and hence how communication acts as a cognitive tool which leads to learning, specifically understood in this context as the acquisition of the TL.

Italian as a 'foreign' language in Malta

Italian is the third language of Malta and it is present on the island because of Malta's geographical proximity to Italy and also due to the historical and commercial ties between the two countries. Italian was one of Malta's official languages till 1936 and, historically, it was used mainly within administrative and cultural spheres of society although at the time there was a small portion of the population that adopted Italian as an L1 (Agius, 1998). Today, contact with Italian is evident in many Maltese words, especially those which form part of the language as integrated borrowings. Although exposure to Italian, especially through television programmes, has declined when compared to the recent past, many Maltese still come in contact with the language: some still tune into Italian TV channels quite regularly, Italian is the most popular foreign language studied in local schools and there are regular political, commercial and cultural exchanges between Italy and Malta (Caruana, 2013). Eurydice-Eurostat (2012) data indicate that Malta is the EU country in which Italian as a foreign language is most widespread in relation to population size.

Although Italian is one of the languages taught as part of a foreign language awareness programme in Maltese primary schools, the main instructional process of the language initiates in secondary schools when students are 11 years old. The teaching of Italian, therefore, is introduced after students would have already had six years of formal schooling in both Maltese and English. Italian is currently the foreign language which most secondary school students choose to study, with approximately 60% of each cohort opting to follow a course in this language.

The history of Italian in Malta, as well as the geographical and cultural proximities between the two countries, are aspects to be taken advantage of in the language classroom, especially when taking into consideration the amount of cognates from Italian present in Maltese. Furthermore, in teacher formation, emphasis is placed on teaching the language through its communicative and socio-pragmatic functions. This contributes to the motivation of the students who learn the language, while taking into account individual learning strategies. Although the importance of teaching the language directly via Italian is stressed, it is acknowledged that since students and teachers share the same L1, the mother tongue cannot be excluded *a priori* from the classroom and that it is necessary to take advantage of it, as well as to identify didactic contexts in which it may be useful during classroom interaction. Research findings in Malta so far have confirmed that the use of the L1 may support the instruction process and helps to establish a stronger rapport between the teacher and the learners (Gauci, 2011; Caruana & Camilleri Grima, 2014).

The theoretical framework and the empirical investigation

Sinclair and Coulthard's (1975) scheme of classroom interaction was the first to provide a systematic analysis of classroom discourse. It is a scheme that has continued to be applied and researched in many contexts (Meerholz-Harle & Tschirner, 2000; Waring, 2009), both in primary classrooms (e.g. Molinari, Mameli and Gnisci, 2013) and more specifically in foreign language teaching (Thoms, 2012).

Sinclair & Coulthard's (1975) smallest unit of analysis is the speech act, i.e. an illocutionary act, or "the making of a statement, offer, promise, etc in uttering a sentence, by virtue of the conventional force associated with it, or with its explicit performative paraphrase" (Levinson, 1983, p. 236). Sinclair & Coulthard's (ibid.) system of analysis is based on teacher-dominated classroom interaction and is sub-divided into discourse ranks (see Figure 1): (i) the largest unit is the lesson, (ii) the lesson is made up of exchanges (boundary or teaching), (iii) which are made up of moves, and (iv) moves are made up of acts. The boundary exchange signals the beginning or end of what the teacher considers to be a stage in the lesson. Teaching exchanges are the individual steps by which the lesson progresses. The most prototypical structure of a teaching exchange is the IRF (Initiation-Response-Feedback). There are five classes of moves and they realise two classes of exchange: framing and focusing moves realize boundary exchanges; opening, answering and follow-up moves realize teaching exchanges. Framing moves are indications by the teacher that one stage in the lesson has ended and that another is beginning.
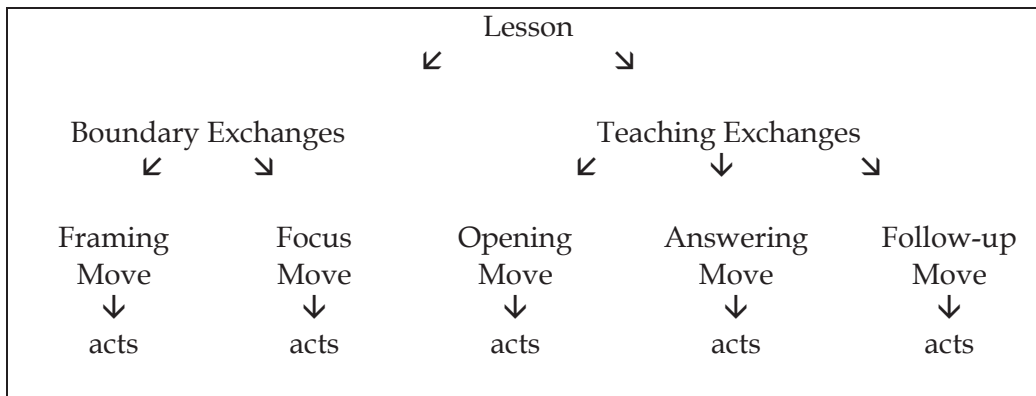
Figure 1: Rank scale of classroom discourse in a lesson (Sinclair & Coulthard, 1975)

Sinclair & Coulthard (ibid.) identified twenty-two speech acts in the traditional classroom context. Speech acts make up the structure of moves. For example, 'elicit' is typically an opening move, while 'reply' is typically an answering move. The major element from Sinclair & Coulthard's (ibid.) work that has continued to be researched is the IRF pattern. In classroom discourse it relates to the sequence of the triadic move: opening (initiation) by the teacher, answering (reply) by the learner and follow-up (accept or reject) by the teacher. Some scholars have preferred to describe the pattern as IRE (Initiation-Response-Evaluation) instead (Hall & Walsh, 2002; Nassaji & Wells, 2000). The results obtained by studies conducted on video- or audio-recorded material collected during whole-class lessons have shown that the vast majority of teachers' questions are focused and oriented at receiving a pre-determined answer, with the teachers allowing learners a short time for the reply, and that the third turn is often limited to brief and simple feedback (Molinari et al., 2013; Waring, 2009; Thoms, 2012).

In Camilleri (1993), Sinclair & Coulthard's (1975) scale of analysis was applied to a sample of lesson transcripts from non-language subjects at secondary school level in Malta. Their scale was found to be useful to some extent, e.g. to identify patterns of interaction, but could not be wholly implemented as a coding scheme due to the lengthy explanations by teachers which excluded the verbal involvement of learners. In the sample we were analysing for this study, however, the interaction patterns seemed to be very similar to those identified by Sinclair and Coulthard (ibid.) in primary schools. In the end we decided to navigate through our data using an adapted form of Sinclair and Coulthard's (ibid.) scheme.

For instance, we noticed that there were moments in the lesson when the teacher and/or the learners digressed from a teaching mode to an aside, and that certain utterances that looked like a statement at face value, e.g. 'M'għidtulix iva jew le' (*You didn't tell me yes or no*) were in fact illocutionary

acts, in this case a prompt, and had a perlocutionary effect (Levinson, 1983) because the learners understood the illocution and reacted by asking for a clarification of the teacher's elicitation. Table 1 presents the list of speech acts adapted from Sinclair & Coulthard (ibid.) that are relevant to our analysis.

marker	Realised by a limited class of items such as 'now', 'so', 'ok'. Its function is to mark boundaries in the discourse.
directive	Realised by an imperative. Its function is to request a non-linguistic response, such as finding a page in a book, and other instructions relating to learner behaviour.
informative	Realised by a statement. Its function is to provide information.
elicitation	Realised by a question, or a statement with the intonation of a question. It is always asked by the teacher and is not a genuine request for information. Its function is to involve learners in classroom interaction by getting them to produce knowledge they already have, or to reason out their point aloud.
prompt	Realised by items such as 'come on', 'let me see', 'why'. Its function is to reinforce an elicitation or a directive.
clue	Realised by a statement or a question. Its function is to provide additional information which helps the learners to answer an elicitation or to do something.
reply	Usually realised by a statement. Its function is to provide a linguistic response which is appropriate to the elicitation.
accept	Realised by 'yes' or 'ok', and commonly by the repetition of the reply. Its function is to indicate that the teacher has heard the reply and considers it to be correct.
reject	Realised by a negative or a statement. Its function is to notify the learner that the reply was incorrect, and for a learner to notify the teacher of their disagreement or refusal.
question	Realised by a question and is a genuine request for information. It is used by learners to signal to the teacher that they need clarification or by the teacher to find out things about the learners.
check	Realised by items such as 'is that ok?' Its function is to enable the teacher to find out whether the learners are successfully following the explanation.
bid	Realised by a close class such as 'Miss'. Its function is to signal a desire by the learners to contribute.

nominate	Realised by the names of the learners, or references such as 'you over there'.
	Its function is to signal to a learner or a group of learners that they are expected to provide a reply.
loop	Realised by statements such as 'pardon' or 'what did you say?'
	Its function is to return the discourse to the stage where it was before an interlocutor spoke.
aside	Realised by statements
	Its function is to signal a change in topic for a very short time.
read	Realised by the reading from a book, sheet of paper etc.
self-praise	Realised by phrases that highlight a student's own achievements.

Table 1: Speech acts identified in our study

We created a new label for a speech act called 'self-praise' because we came across instances in our data where a learner praised himself for his achievement, e.g. in knowing many of the answers to the teacher's elicitations, or in being the first to finish an exercise. In Lesson 4B (Table 2) two such examples were: 'Kemm sirt bravu' (*How good I've become*) uttered by a learner after he had correctly provided an answer, and 'Kważi kollha jien għidthom' (*I'm the one who has answered almost all of them*).

To analyse a sample of classroom discourse we started by randomly selecting two lesson transcripts from an existent database (Gauci, 2011). Then, we needed to identify the elementary units of the text that were to be assigned an illocution label. An illocutionary act is taken to be the minimal unit of human communication (Searle & Vanderveken, 1985). This is not always simple, and necessitates a level of interpretation by the researcher. Thus, the transcription was re-typed in the shape of a list of speech acts which were then labelled on the basis of Sinclair & Coulthard's (ibid.) adapted inventory as it fit our data (Table 1). This process highlighted various interesting events that were going on in teacher-learner interaction. For instance, some of the learners behaved very informally and rudely toward the teacher. On two occasions learners uttered expletives expressing their annoyance: 'uff' and 'u ejja' (*come on*) when they did not want to co-operate with the teacher and refused to do the activity. At one stage of the lesson one student addressed a directing comment to the teacher 'ejja Miss komplihom ħa neħilsu' (*come on Miss continue let's get it done*). At the end, when the teacher gives instructions for further work, one learner refuses outrightly, 'xejn issa' (*now nothing*), and another student asks a rhetorical question, 'int bis-serjetà?' (*are you serious*?). We have labelled these speech acts 'reject' (Table 1).

Both lessons analysed here (labelled as 4B and 4C, on the basis of the nomenclature of the classes in which they were held) were delivered with Form 4 classes (age 14-15) in a secondary school for boys in October 2009.

Lesson 4B was delivered to a class of 18 learners of average ability (students of Italian were set in different classes in this school on the basis of annual exam results), and all the learners spoke Maltese as their first language. The lesson was 35 minutes long, and the lesson objective was to guide learners to work out a set of vocabulary exercises on the textbook and on handouts prepared by the teacher, about various objects found in an office (*L'ufficio*). The teacher was female and had been teaching for eight years, the last six of which were in this school. Lesson 4C was delivered to another class of Form 4 boys that consisted of 15 students of high ability, taught by a male teacher, also fully qualified and who had been teaching for 5 years in this school. Lesson 4C was 38 minutes long and was intended as a grammar revision lesson of the Imperfect verb tense (*Imperfetto)*. Ethical clearance procedures were followed such that permission was obtained from all the participants and the students' parents, and all the names have been changed.

The transcriptions of lessons 4B and 4C were subdivided into teacher (T) and learner turns (pseudonyms have been used to identify the learners). A turn refers to a stretch of speech by the same speaker, starting when s/he starts talking and ending when s/he is stopped or is interrupted. Within each turn, speech acts are listed. Lesson 4B provided us with a transcript of speech acts during teaching exchanges that was twelve pages long (font size 11, single spacing), and a total of 375 speech acts; 288 acts by the teacher and 87 acts shared between the 18 learners. The turns taken by the learners were extremely brief, mostly single words or two-word utterances consisting of an article + noun. Lesson 4C was a few minutes longer than lesson 4B and had fewer stretches of silence during writing activities. The list of speech acts was sixteen pages long, with a total of 540 acts; 393 by the teacher and 147 by the students. The teacher's turns in lesson 4C were longer than those of lesson 4B as he often embarked on a grammatical explanation which involved several examples in a single turn.

Analysis and discussion

The first picture that emerged from the analysis was the limited extent of participation of learners, both in length of utterance as well as in terms of opportunities to speak. The teachers, most of the time, called out individual learners to answer questions and/or to prompt them to participate, thus giving each one of the students in class the chance to say at least something throughout the lesson. Interaction was clearly dominated by the teacher, who was continuously directing the activity and eliciting replies that served the purpose of working out exercises on the textbook or handouts. In this sense they were traditional in teaching style, centred round a text, and the questions and answers were almost always factual. Since lesson 4B was a vocabulary lesson learners' answers tended to be much shorter and more limited than in

lesson 4C which was a grammar lesson and during which the teacher elicited fuller sentences.

The longest contribution by a learner in lesson 4B was 13 words long (Example 1, lines 486 to 489). Paul was prompted by another student, Jon, to provide the reply to a question numbered 7a in a written exercise. Paul does not know which one was question 7, but then he finds it, reads it out, writes the answer and informs the teacher that he had finished doing so, all in a single turn. The moves in this exchange are interesting because they are all performed by these two learners; Jon opens, and then Paul opens too, answers, and follows-up all by himself.

Line		Lesson 4B	Move	Act
485	Jon	(*addressing his neighbour*) **ejja għidha s-seven 'a'** (come on, give the reply to seven 'a')	opening	prompt
486	Paul	**Is-sebgħa x'inhi**? (what is number seven?)	opening	question
487		(*reads*) ascoltare musica in macchina (listening to music in the car)	answering	read
488		(*writes and says aloud*) L'autoradio (car radio)		reply
489		**Lest Miss jien** (I'm ready teacher)	follow-up	inform

Example 1: The longest turn by a learner in lesson 4B

The teacher's turns in lesson 4B were longer than those of the learners, on average consisting of 13 words, with the longest turn consisting of 58 words. It occurred at the very beginning of the lesson when the teacher was giving directions to the class about lesson content and procedures, and consisted in both a boundary and a teaching exchange.

The longest student turn in lesson 4C was 15 words long and consisted of a sentence in reply to the teacher's elicitation asking for a sentence expressing what they used to do when they were younger and what they do now. Mario says, 'Mela, sir, prima giocavo con la bicicletta e adesso vado a lavorare con la macchina' (*so, sir, before I used to play on the bicycle and now I go to work by car*). The average length of learners' turns in lesson 4C was 5 words because the learners were asked to reply by giving sentences and not single words.

Since our ultimate aim is to obtain a deeper understanding of how language learning occurs by means of communication, we shall now focus on speech acts from the point of view of language use and translanguaging. For the rest of our analysis we focus only on teaching exchanges. Both lessons are further analyzed quantitatively as shown in Tables 2, 3, 4 and 5.

	Maltese	Italian	Maltese+Italian	Total
reply	31	31	1	**63**
question	10	0	0	**10**
reject	3	0	0	**3**
loop	4	0	0	**4**
prompt	3	0	0	**3**
informative	1	1	0	**2**
self-praise	2	0	0	**2**
TOTAL	**54**	**32**	**1**	**87**

Table 2: Number of speech acts in Maltese, Italian or both languages, by learners during teaching exchanges in lesson 4B

	Maltese	Italian	Maltese+Italian	Proper name	Total
informative	11	33	6	0	**50**
nominate	0	0	0	37	**37**
elicit	20	50	12	0	**82**
accept	11	22	0	0	**33**
reject	4	1	0	0	**5**
question	0	4	0	0	**4**
clue	2	0	0	0	**2**
directive	25	26	0	0	**51**
check	2	0	0	0	**2**
reply	4	2	1	0	**7**
marker	4	6	0	0	**10**
prompt	5	0	0	0	**5**
TOTAL	**88**	**144**	**19**	**37**	**288**

Table 3: Number of speech acts in Maltese, Italian or both languages, by the teacher during teaching exchanges in lesson 4B

Tables 2 and 3 give an indication of which speech acts were performed in which language by the learners and by the teacher. From Table 2 it is clear that most of the learners' contributions were replies to the teacher's elicitations, and they were uttered in equal amounts in Maltese and in Italian (31 in each language). The replies in Italian consisted of examples of office equipment such as 'penna' (*pen*), 'portatile' (*laptop*), or as to whether a particular tool was used for listening or communicating ('ascoltare', 'comunicare'). The replies in Maltese consisted of examples like 'tieħu l-vidjow' (*records on video*) and 'sterjow tal-karozza' (*car stereo*). The questions, loops, prompts and self-praise were all uttered in Maltese. There were also three instances of reject in Maltese whereby the learners signalled that they were unwilling to co-operate with the teacher on a task.

Table 3 illustrates the extent to which the teacher employed the first language (L1) and the TL during the lesson and for what purposes. She elicited utterances largely in Italian (50 instances), although there were 20 occasions when she resorted to Maltese and L2 mixed utterances. It is understandable, and was to be expected, that the teacher speaks Italian during the Italian lesson. Since it was a vocabulary lesson (*L'ufficio*) she went through a number of exercises highlighting words in Italian. She rarely gave the meaning of a word herself, but elicited this from the learners throughout the lesson by using Italian, for example, 'Di che cosa abbiamo bisogno?' (*What do we need*?), 'Cosa fa la segretaria?' (*What does a secretary do*?), 'Con il telefono si può ascoltare la musica, oppure?' (*Do we use the telephone to listen to music, or*?). Sometimes, though, she resorted to Maltese to elaborate the elicitation, probably because she did not get an immediate reply from the learners and wanted to make sure they had understood her question or wanted to guide them further: 'Immaġinaw naqra li qegħdin f'uffiċċju' (*Try to imagine you are in an office*); 'Meta inti ċċempel u?' (*When you phone and*?); 'Għandha x'taqsam mal-kompjuter' (*It is related to the computer*). In a few cases the elicitation involved both Maltese and Italian: 'meta ngħidilkom il-kelma 'ufficio' x'jiġi f'moħħkom? (*When I tell you the word 'ufficio' what comes to your mind*?); 'Ġieli smajtuha l-kelma 'stampante' fuq it-televixin?' (*Have you ever heard the work 'stampante' on TV*?); 'La macchina fotografica hija kamera tar-ritratti' ('*Macchina fotografica' is a camera*). In all the cases where translanguaging was used in elicitations. The focus was on word meaning and on word equivalents in the two languages. A couple of interesting elicitations occurred when the teacher substituted the word she wanted with a phrase in Maltese: 'Avevo una bella **xi ħaġa**, ma adesso ne ho una digitale' (*I had a nice 'something', but now I have a digital one*), and continued to elicit, '**Kif tafu kamera ngħidulha** macchina?' (*As you know we call it macchina*), and a learner replied correctly 'fotografica'.

The informative acts by the teacher were to a large extent performed in Italian (33), while 11 were in Maltese and 6 were in both languages. The teacher sometimes expanded the explanation a little bit by giving some information on, for example, the utility of an answering machine, e.g. 'Se la segretaria non è presente abbiamo bisogno di una cosa' (*If the secretary is not present we need something*). In relation to this, prompts and checks were all expressed in Maltese.

The directives were almost equally shared between Italian and Maltese. Directives in Maltese largely had to do with class control, e.g. 'L-aħħar ċans minn hawn għal barra' (*This is the last chance or you'll get sent out of class*); and directives in Italian were mainly given to explain how to work out the exercises, e.g. 'la mettiamo qua sotto comunicare' (*We place it here under 'comunicare'*). The feedback of the teacher to learners' replies was mostly given in Italian (22 instances), but there were also occasions when the teacher

reacted in Maltese (11 instances), normally after a learner had replied in Maltese. There were four instances in which the teacher asked genuine questions to find out more about the learners, such as, 'Ti piace usare il computer?' (*Do you like to use the computer*?); 'Quale sito preferisci?' (*Which site do you prefer*?); 'Che tipo di giochi?' (*Which type of games*?). Possibly these questions were also meant to involve the learners more directly in the lesson content, and to encourage them to speak in Italian. As it turned out they got by with single word answers, which, however, were in Italian, e.g. 'calcio' (*football*), 'giochi' (*games*).

	Maltese	Italian	Maltese+Italian	Name	Total
reply	7	82	6	0	**95**
question	19	3	2	0	**24**
reject	4	1	0	0	**5**
loop	4	0	0	0	**4**
prompt	0	0	0	0	**0**
informative	12	0	1	0	**13**
self-praise	0	0	0	0	**0**
read	0	2	0	0	**2**
bid	0	0	0	4	**4**
TOTAL	**46**	**88**	**9**	**4**	**147**

Table 4: Number of speech acts in Maltese, Italian or both languages, by learners during teaching exchanges in lesson 4C

In lesson 4C there were another two types of speech acts uttered by learners which were not registered in lesson 4B: read and bid. The total number of speech acts in Italian by learners is also significantly higher than in lesson 4B, because while in lesson 4B the learners uttered 54 speech acts in Maltese and 32 in Italian (Table 2), in lesson 4C they uttered 46 acts in Maltese and 88 in Italian (Table 4). It is worth recalling that although both were held with students aged 14-15 and in their fourth year of learning Italian, lesson 4B was a vocabulary lesson with a group of average learners while lesson 4C was a grammar lesson with a higher ability group. Apart from the different topic and difference in learners' ability, the teacher was also different and this could be another factor that contributed to the divergence in the number of speech acts in Italian and in Maltese. From our data it is evident that the teacher of lesson C managed to sustain the use of Italian longer, both in his own speech acts and in those uttered by the learners.

	Maltese	Italian	Maltese+Italian	Name	Total
informative	33	43	0	0	**76**
nominate	0	0	0	35	**35**
elicit	6	68	0	0	**74**
accept	3	36	0	0	**39**
reject	11	13	0	0	**24**

question	2	8	0	0	**10**
clue	0	0	0	0	**0**
directive	12	39	0	0	**51**
check	0	1	0	0	**1**
reply	3	16	0	0	**19**
marker	24	1	0	0	**25**
prompt	2	9	0	0	**11**
praise	5	19	0	0	**24**
read	0	4	0	0	**4**
TOTAL	**101**	**257**	**0**	**35**	**393**

Table 5: Number of speech acts in Maltese, Italian or both languages, by the teacher during teaching exchanges in lesson 4C

It must be noted that speech acts that were uttered in both Maltese and Italian were at a minimum in both lessons, with only 12 elicitations occurring in a mixed code in lesson 4B. This tallies with all the other research conducted on code-switching in Maltese classrooms (Camilleri Grima, 1995, 2013) and outside of the classroom (Xerri, 2015) which shows that although a bilingual discourse is prevalent, the vast majority of utterances and/or speech acts take place in one or the other language. Therefore, rather than simply perpetrating the perception that code-switching is rampant in the classroom and hence something to be viewed negatively and eradicated, it is necessary to "validate code-switching" (Council of Europe, 2015, p. 63) because, as we are trying to show here, translanguaging is worth much more consideration and esteem from educational and pedagogical perspectives.

Approximation to TL vocabulary

The fact that, as shown in Table 2, half of the learners' replies were in Italian indicates that some learning of vocabulary, the objective of the lesson, was indeed taking place. Furthermore, when a student had difficulty with pronunciation the teacher provided the correct form as illustrated in Example 3. In Example 3, reported in l. 394 below, a student asks the teacher how to write the answer on the handout, i.e. with or without the article. The teacher replies (l. 395 to l. 397) that for the purpose of this exercise the use of the article was not necessary. The interaction proceeds as the teacher elicits the students to produce another term (l. 398). This occurs in Italian and the same learner, Scott, answers by translating the teacher's phrase into Maltese (l. 399). The teacher continues to use Italian in order to elicit responses from the learners (l. 400 and l. 402) but the learner has difficulty to pronounce the word correctly in Italian (l. 403). At this point the teacher reprimands the learner because she interprets his mistake as a reading error (l. 404) and provides the correct answer (l. 405 and l. 406) by means of further elicitation so as to give the learners the opportunity to say the word correctly (although in this case they do not do so, because there is an interruption in the flow of discourse).

		Lesson 4B, 'L'Ufficio'		
394	Scott	Il lettore CD **jew** lettore? (the lettore CD or lettore?)	opening	question
395	T	Lettore **biss**	answering	reply
396		**Hm, tagħmlux l-artiklu please.**		inform
397		**Christian, grazzi**.		accept
398		Fare i conti, con che cosa facciamo i conti? (only lettore Don't insert the article please Thank you Christian. To work out a bill, with what do we work out bills?)	opening	elicit
399	Scott	**Li tagħmel il-kontijiet**? (that which works out the bills?)	answering	question
400	T	Che cos'è? (what is it?)	opening	elicit
401	Scott	**Kelkjulejter**? (calculator?)	answering	reply
402	T	Allora, in italiano? (so, in Italian?)	opening	elicit
403	Scott	Calci...latrice	answering	reply
404	T	**Taf taqra**?	feedback	reject
405		Calcolatrice, numero due calcolatrice,		inform
406		mhux calcio. Calco? (Can you read properly? Calculator, number two calculator, not football)		elicit

Example 3: Teacher feedback on pronunciation

Example 3 shows the extent to which the teacher pushes for a reply in Italian by the learners. At the same time we can appreciate how this learner managed to follow the teacher's explanation by translating her phrases into Maltese until he finally produced the right answer.

Approximation to TL grammar

Example 4 presents the approximation to a TL grammar point. The topic of discussion is food and the teacher is trying to get the learners to use the structure of the 'imperfetto' verb tense by expressing what they liked to eat as children and what they like now by comparison (l. 171 to l. 178). At one point (l. 181), Aldo says 'mi piacevo' (I used to like myself), which is a reflexive form, instead of 'mi piaceva' (I used to like). The teacher rejects the reply by

formulating a translation of the wrong answer in Maltese in a questioning intonation such that the learner immediately corrects his error (l. 182 to l. 184). The teacher in turn accepts his answer, and through words and gestures elicits a full phrase (from l. 185 to l. 186). As it happens another learner, Steve, steals the turn (l. 187) and utters a correct phrase himself which the teacher accepts (l. 189).

		Lesson 4C: 'L'Imperfetto'	Moves	Acts
167	T	**Mela**,	opening	marker
168		ricordatevi cosa vi piaceva prima.		elicit
169		**Ma naħsibx li l-istess ħaġa**.		inform
170		A me non piaceva il pesce quando ero piccolo. (So, remember what you used to like in the past. I don't think it was the same thing. When I was young I did not like fish)		inform
171	Aldo	A me un hamburger (I used to like hamburgers)	answering	reply
172 173	T	Non devi mangiarne troppo di quelli.	follow-up	accept
174		Aldo, cosa ti piaceva prima? (You musn't eat too many of those. Aldo, what did you used to like?)	opening	nominate elicit
175	Aldo	Pasta (pasta)	answering	reply
176 177	T	Ti piaceva la pasta e ora? (You used to like pasta And now?)	follow-up opening	accept elicit
178	Aldo	La carne (meat)	answering	reply
179 180	T	E dì una frase in italiano. Prima? (Come on, say a phrase in Italian. Before?)	follow-up opening	direct elicit
181	Aldo	Mi piacevo (I liked myself)	answering	reply
182 183	T	Mi piacevo? **Kont togħġob lilek innifsek**? (You liked yourself?	follow-up	reject inform

			Moves	Acts
		You used to like yourself?)		
184	Aldo	Mi piaceva (I used to like)	answering	reply
185	T	Prima mi piaceva (*gesture eliciting continuation*) (Before I used to like)	opening	accept
186	Aldo	Mangiare, e adesso mi piace (To eat, and now I like)	answering	reply
187	Steve	Prima mi piaceva mangiare la pasta e oggi mi piace mangiare la carne. (Before I used to like to eat pasta and now I like to eat meat)	answering	reply
189 190	T	Benissimo! Ottima frase. Francesco (Very good! Excellent phrase)	follow-up opening	accept nominate

Example 4: Clarifying a grammar point

The exchange in Example 4 illustrates how translanguaging is successfully employed to scaffold the acquisition of a new grammatical form. In l. 183 the teacher does not reject the learner's answer outright by saying 'no' or 'wrong'. Instead, by providing the translation of the learner's answer in Maltese she helps him realise what his error was because in this way he understands what his own utterance in Italian meant. Thus the learner assimilates the distinction between these two verb forms and their meaning.

In Example 5 we can see another approximation to TL grammar, in this case relating to the use of the auxiliary verb 'essere'. Mark replies to the teacher's elicitation by producing only the past participle 'arrivati' (l. 403). The teacher rejects his reply by explaining that he needs to produce a two-word phrase 'qbiżtli kelma' (*you skipped a word*) in l. 404. In l. 405 Mark reacts by asking a question in Maltese, 'm'għidthiex?' (*Haven't I said it*?) which shows a degree of uncertainty from his end. The teacher replies that he had not said it (l. 406), and Mark then realises that he needed to add the auxiliary verb 'siamo' to produce this verb correctly (l. 407). To be sure that he has understood Mark asks in l. 411, 'niktibha kollha? (*do I write it all*?) and the teacher explains further by reminding him that he needs to use both the auxiliary and the past participle (l. 412): 'passato prossimo **mhux bi tnejn**?' (*isn't the 'passato prossimo' constructed with two verbs*?).

		Lesson 4C: 'L'imperfetto'	Moves	Acts
401 402	T	Provaci. Quando siamo arrivati o quando arrivavamo al cinema il film stava iniziando? (Try.	opening	prompt elicit

		Was the film about to start when we arrived or when we used to arrive at the cinema ?)		
403	Mark	Arrivati (arrived)	answering	reply
404	T	**Jonqsok kelma imma qbiżtli kelma imma** (There;s a word missing but you skipped a word)	follow-up	reject
405	Mark	**M'għidthiex**? (didn't I say it?)	answering	question
406	T	No	follow-up	reply
407	Mark	Siamo?	answering	reply
408	T	E certo (of course)	follow-up	accept
409	Mark	Quando siamo arrivati (when we arrived)	answering	reply
410	T	E siamo arrivati (and we arrived)	follow-up	accept
411	Mark	**Niktibha kollha jiġifieri**? (so should I write it all?)	answering	question
412 413 414	T	Passato prossimo **mhux bi tnejn**? Essere e avere, e ato, uto, ito. Ryan dimmi la prossima. (Isn't the passato prossimo formed by using two verbs? Essere or avere, and ato, uto, ito. Ryan tell me the next one)	follow-up opening	accept inform nominate elicit

Example 5: Giving a grammar clue

In Example 5, the teacher does not spoon-feed the learners by providing the correct answers, but helps them to reason it out on their own. They do so through translanguaging, which would not have been possible had they been obliged to use Italian exclusively. Thus, the learner initially realises through the use of Maltese, that his answer is incomplete and then, with a little bit more translanguaging, he provides a correct answer.

In Example 6, Peter has difficulty producing the correct verb form 'andavo' in the *imperfetto* and says 'sono andato' (l. 250). The teacher follows-up by rejecting his reply (l. 251), nominating him for a reply once again (l. 252), and by using elicitation in Italian (l. 253). This time Peter replies correctly (l. 254). The teacher continues to follow this up not only by accepting his correct reply (l. 255) but also by giving a further explanation by translating the verb into

Maltese 'andavo, kont immur, andavo' (l. 255) and by giving further information, also in Maltese (l. 256-257).

		Lesson 4C, 'L'imperfetto'	Move	Act
248 249	T	(...) due, Peter da bambino sono andato o andavo tutte le estati? (two, Peter when I was young sono andato or andavo every summer?)	opening	direct nominate elicit
250	Peter	Sono andato	answering	reply
251 252 253	T	No, Peter, da bambino sono andato o andavo a Gozo tutte le estati? (no, Peter, when I was young sono andato or andavo to Gozo every summer?)	follow-up	reject nominate elicit
254	Peter	andavo	answering	reply
255 256 257	T	Andavo, **kont immur**, andavo, **kont immur Għawdex kull sajf, mhux mort kull sajf** (andavo, I used to go, andavo, I used to go to Gozo every summer, not I went every summer)	follow-up	accept inform inform

Example 6: Explaining Italian grammar through translation

Translanguaging in Examples 4, 5 and 6 is a pedagogical tool in the teachers' hand to reinforce the acquisition of the target language. The learners adopt translanguaging as an effective way to make transitions from their L1 to a deeper understanding of how the TL works. Each shift from the L1 to the TL, sometimes back and forth, represents an approximation to the acquisition of the TL.

Moving from formal to informal communication

Example 7 illustrates how learners in this class sometimes tried to divert the content of the lesson and shifted communication from a formal mode to an informal one. It is an aside that interrupts the flow of the teaching exchange. Mario reacts with a prompt in Maltese in reply to the teacher's prompt, also in Maltese (l. 429), urging her to hurry up so that they could finish as quickly as possible (l. 430). Another learner, Karl, immediately takes the cue and asks

about how much time is left until break time (l. 431). The teacher replies in Italian 'undici minuti' (*eleven minutes*). At this point Karl starts counting in Italian (l. 433), and the teacher prompts him to stop to which he replies in Maltese in l. 437 'ħdax-il minuta' (*eleven minutes*). This interruption, which the teacher quickly brings to a close and which is immediately followed with a teaching exchange (l. 438), illustrates how a single word in Maltese can possibly be taken as a cue by the learners to transform a formal teaching exchange into an informal dialogue.

		Lesson 4B: 'L-ufficio'	moves	Acts
426	T	(...) segreteria telefonica (answering machine)	answering	inform
427		Questa è la numero tre (this is number three)	opening	direct
428		*Thank you*	answering	accept
429		**Kompli** (carry on)	opening	prompt
430	Mario	**Ejja Miss komplihom forsi neħilsu** (come on teacher continue so that we finish)		prompt
431	Karl	**Kemm fadal Miss għall-break?** (teacher how much time is left for break?)		question
432	T	Undici minuti (eleven minutes)		reply
433	Karl	Uno, due, tre (one, two, three)		inform
434	T	Come on		prompt
435		Undici **ta m'għidtlekx** due mila (I told you eleven not two thousand)		inform
436		Dai (come on)		prompt
437	Karl	**Ħdax-il minuta** (eleven minutes)		inform
438	T	Leggere 'immagini per il computer' (read 'pictures for the computer')	opening	elicit

Example 7: From formal to informal communication

At first glace it seems as though the prompt in Maltese by the teacher (l. 429) had the negative effect of triggering an interruption in the flow of the lesson. However, even within the informal exchange, the counting of numbers in Italian and the translation into Maltese in l. 437, show that approximation of

the TL has not been disturbed! This is a clear indication of how informality within a lesson may actually be conducive to acquisition, and how implicit learning may occur even when the learners stray from the topic that is being tackled by their teacher.

Conclusion

The excerpts included in this paper demonstrate how translanguaging operates in subtle ways and how it may boost learner participation in the lesson and their understanding of the subject matter, as well as TL production and its rehearsal. Translanguaging scaffolds the second language acquisition process and makes it more natural and effective. Finally, it must be pointed out that, in the Maltese context, translanguaging often may occur spontaneously and unconsciously by teachers and learners alike. Teachers are not trained to do it and no prior planning is made for it. It simply happens in a most natural manner, possibly as a reflection of the constant interplay between Maltese and English that occurs locally in everyday speech.

In the early 1980s Krashen (1981; 1982; 1985) made quite an impact on how teachers understood and employed language pedagogy through his convincing arguments in favour of comprehensible input in the TL. This led, at least in theory, to the exclusion of the L1 in the L2 classroom (Gass, 2003; McMillan & Turnbull, 2009),. However, recent classroom-based research has revealed that the learners' L1 can, and is, used successfully to teach a foreign language (McMillan & Turnbull, 2009; Hélot & Ó Laoire, 2011; Levine, 2011). In fact, relatively recent analyses of classroom discourse have unravelled some essential pedagogical functions of the learners' L1 in FL teaching (Creese & Blackledge, 2010; Potowski, 2009; Cook & Singleton, 2014). As Macaro (2009, p. 49) puts it:

> "What emerges is an increasing possibility that banning the first language from the communicative second language classroom may in fact be reducing the cognitive and metacognitive opportunities available to learners. We have some evidence that some items of vocabulary might be better learnt through a teacher providing first-language equivalents because this triggers deeper semantic processing than might occur by providing second-language definitions or paraphrases".

Indeed, the role of the L1 in an English-immersion classroom to support cognitive and metacognitive development has also been reported in the teaching of other subjects, like Mathematics in Malta: Farrugia (2009a; 2009b) noted that a shift to an exclusive use of English was not the most educationally beneficial policy, as pupils whose L1 was Maltese refrained from asking questions and had greater difficulty assimilating content, among other issues. Camilleri Grima's (2003; 2013; 2015) research has also come to the conclusion that banning the L1 from the classroom in whichever subject,

is a form of 'silencing' (Simon, 1990). The Italian language lesson in Malta is no exception, as although the use of the L2 is encouraged therein, both English and Maltese feature regularly in students' production (Caruana, 2011)

As indicated in international literature (Molinari et al., 2012; Thoms 2012), and as confirmed through our study, one of the main recommendations that can be made to teachers is to be aware of how their 'feedback' moves can be used to render interactions more open-ended, rather than to restrict or close them. By using the 'feedback' move in order to probe for further amplification by the learner, or by re-launching subsidiary questions, preferably ones that involve higher-order thinking skills that begin, for instance, with 'how', 'why' and 'explain', there would be a greater opportunity for more extended turns by learners. Similarly, authentic questions, in addition to elicitations, promote wider participation in whole-class activities.

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