



Maltese
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1. The identity

1.1. The name

The Maltese language, locally known as *il-Malti*, is the national language of the Maltese Islands, which are situated in the middle of the Mediterranean Sea. Malta is situated 96 km south of Sicily and 288 km away from the North African coast, specifically from Tunisia. The Maltese archipelago consists of three islands, Malta, Għawdex (Gozo) and Kemmuna (Comino), which together cover an area of 315.6 km². Gibraltar, to the West, is 1,826 km away and Alexandria, to the East, 1,510 km away (Azzopardi : 1995, pp. 18-19). Note that, for convenience, from now the name of the main island, Malta, will be used to refer to the Maltese Archipelago. Together with English, Maltese is also the official language of the state. This means, among other things, that the authorities are obliged to publish legal and official documents, such as laws, in both languages.

The name of the language, *Malti*, obviously comes from the name of the main island, Malta. The origin of the name *Malta* itself is unclear. According to Vella (1974, p. 1), it seems that the first record of Malta by name, as *Melite* or *Melitaie*, was found on an amphora which was found in Vulci, an old Etruscan city, in 500 BC. However, this amphora does not seem to exist anymore. Roman and Greek writers referred to it as *Melite* or *Melitaie*, and the Phoenicians called it *Malithah* or *Malta*, which means ‘refuge’.

1.2. The family affiliation

Maltese belongs to the South Arabic branch of Central Semitic. For details on Semitic languages, and on Arabic in particular, see (Moscati : 1964), (Hetzron : 1997) and (Holes : 2004). It has an Arabic stratum, a Romance (Sicilian, Italian) superstratum and an English adstratum. The influence of the non-Semitic element is most obvious in the lexis, while the most salient basic grammatical structures are of Arabic origin. Maltese is the native language of approximately 400,000 people who live on Malta and Gozo, but it is also spoken abroad in communities in Australia, Canada, the USA and the UK. These communities are mainly the result of massive emigration that took place in the 1950s and 1960s, when large numbers

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of Maltese emigrated, mainly because of local unemployment and the limited resources of the country, and established communities of Maltese speakers in various areas (see section 3.3.2 below).

1.3. The distinctive features

In this section, a few features of Maltese will be chosen to give the reader an idea of the grammar of the language, without going into details because of space limitations. For more detailed descriptions, see (Sutcliffe : 1936), (Aquilina : 1986), (Borg : 1988) and (Borg and Azzopardi-Alexander : 1997), among others.

1.3.1 Phonology

The vowels are |v, v:, ε, ε:, ɪ, i:, i:, ʊ, u:, ɔ, ɔ:|. Vowel length is contrastive, as can be seen from examples like the minimal pair *riedna* ['rɪ:dna] 'he wanted us to' and *ridna* ['rɪdna] 'we wanted to'. In certain cases, (e.g. ʊ and u:), the difference is not just one of duration but also of quality. The consonantal system consists of the phonemes |b, p, f, v, t, d, s, z, ʃ, ʒ, tʃ, dʒ, ts, dz, k, g, ʔ, ħ, l, n, m, w, j|. All of the consonants occur also as geminates, except for |ʒ|, which is actually a rare sound found in a few loanwords like *televixin* 'television', where [ʒ] is expressed with the grapheme 'x'. See also (Borg : 1973), (Borg and Azzopardi-Alexander : 1997, p. 299).

A specific phonological feature of Maltese is the devoicing of obstruents in word final position. Thus, *sabet* 'she found' is pronounced ['sɛ:bet], while *sab* 'he found' is [sɛ:p]. Interestingly, this seems to be a distinguishing feature of Maltese in comparison with other variants of Arabic. In consonant sequences, regressive assimilation regularly takes place as, for example, in *sabiħ* 'beautiful (masculine)' [sɛ`bɪ:ħ] and *sbieħ* 'beautiful(plural)' [zbrɪ:ħ], where voiceless |s| acquires voice under regressive assimilation to voiced [b]. Finally, there is also limited vowel harmony, most obviously involving the |ɔ| sound in word patterns like *ħotob* 'humps' and *ħolom* 'he dreamed'.

Stress in Maltese is conditioned by syllable weight. Thus, for example, word stress usually falls on the pre-final syllable, unless the final syllable is heavy, in which case it carries main stress. Intonation, which plays a very important role also in syntactic structure, is strongly affected by focus structure constraints and different discourse contexts. For example, in spoken Maltese, interrogative structures are often marked by specific intonation patterns. See (Vella : 1995) and (Borg and Azzopardi-Alexander : 1997).

1.3.2. Morphology

(a) Root-and-pattern structure

The Arabic vocabulary of Maltese still retains the root-and-pattern characteristic typical of Semitic languages, whereby derivational and inflectional word forms are created through both internal changes to the basic consonant / vowel structure, i.e. non-concatenatively, as well as through affixation, i.e.

concatenatively. Thus, for example, from the trilateral (tri-consonantal) radical *q-s-m*, one can form the related derivational forms *qasam* (1st verbal form: split), *qassam* (2nd verbal form: share out), *nqasam* (7th verbal form: broke), *tqassam* (5th verbal form: get shared out) *qasma* (nominal form: a split), among others.

(b) Mixed Semitic / non-Semitic morphology

Maltese displays a great deal of mixture, especially at the lexical level. At different phases of its history, it borrowed profusely both from Romance (Sicilian, Tuscan, and Modern Italian, in particular), as well as from English, especially in recent times. (See section 2 for a historical outline of the language.) These borrowings have been, and still are, to a great extent integrated into largely Semitic morphological and syntactic patterns. However, loans have also, in turn, had effects both on the phonological and on the grammatical structures, although, in many ways, the morpho-syntax of Maltese is still very obviously Arabic in character (see e.g. Ebert : 2000). To take an example, the word *serrep* ‘meander (like a snake)’ is of Romance origin, from *serpe / serpente*, but has undergone germination of the second consonant to be turned into a verb of the so-called second form, which generally derives a causative form of a basic verbal or nominal form.

1.3.3. Syntax

(a) Constituent order

Maltese is a topic-oriented language, especially in the spoken form. This means that all, apart from the subject noun phrase, all kinds of object phrases (direct, indirect, prepositional, locational, etc.) can be placed at the beginning of the sentence, as the following examples show.

1a.	Marija Maria (3fsg)	xtra-t bought (3fsg)	il-ktieb the-book (msg)	il-bieraħ yesterday
Maria bought the book yesterday				
1b.	Il-ktieb the-book (msg)	Marija Maria (3fsg)	xtra-t bought (3fsg)	il-bieraħ yesterday
Maria bought the book yesterday (It was the book that Maria bought yesterday)				
1c.	F-il-kamra in-the-room	daħal entered (3msg)	Pawlu Paul	
Paul entered the room (In the room entered Paul / It was in the room that Paul entered)				

As a result, Maltese has a relatively free constituent order, in terms of S(ubject), V(erb) and O(bject), on sentence level, allowing both SV and VS for sentences with an intransitive verb, and SVO, SOV, OSV, OVS, and VSO (but not *VSO, see (2b) below) for sentences with a mono-transitive verb. The unmarked

order for S, V, and O is SVO, with the other variants being used mainly contrastively, given the appropriate intonation. If pronominal clitics, which agree either direct and/or indirect object, are attached to the verb, then all permutations, including VSO, are possible. Thus, compare grammatical sentence (2a), which displays the enclitic *-u* on the verb, with ungrammatical (2b), which does not have a clitic.

2a.	Xtra-t-u bought (3fsg- 3msg)	Marija Maria (3fsg)	l-ktieb the-book (msg)
Maria bought the book (bought it Mary the book)			
2b.	*Xtra-t bought (3fsg)	Marija Maria (3fsg)	l-ktieb the-book (msg)

For a more detailed study of word order, see (Fabri : 1993) and (Fabri and Borg : 2002).

(b) Null subjects

Maltese is a pro-drop language, i.e. it allows sentences without an explicit pronominal subject. Since it has very rich agreement morphology, it is possible to reconstruct the subject in every case from the agreement affix on the verb. As well as null subjects, Maltese also allows empty (and topic) objects (including prepositional and nominal possessor objects) whose absence is marked by means of direct and indirect object clitics, as the following example shows.

3.	Bġhat-t-hu-lha sent-(1sg-3msg-3fsg) Sb-dOb-iOb I sent it to her
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Like other pro-drop languages, it also lacks expletive pronouns (like *it* in a sentence such as *It seems that John is tired* in English), and it allows subject object inversion and extraction of the subject from a subordinate clause.

1.3.4. Alphabet and spelling system

The Maltese alphabet consists of thirty-one letters, two of which are digraphs ('ie' and 'għ'), and four of which, namely, 'ċ', 'ż', 'ħ', and 'għ' contain diacritical marks. The following are the graphemes together with their sound values: a [v, v:], b [b], ċ [tʃ], d [d], e [ɛ, ɛ:], f [f], ġ [dʒ], g [g], għ [usually silent], h [usually silent], ħ [ħ], i [i, i:], ie [i:], j [j], k [k], l [l], m [m], n [n], o [ɔ, ɔ:], p [p], q [ʔ], r [r], s [s], t [t], u [u, u:], v [v], w [w], x [ʃ, ʒ], z [ts], ż [z]. 'għ' and unbarred 'h' are usually silent. Their use can be justified on both historical and morpho-phonological grounds: see, e.g., (Brame : 1972). However, when these two letters occur together, they are pronounced [ħħ], as in *tagħħa* 'hers' [taħħa].

Some graphemes are ambiguous in terms of pronunciation. Thus, double 'z', i.e. 'zz' can either be geminate [ts:], as in *rizza* 'sea urchin' ['rɪts:v], or geminate [dz:], as in *gazzetta* 'newspaper' [gɔdz:'ɛttv]. Similarly, 'x' can be [ʃ], as in *rixa* 'feather' ['ri:ʃv], or [ʒ], as in *televixin* [tɛlɛ'vɪʒɪn]. Apart from having the values |ɪ| and |i:|, as in *fit* [fɪt] 'nuisance' and [fi:t] *fit* 'a little', the grapheme 'i' is also pronounced as |ɪ:| in certain contexts, e.g. when followed by the sound, if any, corresponding to graphemic 'q', 'gh', 'h' or 'ħ', as in *riħ* 'wind' [rɪ:ħ].

The letters generally retain their sound values but there are some surface phonetic / phonological rules that bring about changes in pronunciation that are not reflected in the spelling. Thus, for example, due to final devoicing (see section 1.3.1), voiced obstruents are devoiced at the end of words. The spelling, however, retains the original form. Therefore, for example, *ktieb* 'book' is pronounced [ktɪ:p] and not [ktɪ:b], while *kotba* 'books' is pronounced ['kɔdba].

2. The history

Lying right in the middle of the Mediterranean Sea, between Europe and North Africa, the Maltese Islands have often played a significant strategic role in commercial (shipping and trading) and political events involving the Mediterranean countries. There are a few other small islands in the central Mediterranean area, such as Pantelleria, Lampedusa and Linosa, but Malta is the only island with two natural, deep harbours which can take very large ships. As a result of its strategic importance, its harbours and its minuscule size, Malta has had a very turbulent and eventful history.

2.1 The emergence

The origins of the Maltese language are, to an extent, still a matter of speculation and discussion. See (Brincat : 2010). The first signs of a human presence on the islands can be traced back to about 5,200 BC. "Excavation has revealed a people at a Neolithic level of cultural development" (Blouet : 1984, p. 21). It must have been then that a group of Stone Age people probably crossed over from Sicily to Gozo in their boats (Vella : 1974, p. 22 ; Blouet : 1984, p. 21 ; Trump : 1990, p. 20). During the pre-historic age, from approximately 5,200 to 800 BC, which includes the Earlier Neolithic, the Temple Cultures (Stone Age), and the Bronze Age, probably new waves of people arrived at different phases (Blouet : 1984, p. 22), bringing their skills and culture with them. Nothing is known about the language of these early inhabitants but the archaeological data provide a great deal of information about their way of life and their social organisation.

In 725 BC, the Phoenicians arrived in Malta (Brincat : 2000, p. 17) and by about 800 BC they had "established themselves and began to have a cultural influence on the existing population" (Blouet : 1984, p. 30). There is some evidence of a possible intermingling between the pre-Phoenician Bronze culture

and the Phoenicians, but it is clear that the Phoenician culture soon prevailed (Brincat : 2000, p. 17). The Phoenician period ended in about 650 BC and was followed by a Carthaginian phase up to 218 BC, when the Romans conquered the islands.

During the Phoenician / Carthaginian period, one can speculate that Punic was the official language of the islands. “The Punic letters and the Punic symbols and figures [...] suggest a time when the language and culture of Malta was [...] completely Punic” (Coleiro : 1971, p. 79, cited in Vella : 1974, p. 36). According to Vella (1974, p. 36, fn. 27), it is not known whether, during the Phoenician / Carthaginian period, Malta was ever taken over by the Greeks, as had happened in other places in the Mediterranean. However, there is some evidence that Greek culture and language made their presence felt on the island (Vella : 1974, p. 33). According to (Brincat : 2000, p. 21), the inscriptions and coins of the time “show that, in Malta, Punic, Greek and Latin [...] were used as official languages in successive phases or together in transitional phases” [my translation].

Whether, during the Phoenician / Carthaginian period, the local population spoke some form of Punic and, later, Greek cannot be determined with any certainty. In the 16th and 17th centuries in particular, a number of scholars claimed that the Maltese spoke a form of Punic. See (Brincat 2000, p. 18) for references to specific writers and works. With a few exceptions, this idea was held well into the 20th century, mainly for cultural and political reasons, since many felt that they had to distance themselves and their culture from that of the largely Moslem Arabs, and emphasise their Christian and, therefore, non-Arab cultural links. However, it has been shown by linguists like Grech (1961) and Borg (1978) (cited in Brincat : 2000, p. 19) that there are no traces of Punic in modern Maltese.

The Carthaginians were followed by the Romans, who took over Malta in 218 BC, and who, in turn, were followed by the Byzantines in 535 BC (Brincat : 2000, p. 22). Again, one can only speculate about the use or even adaptation of Roman and Greek by the Maltese during his time. According to (Mifsud : 1995, p. 22), “Latin must have been used as the official language of administration. At the popular level, however, it seemed that Punic culture still persisted during this period. [...] written sources during this period describe the Maltese as *barbaroi* [...] and the islands as a Phoenician colony.” People described as *barbaroi* were people who spoke a language that was different from Greek or Latin. According to (Brincat : 2000, p. 24), “we cannot decide whether the substrate of Maltese should be Punic, Latin or Greek, for the simple reason that in the Maltese language there is no substrate” [my translation].

The year 870 marks the beginning of a very important phase in the history of Malta, especially from a linguistic point of view, namely the arrival of the Arabs. According to (Mifsud : 1995, p. 3), this phase:

is particularly significant since it seems to have completely obliterated cultural vestiges of the preceding rules. The Arabs effected important changes [...] but their most important

contribution was the Maltese language which to this day betrays its origin as an Arabic dialect of the North African type, possibly with strong ties with Arabic Sicily.

On the basis of the writings of the 15th century scholar Abd al-Mun'im al-Himyarî, who mentions Malta in one of his descriptions, and who, up to a few years ago, was unknown to historians of the Maltese Medieval period, Brincat (1995 and 2000) concludes that from 870-1048, Malta was practically uninhabited, with only a few scattered rural families living on the island. There was thus practically no continuity between the previous inhabitants and the Arab settlers. According to Brincat, citing al-Himyarî, from 1048/9 to 1090/1, Malta was “colonised” by Arabic-speaking Muslim settlers from Southern Italy or Sicily and their slaves, who were probably Sicilian Christians, Sicilian ex-Christians and Slavs. The slaves would also “have been Arabic-speaking and they would have assimilated the local inhabitants, the few indigenous descendants of pre-870 Maltese population” (Brincat : 1995, p. 24). These findings are still being debated by scholars. Thus, for example, Mifsud (1995, p. 23, fn1) states that “the correct interpretation of Al-Himyarî’s statement is still an object of debate.” Borg (2007) claims that the linguistic evidence might also be interpreted as pointing in the direction of continuity, and Busuttil et al. (2010) claim that there is historical evidence that shows that, although the main island of Malta might have been “practically uninhabited”, a thriving Christian community actually survived in Gozo.

In 1091, the Islands were conquered by the Normans, who dominated Apulia Calabria, Campania, and Sicily. The Normans allowed the Muslim community to stay on until 1224, when those who did not convert to Christianity were expelled. Up to 1530, when the Order of the Knights of St. John the Baptist was given the Islands by Pope Clement VIII and King Charles V of Spain, the political, and probably also the linguistic, situation in Malta closely followed that of Sicily. The Normans were followed by the Swabians in 1194 (who under Fredrick II Hohenstaufen, united the thrones of Germany and Norman Sicily), the Angevins in 1268 (with Charles I as King of Naples and Sicily), the Aragonese in 1284 (under Peter III of Aragon as King of Sicily) and the Castilians in 1412 (as part of the Kingdom of the Two Sicilies).

The oldest extant document that specifically mentions the Maltese language dates back to 1364, and recounts how Benedictine monks could not open a monastery in Malta because they did not speak the local language (*L-Istorja ta' l-Ilsien Malti*, n.d.). Due to growing contact between Malta with Sicily during this period, especially in the form of immigration, Maltese was markedly influenced by Sicilian, mainly by the absorption of Sicilian words and word forms in its vocabulary. According to Wettinger (1978, p. 100) “Late Medieval Maltese [...] had lost the moods and case endings of Classical Arabic and adopted morphological forms peculiar to the region, but preserved much more of the Semitic vocabulary than Modern Maltese” although “a multitude of Sicilian words

that have survived down to our own times [...] could only have entered Maltese in the Middle Ages” (Wettinger : 1978, p. 102).

A very important and unique linguistic document of the time is *II Cantilena* by Peter Caxaro (who died in 1485), a poem consisting of twenty verses which was probably written some time in the mid-15th century (Wettinger and Fsadni : 1983). It was recorded by Notary Brandano de Caxario, who wrote an introduction to the poem in Latin, in which he specifically refers to the Maltese language (*lingua melitea*), when he writes: “which I am here giving in the Maltese tongue” (Wettinger : 1978, p. 91). This shows that people were already conscious of Maltese as a language (Cassola : 1996, p. 7). According to (Brincat : 2000, p. 92), at this time, Maltese was the spoken language, Latin the formal, written language and Sicilian both spoken and written on a less formal, more practical level.

2.2. The periodization

(a) Maltese in the 16th to the 18th century

Between 1530 and 1798, Malta served as the base for the Knights Hospitallers of the Order of St. John the Baptist. During this time, the absorption and assimilation of a large number of Romance elements, which had started during the Norman period, continued at a rapid pace. Italian (particularly, Tuscan) entered the language through the knights, professionals and the church (Brincat : 2000, pp. 99ff). Also, a considerable number of Romance elements entered the language through immigration, mainly that of skilled workers. This was a gradual process and, therefore, these elements could be absorbed and integrated into the system without creating turbulence. At the same time, a variant of Maltese that was different from that spoken in the villages developed in the towns around the Grand Harbour (Brincat : 2000, pp. 117ff), and would eventually become the Standard variety.

A very important figure in the study of Maltese is Mikiel Anton Vassalli (1764-1829), whom L. Cachia (1994, p. 100) calls the first scholar of Maltese linguistics (see also Brincat : 2000, p. 115). He eventually came to be known as the “Father of the Maltese Language” (Hull : 1993, p. 280), not only because he showed great interest studying the language but also because he championed its use in all spheres of life, rebuking those who denigrated it as a useless or uncultured (Vassalli : 1796, IV in Sammut : 2002). In 1788, Vassalli published his first alphabet of Maltese *Alfabeto Maltese*, followed by a second one, *l-Alfabet Malti Mfisser bil-Malti u bit-Taljan* ‘The Maltese Alphabet Explained in Maltese and Italian’. In 1790 (Brincat : 2000, p. 133), Vassalli published, also in Rome, *Mylsen Phoenico-Punicum sive Grammatica Melitensis*, in which he treated the phonology / phonetics, morphology and syntax of Maltese. In 1797, he published his *Lexicon*, with 18,000 entries (see Sammut : 2002).

In his writings, Vassalli gives a clear description of the state of Maltese at his time, i.e. at the end of the 18th and the beginning of the 19th century, including a description of dialectal variation (see section 3.3.1).

(b) Maltese in the 19th and 21st centuries

In 1800, after a two-year period under the French, who expelled the Order of St. John in 1798, the Maltese asked the British to help them liberate themselves of the French, and thus Malta effectively became a British colony. According to (Hull : 1993, p. 5), the British had “two great obstacles to communication with the inhabitants”, namely, language and religion. With respect to the language, the main challenge facing the British, especially during the second half of the nineteenth century and the first half of the twentieth century, was to replace Italian with English as the dominant local language. This led to a political dispute which later came to be known as the “language question”. The struggle was mainly between the use of English and Italian. Indeed, the use and teaching of Maltese was often encouraged by the pro-English faction as a means of weakening the position of Italian.

In 1921, Malta obtained a new constitution, whereby English and Italian were to be the official languages, with the former being the language of administration (with Italian as a second official language), and the latter the official language in the Courts of Malta. In education and culture, Italian and English were “recognised as” equal (Hull : 1993, p. 53). In contrast, Maltese was meant to “enjoy all such facilities as are necessary to satisfy the reasonable needs of those who are not sufficiently conversant with the English or Italian language” (Hull : 1993, p. 53). Importantly, though, this allowed the Maltese members of the local government, i.e. Senate and Legislative Council, to hold debates in Maltese, as well as in English or Italian. By the end of the First World War, English was more widely understood and used than Italian (Hull : 1993, p. 56).

In January 1934, the Maltese orthographic system of *l-Għaqda tal-Kittieba tal-Malti* ‘the Union of Maltese Writers’, which was founded in 1920, was officially adopted by the Government and, in August of 1934, English, Maltese, and Italian were declared official languages, with English as sole medium for administration, public records, documents and government notices, and Maltese and Italian as “optional” translations. Maltese became the language of the Law Courts (Blouet : 1984, p. 187), and, in 1936, with the revocation of the 1921 Constitution, Italian stopped being an official language, with “Maltese now filling in theory most of the positions hitherto occupied by Italian” (Hull : 1993, p. 81).

In 1964, Malta obtained independence from Great Britain. According to Section 5 [National Language], chapter I of the new Constitution, the “national language of Malta is the Maltese language” with “the Maltese and the English languages” as “the official languages of Malta”. In 2004, Malta became a member of the European Union. Years of discussions, negotiations and political pressures finally resulted in Maltese being recognised as one of the official languages of the

European Union. It is clear that Maltese has come a long way since the not-so-distant days when it was seen by many as not being worthy of preservation and respect.

(c) Standardisation of orthography

When writing in Maltese, various writers used various writing systems, most of them based on the Italian alphabet (de Soldanis). Some writers also utilised a mixture of Italian and Arabic symbols (Thezan), while others, such as Vassalli, added newly invented symbols (Farrugia : 2004). Vassalli devised and published two versions of the Maltese alphabet, one in 1790 and one in 1827, but neither really caught on as a system. Indeed, a number of bodies came into being, trying to standardise Maltese orthography. These included the *Società Medica*, the *Accademia Filologica Maltese*, and the *Socjeta Semitika Ingliza Filologika* (Farrugia : 2004, p. 86).

In 1920, *L-Għadqa tal-Kittieba tal-Malti* ‘the Union of Maltese Writers’ was set up with the specific aim of creating a standard orthography. The members of this committee, which included some of the best writers of the time, published a book entitled *Tagħrif fuq il-Kitba Maltija* ‘Information about Maltese Writing’ in 1924. Their orthographic system came to be known as *l-Alfabett tal-Għaqda tal-Kittieba tal-Malti* ‘the Alphabet of the Union of Maltese Writers’, and, in 1924, in accordance with a motion passed in the Legislative Assembly that year, the government accepted to publish the grammar of the *Għadqa tal-Kittieba tal-Malti*. To this day, this publication is considered the authority on Maltese orthography. Interestingly, however, at the time the members of the committee themselves did not always adhere strictly to the rules they had formulated. Generally speaking, a certain degree of consistency among writers and in publications became a reality in the 1950s, after the Second World War (Cauchi : 1994, p. 27).

To this very day, debate still rages about certain orthographic questions. A recurring burning question is whether loanwords, in particular those of English origin, should retain their original spelling (e.g. mouse, airport) or be written phonetically (maws, erport). This question is hotly debated, and a National Council for the Maltese language is preparing guidelines to standardise the spelling of loanwords.

3 The geography

3.1 Development in contact

Due to Malta’s geographical location and its history, Maltese has been greatly influenced by foreign languages as a result of language contact. Mifsud (1995, pp. 29-30) distinguishes two main historical periods in the development the language: the first is roughly equivalent to the first part of the Order’s rule, which brought about the “transfer into Maltese of a large corpus of Romance loans” resulting in “the automatic acceptance of other [...] features [...] from the field of

phonology and grammar, as well as innumerable calques”; the second period, which started in the post-war period, is still on-going (*ibid.*) and is characterised by “extensive lexical borrowing from English, especially in the new fields of human achievement”, such as technology and communication.

3.2. Maltese in contact — the English influence

According to (Mifsud : 1995, p. 27), the English adstratum “consists mainly of lexical material adopted [...] in two phases”. In the first phase, from 1800 to the 1940’s, the influence of English is restricted to a few areas, “mainly military and administrative spheres and the coveted material aspects of the way of life [...] of Malta-based British servicemen” (*ibid.*). In the second phase, starting in the 1940’s, “English becomes the main medium of acculturation and [...] is also [...] the exclusive source of new terminology connected with modern life” (*ibid.*). Some obvious recent examples are words like *kompjuter* for *computer*, *mowbajl* for *mobile phone* (see also section 2.4), but also older loan words like *wajer* for *wire / flex* and *plagg* for *plug*.

An interesting example of how loans affect the lexical structure of the language is also the use of the words *is-ser* for the ‘male teacher’, *il-miss* for the ‘female teacher’, as well as *it-tiċer* for either male or female, possibly preferably female. Indeed, according to (Farrugia : 2003, p. 244), 35.4% of the respondents in his study on gender assignment classified the written word *tiċer* masculine gender, while 64.6% assigned it feminine gender. *Miss*, *ser* and *tiċer* are the words that are used by children, parents and also teachers in the everyday spoken language. However, in a more formal context, say a speech by the head of a school, it is the words of Semitic origin *għalliem* ‘male teacher’ and *għalliema* ‘female / plural teacher’ that are used. Obviously, and not surprisingly, the introduction of new words has brought about an enrichment of this particular word-field, and which has resulted in a specific differentiation in terms of register which was not there before.

3.2.1 The languages of the “insiders”: bilingualism

One of the positive effects of the English presence in Malta is the fact that many Maltese are bilingual. Both Maltese and English are used by the majority of the population, to different extents and in different varieties and contexts. Between the two extremes of monolingualism and bilingualism, there is a continuum of mixture of languages, in which both language-mixing and code-switching take place. See especially (Camilleri : 1995) for a study of bilingualism in Malta, in particular code-switching within the classroom. It seems that most Maltese generally prefer to talk to each other in Maltese. Indeed, Borg et al. (1992) claim that 96% of Maltese families interact in Maltese rather than in English. Similarly, according to (Sciriha and Vassallo : 2001, p. 15), 98.6% of respondents in their sample (500 respondents, randomly selected from Malta and Gozo) claimed to

have Maltese as their native language, while only 1.2% considered English to be their native language. Interestingly, 0.2% claimed that Italian was their native language.

Generally, people use one language in certain social situations or domains, and they the other language in different situations or domains, while mixing and / or switching in others. According to (Sciriha and Vassallo : 2001, p. 29), “70% of the respondents claimed to use Maltese at work, while 90% said they communicate with their family members at home in Maltese. [...] the percentages for spoken Maltese are extremely high but go down for other skills like reading and writing.” Camilleri and Borg (1992) identified specific domains in which Maltese, English or a mixture tend to be used. Thus, for example, in Education, the spoken medium is mainly Maltese, while the written medium is mostly English. In the spoken form, mixed Maltese-English is often used in this context. At home, the majority of families speak Maltese, a few families speak English and some mix.

3.3. The speakers

3.3.1. Maltese as a “de jure” language

As was mentioned above, Maltese is legally recognised as the national and, together with English, the official language of Malta. The Constitution specifically regulates the use of language in three main areas, namely, the administration, the law courts and parliament. According to the law, for all official purposes, the Administration may use either of the official languages and “any person may address the Administration in any of the official languages and the reply of the Administration thereto shall be in such language” (*Constitution of Malta*, Chapter 1, Article 5, § 2).

The Constitution explicitly states that Maltese is the language of the Courts, but also that “Parliament may make [...] provision for the use of the English language in such cases and under such conditions as it may prescribe” (*Constitution of Malta*, Chapter 1, Article 5, § 3). Parliament is allowed to regulate “its own procedure” and “determine the language or languages that shall be used in Parliamentary proceedings and records” (*Constitution of Malta*, Chapter 1, Article 5, § 4). However, laws are to be enacted in both Maltese and English, and, importantly, “if there is a conflict between the Maltese and the English texts of any law, the Maltese text shall prevail” (Chapter 6, Part 1, Article 73).

On another level, the fact that Maltese is now also one of the official languages of the European Union means that European Union laws and official documents have to be translated into Maltese, including, for example, the *Official Journal* of the European Union. Relevant Maltese documents must also be translated into the other official European Union languages. Moreover, Maltese citizens can write to European Union institutions and obtain a written reply in Maltese. If they want to, Maltese representatives in European Union institutions

can speak in Maltese on official occasions, such as when they address the European Parliament.

The recognition of Maltese as an official language within European Union is both a blessing and a headache. It is certainly a great political and historical victory for a language which, for so long, was considered a poor and inadequate language, even by its own speakers. Finally, Maltese has acquired a high status, not only at a national level but also at European level, at least on paper. In practical terms, it is now forced to grow and expand, in particular lexically, in order to be able to cope with the barrage of technical and legal terms that are required in the translation of official and legal European Union documents. Unfortunately, not enough translators and interpreters were trained to cope with the huge mass of material that needs to be translated and interpreted. Moreover, there are very few specialised technical terminology dictionaries in Maltese, and the lack of authoritative sources often results in individual translators or teams of translators using different terms for the same objects or concepts, resulting in overall confusion. Indeed, one of the important tasks of the National Council for the Maltese language is to try and at least co-ordinate efforts so that a measure of standardisation and common practice among translators and interpreters is achieved.

3.3.2. Maltese as a “de facto” language

Outside of Europe, Maltese is often still the *de facto* language emigrant families and communities in places like Australia, Canada, the USA and Great Britain (see also section 1.2 above). Thus, for example, according to the 2001 census profile for Canada, there were nearly 33,000 persons in Canada who claimed Maltese origins, with 14,115 claiming single origin and 18,880 multiple origin (i.e., a total of 32,995). Interestingly, in the same census, 7,375 claimed to have Maltese as their mother tongue (*Census Profile Canada*, 2001). It is also worth mentioning that from early on in the 19th century many Maltese emigrated to Algeria, Tunisia and Egypt and lived there until the mid-1950s, when they were forced to leave for places like France and the UK.

Some research has been carried out on the Maltese spoken in Canada (see Sciriha : 1991) and that spoken in Australia (see especially Bovingdon : 2001). According to (Bovingdon : 2004), the Maltese used by speakers in Maltese communities in Australia has “deviated considerably”, especially lexically, from the Maltese spoken in Malta. Bovingdon calls the variety, or ethnolect, of Maltese spoken in Australia “Maltraljan”. To take one example, the Maltraljan word *ħangri* (from English *hungry*), means ‘mean or miserly’ as in *kemm hu ħangri* ‘how mean / miserly he is’. This word does not exist in Standard Maltese and is, therefore, an example of Maltraljan, as opposed to Standard Maltese.

Generally, it seems that there is a strong desire among some communities in the diaspora to keep the mother language and the culture alive. Nowadays, contact

between the local community and communities abroad is made much easier because of the Internet, especially email and the streaming of local radio programmes.

3.4 Pluricentrism

Although Malta is a very small country geographically, Maltese has a number of regional varieties or dialects. The differences between varieties are mainly phonological, although there are also some morphological and syntactic differences which, however, have not been studied in any detail yet. The Standard variety, often referred to by speakers as *il-pulit* ‘the polite language’, is the variety spoken in certain urban areas like Valletta, Hamrun and Sliema. In contrast, a number of varieties, often referred to as *l-imghawweg* ‘the distorted language’, are spoken in different areas. According to (Puech : 1994), three main dialectal, i.e. non-standard, varieties can be distinguished, namely, that spoken in Gozo, that spoken in what he calls the Quadrilateral of Żurrieq (including the villages Żurrieq, Safi, Kirkop, Mqabba, and Qrendi), and that spoken in the other rural areas, such as Mosta and Mgarr. To give a few examples of dialectal variation: Standard *omma* ‘her mother’ [ˈɔmmə] is pronounced [ˈɔmmə] in Gozo, while *statwa* ‘statue’ [ˈstɔːtwə] is [ˈstuːtwə] in the variant spoken in Mqabba, a village in the South-Eastern part of Malta.

There is a need for extensive research to be carried out to examine the current state of Maltese dialects in detail. According to (Fenech : 1981, p. 1), “scattered information about Maltese and its pronunciation is available from the late Middle Ages” but “the question of dialects within Maltese does not seem to have attracted scholarly attention before the late eighteenth century.” According to (Aquilina : 1976, p. 41), “the first Maltese scholar to note these dialectal peculiarities which distinguished one village for another was Mikiel Anton Vassalli”, who, in his *Lexicon* (Sammut : 2002, p. xvii) claims that five dialects were popularly distinguished at the time, namely, the language of the cities, Gozo, the lower villages, the upper villages, and the central villages. He describes the variety spoken in each area, also in comparison with Classical Arabic.

The most detailed study to date was carried out in the 1960s and 70s in a project led by J. Aquilina and B. S. J. Isserlin. Two volumes describing the fieldwork were planned, one on Gozo and one on Malta, but only the one on Gozo was published (Aquilina & Isserlin : 1981). In 2004, a group called the *Maltese Dialects Study Group* was formed by a number of individuals interested in reviving and continuing work on the study of Maltese dialects (Vella : 2004) and a pilot project was carried out, collecting, transcribing and analysing data from *Xlukkajr*, the dialect of the fishing village of Marsaxlokk in the South-East of Malta. Work on this project is still on-going but, unfortunately, it is very slow because the local researchers face severe financial and time constraints.

4. Auxiliaries

4.1. Institutions and language planning

Until 2005, Malta did not have a body that was legally responsible for language matters in general and language planning in particular. Language matters were mainly tackled in an *ad hoc* manner and, for a long time, they were determined mainly by political expediency and the various interests of individuals (expert or otherwise) and organisations, many of whom were genuinely wanted to encourage the use and preservation of the Maltese language. Recall that the late 19th and early 20th centuries were characterised by the notorious “Language Question” (see section 2.3), with the British colonial government trying to dethrone Italian from its privileged status as the language of the administration and the courts, and, with the leverage of Maltese, trying to push forward English, instead. This aim was achieved in 1934, when, after years of resistance, Italian stopped being an official language.

The founding of *l-Għaqda tal-Kittieba tal-Malti* ‘Union of Maltese Writers’ in 1920, and the publication and official recognition of its orthographic system in 1934 were very important and concrete steps in the development of Maltese as a national language. With Independence from Great Britain, in 1964, the status of Maltese as national language and, together with English, official language of Malta was entrenched in the constitution. The language reached another level of prestige when, in 2004, it became an official language of the European Union. In April 2005, *Il-Kunsill Nazzjonali tal-Ilsien Malti* ‘The National Council for the Maltese Language’ came into being.

According to the *Maltese Language Act* (Act N^o V of 2004), the aim of the Council is “to promote the National Language of Malta and to provide the necessary means to achieve this aim.” The work of the Council is based on the principle that the Maltese language is “a fundamental element of the national identity of the Maltese people” and “an essential component of the national heritage [...] distinguishing the Maltese people from all other nations and giving the same people their best means of expression” (*ibid.*). Moreover, the Maltese State recognises the fact that the Maltese Language is a strong expression of the nationality of the Maltese, and “the study of the Maltese Language in its linguistic, literary and cultural manifestations shall always be given primary importance in both state and other schools from the very first years of education of all Maltese citizens” (*ibid.*). The law also specifically mentions the fact that, “within the wider context of the Maltese diaspora, [...] the Maltese Language should remain known by and be considered [...] a binding element of the Maltese people” (*ibid.*).

Together with promoting the Maltese Language, both in Malta and abroad, and promoting the “dynamic development of such linguistic characteristics as identify the Maltese people” (*ibid.*), one of the stated functions of the Council is “to adopt a suitable linguistic policy backed by a strategic plan” and make sure

that it is “put into practice and observed in all sectors of Maltese life” (*ibid.*). The law also specifically refers to the task of updating “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” (*ibid.*).

Apart from the Council, which is a government body, there are a number of associations that have the Maltese language and literature as a focus of interest, such as *L-Akkademja tal-Malti* ‘The Academy of Maltese’, *Id-Dipartiment tal-Malti tal-Università* ‘the Department of Maltese at the University of Malta’, and *Il-Kunsill Nazzjonali tal-Ktieb* ‘The National Book Council’, to mention a few.

4.2. Linguistic resources

4.2.1 Conventional resources

(a) Dictionaries

Apart from the historical dictionaries, glossaries and vocabularies of Maltese mentioned in section 2.2. above, a number of other works exist that deal with the vocabulary of Maltese. The following is not meant to be an exhaustive list but is rather an arbitrary choice of a few well-known works arranged chronologically. For a more thorough list of works up to 1986, including some comments, see Aquilina’s, *Maltese-English Dictionary* (1987), I, pp. XXV-XXVI.

VELLA (Francesco): 1843, *Dizionario portatile delle Lingue Maltese, Italiana, Inglese* (Livorno); MAMO (Salvatore): 1885, *English-Maltese Dictionary* (Malta); BUSUTTIL (Vincenzo): ¹1900, ²1932, *Diziunariu mill Malti għall Inglis* (Malta); BUSUTTIL (Vincenzo): 1900, *Diziunariu mill Inglis għall Malti* (Malta); MAGRO (E.): 1906, *English and Maltese Dictionary from to L* (Malta); PSAILA (K.): 1936-1955, *English-Maltese Dictionary — Dizzjunarju Inġliż-Malti*, 3 vols. (Malta); BUSUTTIL (Edward D.): ¹1941, ²1977, *Kalepin (Dam mil-Kliem) Dizzjunarju Malti-Inġliż* (Malta); BUSUTTIL (Edward D.): ¹1948, ²1981, *Kalepin: Dizzjunarju Inġliż-Malti* (Malta); SERRANCINO-INGLOTT (Erin): 1975-1987, *Il-Miklem Malti*, 9 vols. (Malta); AQUILINA (Joseph): 1987 and 1990, *Maltese-English Dictionary*, vol. I (A—L) and vol. II (M—Z); AQUILINA (Joseph): 1999, *English-Maltese Dictionary*, 4 vols. (Malta); AQUILINA (Joseph): 2006, *Concise Maltese-English, English-Maltese Dictionary* (Malta); MOSER (Manfred) & MEILAK (Christopher): 1999, *Dizzjunarju Malti-Germaniz / Wörterbuch Malti-Germaniz / Germaniz-Malti; Maltesisch-Deutsch / Deutsch-Maltesisch* (Malta); PEG; AGIUS (Albert W.): 2000, *It-Teżawru: gabra ta' sinonimi u tifsiriet jixtiebħu Maltin* (Malta).

(b) Grammars

The following are a few Maltese Grammars, both historical and current, not mentioned above. Again, this list is not meant to be exhaustive. See *Maltese-English Dictionary* (1987), I, p. xxix for a more complete list up to 1982.

DE SOLDANIS (Ġan Franġisk Agius) :1750, *Nuova Scuola di Grammatica per agevolmente apprendere la Lingua Punica-Maltese* (Rome); VELLA (Francesco) : 1831, *Maltese Grammar for the Use of the English* (Leghorn); PANZAVECCHIA (Fortunato) : 1845, *Grammatica della Lingua Maltese* (Malta); CREMONA (Anthony) : ¹1935-²1970 & ¹1938-²1973, *Tagħlim fuq il-Kitba Maltija, I & II* (Malta); SUTCLIFFE (Edmund F.) : ¹1936, ²1950, *A Grammar of the Maltese Language* (Oxford); AQUILINA (Joseph) : ¹1965, ²1985, *Teach Yourself Maltese* (London); BRO (Henry) : ¹1960-²1979 & ¹1967-²1980, *Grammatika Maltija, I & II* (Malta); BORG (Albert) and AZZOPARDI-ALEXANDER (Marie) : 1997, *Maltese. Lingua Descriptive Grammar* (London—New York); AMBROS (Arne A.) : 1999, *Bongornu, kif int? Einführung in die maltesische Sprache* (Wiesbaden : Reichert).

4.2.2. Electronic resources

Electronic resources for Maltese are not well developed yet and a great deal needs to be done for Maltese to reach the same level of resources as many other European languages. There have been, however, some initial attempts by individuals to develop electronic resources, such as spell-checkers (see, for example, <http://linux.org.mt/projects/spellcheck>). Work on the development of electronic lexicons and a corpus of Maltese, together with language processing tools that should allow easy on-line access, sharing and manipulation of data is at an advanced stage (<http://mlrs.research.um.edu.mt/>).

On-going work and research is also being carried out on the development and annotation of a corpus of spoken Maltese (Vella and Farrugia : 2006). The idea is to eventually combine the written and spoken corpora, and the tools developed to manipulate them, into an integrated system. It is hoped that the work done on both projects will provide a clear picture of the current state of written and spoken Maltese, and also allow for regular up-dates of tools and information. The corpus should provide material for linguistic research on Maltese, material and tools for educational purposes, and provide the basis for sophisticated language resources, such as spell- and grammar-checkers, and specialised electronic dictionaries, including thesauri, and terminological and multi-lingual dictionaries.

4.3. Culture

4.3.1 Literature

Although Malta only has a population of a few thousand, it has a relatively vast and rich literature. As was mentioned in section 2.1 above, the first extant “literary” work in Maltese is *Il Cantilena* by Peter Caxaro, which presumably dates back to about 1450. It is certain that other works were written at the time, but none have been found up to now. According to (Friggieri : 1976, p. 200), the history of Maltese literature has three phases, namely, (1) an initial phase in which, with the exception of the Caxaro’s *Cantilena*, only Italian was the language used

in literary works; (2) a middle phase, with both Italian, as the expression of the “upper” classes, and Maltese, as the popular expression without any literary aspirations / pretensions, and (3) a final phase in which Maltese became a proper “artistic tool”.

The first extant works of prose that are known date back to the period between 1739 and 1746. They are sermons in manuscript form written by Padre Ignazio Saverio Mifsud. The first published book in Maltese (together with a parallel Italian text) was a catechism under the title *Tagħlim Nisrani* ‘Christian Teachings’ by Dun Franġisk Wizzino, published in 1752, while the first extant published poems, penned by Abbati Gioacchino Navarro, appeared in 1791 in the book *Malta par un Voyageur Francais* by the French historian François-Emmanuel Guignard de Saint-Priest. The 19th century saw a number of “firsts” in literary works in Maltese. For example, in 1824, Francesco Vella and Giuseppe Montebello Pulis published *Ward ta' Qari Malti* ‘Blossoms of Maltese Reading’, the first book that was completely in Maltese, and in 1889 the first literary novel, *Ineż Farruġ* by Anton Manwel Caruana, was published.

In 1912, Dun Karm, who was later to become the “national poet”, started writing in Maltese, with his first poem in that language being *Quddiem Xbiha tal-Madonna* ‘In Front of an Image of the Virgin Mary’. Dun Karm, who was first called “national poet” by Laurent Ropa in 1935, left a great legacy of poetic works. It is, of course, not possible to mention all the well-known and talented writers in this brief section on literature. A few well-known “classical” authors (ordered alphabetically, and not implying that others are in any way inferior or less talented) include Ġużè Aquilina, Rużar Briffa, Anton Buttigieg, Ġużè Chetcuti, Ġużè Ellul Mercer, Ġużè Galea, Juan Mamo, Ġużè Muscat Azzopardi and Mary Meylak, the latter being the first woman to publish poems in Maltese.

The 1960s heralded a literary revival that coincided with Malta’s Independence from Great Britain. Maltese literature, in general, and Maltese poetry, in particular, took on a “new direction”, with authors experimenting with new content and new forms of expression (Cardona et al. : 1981). Some of these authors include Mario Azzopardi, Victor Fenech, Joe Friggieri, Oliver Friggieri, Raymond Mahoney, Albert Marshall, Daniel Massa, Doreen Micallef, Achille Mizzi, Frans Sammut, Alfred Sant, Lilian Sciberras, Philip Sciberras, Lino Spiteri, and Trevor Żahra, just to name a few. Francis Ebejer is probably Malta’s best-known playwright, a prolific and often controversial writer who won the first radio-play contest with *Ċpar fix-Xemx* ‘Mist in the Sun’ in 1950. In 1965 Joseph J. Camilleri published his novel *Aħna Sinjuri* ‘We Are Rich’, which is considered the first “new” novel in Maltese literature.

Today, there are a number of voluntary organisations, like the *Akkademja tal-Malti* ‘The Maltese Language Academy’ *Poeżijaplus* ‘Poetryplus’, *Għaqda Poeti Maltin* ‘Maltese Poets Society’, *Għaqda Letterarja Maltija* ‘Maltese Literary Society’ and *Inizjamed*, which encourage the production of literary works. The

new generation of poetry and prose writers includes, amongst others, Clare Azzopardi, Stanley Borg, Norbert Bugeja, Joseph Buttigieg, Adrian Grima, Henry Holland, Simone Inguanez, Immanuel Mifsud, Karl Schembri, Ġużè Stagno and Vince Vella.

Popular culture is also alive and well, with traditional folk songs (known as *għana* in Maltese) and popular theatres (*teatrin*) still very popular in many towns and villages. It is interesting to note also that the first rock opera in Maltese, *Ġensna* ‘Our Nation’, was performed in 1982. There are many pop songs in Maltese, including attempts at adopting new styles, such as rap, to the Maltese language and context. The number of both literary and non-literary works in Maltese has been steadily increasing, notwithstanding the disadvantage of a relatively limited market. This is surely a sign that the language is very much “alive” and it augurs well for the future.

4.3.2. The Media

The first national newspaper, *Journal de Malte*, came out in 1798 and was in French and Italian. During the British rule, many newspapers were published in English, Italian and Maltese (Chircop : 2004, p. 60). According to (Chircop : 1994, p. 360), “besides local needs for information dissemination, [...] two factors played a key role in the development of [the] media”, namely, “close proximity to Italy and the British domination during the last 200 years”, with the British attempting to counteract the Italian influence by promoting the free press. According to (Frendo : 2003, p. 23) “one can say that the free press in Malta started when the first permits were issued for private printing presses.” In the 18th century, the very first newspapers, which came out in 1838 include, among others, *Lo Spettatore Imparziale* (monthly), *Il-Portafoglio Maltese* (weekly), *The Harlequin*, *Il Mediterraneo—Gazzetta di Malta*. See (Frendo : 2003) for the history of journalism up to 2002.

Currently, the media landscape in Malta reflects the mixed linguistic and socio-political background of the Maltese people. There is roughly a balance of local Maltese language and English language newspapers. The situation with respect to the visual and audio media, television and radio, is similar to that of the printed media in terms of the socio-political dimension. Radio broadcasting started in 1935, when the British owned company, Rediffusion Ltd, was awarded a licence to go on air in the form of cable radio. The Maltese had access to Italian television in the mid-fifties and, in September 1961, the Broadcasting Authority, an independent statutory body appointed by the President of the Republic, was set up to regulate television broadcasting services. Malta television came into being in 1962 (Chircop : 2004, p. 61).

The PBS (Public Broadcasting Services) runs the official public television station (*Televiżjoni Malta*) and radio station (*Radju Malta*). The political parties have their own “official” television and radio stations, namely, *One Radio*

and *One Television* for the Labour Party and *Radio 101* and *NET TV* for the Nationalist Party. Ownership of media stations by political parties is a unique and controversial state of affairs which reflects the highly partisan attitude of the Maltese people, and the fact that politics pervades Maltese society, both at national (state) and local (town, village) level (see, in particular, Boissevain : 1993).

Most programmes on the local radio stations are in Maltese, while TV stations also show a number of English language productions, especially features and films. The *Malta Broadcasting Corporation* has long felt that one of the roles of broadcasting, in particular that paid by the public funds, is to both protect and promote the Maltese language (*L-Ilsien Malti fix-Xandir* : 2001). The *Malta Broadcasting Authority* website has a special section on Language in Broadcasting which contains some information on the use of terminology, in particular computer terminology, and guidelines for the correct use of Maltese.

Finally, in recent years, Malta has also seen fast developments in the use of the Internet and mobile telephony, with many households now having access to these services and sources of information. Official statistics for May 2006 show that, out of a total population of about 400,000 inhabitants, 327,032 persons had a mobile telephony subscription, and the number of Internet subscriptions was 89,869 (*National Statistics Office*, Malta, 3rd May 2005). Many broadcasting and print media have their own websites with selected information. Some radio stations also stream their programmes live, while a number of media organisations exist only on the Web, such as *SearchMalta*, *MaltaMedia* and *Di-ve Malta*, *MaltaRightNow* and *MaltaStar*.

For a long time, one of the main problems with the use of Maltese (instead of English) on computer was the lack of standardisation of the Maltese fonts, which need to include special symbols such as the barred h (ħ), or dotted c (ċ), for example. Technically, this is not a problem anymore since now the Maltese fonts have been standardised in UTF-8 format and are available together with drivers for the Maltese keyboard. The availability of standardised fonts and keyboards should encourage people to use Maltese more often than English when writing texts on computer. However, this is not possible yet on mobile phones, although, hopefully, it will be possible to write proper Maltese in SMS's, as well, in the near future. Thus, one will be able to see Maltese written properly also on local TV stations which often show SMS messages "live", especially on programmes which encourage interaction with viewers.

5. Present and Future Role

Maltese is sometimes classified as a "small" or "minor" language, in the sense that it has a relatively small number of speakers. If one takes the measure suggested by (Stolz : 2001) to determine whether a language is "small" (*Kleinsprache*), namely, if it has fewer than a million speakers, then Maltese

should count as such, even if one also takes into account the speakers of Maltese who live abroad. However, the Maltese are very sensitive about the way in which their language is described. For many, for example, the term “minor language” is wrong because sounds derogatory since the word “minor” might be taken to imply “of lesser quality, stature or seriousness” when compared to other languages. See, for example, (Mizzi : 2000, p. 36) and (Sant : 2000, p. 9). Also, it might imply that it is a “minority” language, i.e. a language spoken by a minority population within the country, which, of course, is not the case.

“Less studied” might be the term that does not necessarily cause negative reactions. Indeed, it may safely be said that, possibly because of its turbulent history, for a long time, Maltese was not studied with the seriousness it deserved. However, the passion and initiative of a few individual scholars and organisations, both local and foreign, has indeed produced a relatively small (when compared to other European languages) but significant body of work dedicated to the Maltese language. Especially, in the last fifty years or so, in particular after Maltese obtained official and then national status, there has been a rapid increase in works both on and in Maltese, both academic and literary.

Maltese is also sometimes called a “mixed” language — see (Aquilina : 1959) and (Bakker and Maus : 1994) — on account of the fact that it displays a mixture of Arabic, Romance and English elements. Again, although technically it may indeed be the case that Maltese is a language mix, people tend to see this label in a negative light as well, often feeling that describing a language as being a mixture can be interpreted as claiming that it is a “patois” or, even worse, just a “hodgepodge”, i.e. a non-standard object that lacks unity and organisation. People tend to be very sensitive about the way their language is perceived by others and, therefore, one should be very careful when classifying it or applying labels to it.

Whatever one’s point of view, the passion with which such matters are discussed is proof of the fact that the Maltese people do care a great deal about their language. Coupled with the fact that, as was said above (see section 3.2.1), Maltese is still very much the language of the large majority of people living in Malta, as well as some communities abroad, and also the fact that it has a flourishing literary and cultural scene, this strongly indicates that Maltese is indeed a robust language that is certainly not, in any way, to be classified as threatened language. This is also the conclusion that Camilleri and Borg (1992) come to after examining the state of the language.

Another important factor that has to be taken into consideration when discussing the state of Maltese is the effect of language mixture (switching and mixing), and whether the wide use of loan words, especially from English, can be said to weaken and possibly, as some claim, “annihilate” the Maltese language. Of course, one’s judgement depends on what one understands by “weaken” or “annihilate”, which tend to be vague and imprecise notions. However, whatever one thinks about the effect of mixture on Maltese at this stage in its development,

it is a fact that present-day Maltese is itself the product of, sometimes drastic, linguistic changes that came about, as a result, of the influence of other languages through contact. It is these changes that have made Maltese a unique language, different enough from Arabic, Italian or English to be considered a language rather than a dialect. Indeed, Maltese speakers have proven to be very adept in integrating material, especially lexical material, into their linguistic system (see section 3.2. for examples). The capacity of a language to integrate foreign material should be taken as a positive sign of strength rather than seen as a weakness. Survival requires that the language be able to grow, expand and develop in such a way that it can adapt to the exigencies of a modern, highly technological, “globalised” world.

The current linguistic situation in Malta is a complex one, especially because both Maltese and English, the two official languages, are used by the majority of the population. A sensible language policy recognises the importance of both languages, depending on necessity and context of use. It does not have to be the case that one language should exclude the other: Maltese gives the people a sense of identity and belonging, making them look “inwards” and giving them a sense of continuity and history, while English makes them look “outwards” and allow them to communicate with the rest of the world and keep them from becoming isolated because of their 'smallness' and insularity.

One area which needs to be encouraged and developed is language research. Currently, there is a serious lack of financial investment (both state and private) in research, in general, and in language research, in particular. The number of academic (lecturing and research) posts currently available at the University of Malta is too small, and the funds available for resources and remuneration are too poor. As a result, young scholars are not encouraged to focus their intellectual capabilities on researching various aspects of the Maltese language.

Encouraging signs in this respect come from three important developments, namely, the recognition that Maltese obtained as an official European Union language in 2004, the establishment of the *National Council for the Maltese Language* in 2005, and the founding of the *International Association of Maltese Linguistics* in 2007.

The *International Association of Maltese Linguistics* was founded in Bremen on the initiative of Professor Thomas Stolz of the University Bremen. It serves as a platform for scholars from many different research institutions working on Maltese to meet regularly and discuss their work. It has also produced a number of publications dealing with the latest research on the Maltese language. See (Comrie et al. : 2009) and (Caruana et al. : forthcoming).

Recognition of Maltese as an official EU language provides it with a European platform, and helps make it known by a large number and variety of people abroad. Moreover, because of the need for translations into and from Maltese, it encourages adaptation of terminology and, therefore, expansion of its

lexical base. Also, it has fostered the radical expansion and professionalisation of the skills of translation and interpretation (see section 3.3.2).

The setting up of the *National Council for the Maltese Language* should have, at least, two positive effects on the Maltese language, namely, (a) a more practical and serious attempt towards its preservation and standardisation, and (b) the ushering of the language into the era of modern technology, especially that of computers and mobile telephony. The establishment of this Institution was long overdue and the Council still needs to be given the support and resources it requires to carry out its duties and to function properly, as required by the law. The signs are that the Maltese language will not only simply survive but that it will also grow in stature and status, and prove to be an appropriate tool of communication in the 21st century and beyond.

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