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Bilingualism in Malta: Preferences and Attitudes of Maltese University Students

Abstract

Malta is a small European island with over 440,000 citizens inhabiting the area of 316 square kilometers. Despite the geographical restriction, Malta has a highly interesting linguistic situation. Throughout the centuries, Malta was conquered and inhabited by numerous nations.

In consequence, Maltese developed in the situations of constant language contact, which is traceable in the sounds recalling Arabic as well as the weaving of Italian and English phrases (Brincat 2006). The characteristic language contact situation is pending: since 1964 Malta has both Maltese and English as its official languages. Considering that Maltese does not have plenty of speakers and is not a widely spread language, it could be assumed that the present linguistic tendency on the island, especially among the young, would lean towards the usage of the current global language, which is English. Such a tendency among the young generation would imply the beginning of an end for the Maltese language. Nevertheless, the questionnaire conducted among a group of students of the University of Malta indicates that there is no such threat. All of the respondents point to Maltese as their native language and use it on a daily basis when talking with friends, family members and doctors. English is mostly used when counting, reading scholarly papers or watching TV. Interestingly enough, Italian, which was an official language of Malta till 1934, is still quite popular among the young. As far as the attitudes are concerned, English is considered as highly useful but inferior to Maltese.

Knowledge of the language is thought to be significant for numerous reasons, yet it does not make the person speaking it more educated or intelligent as it used to. The researched group is small; however, it indicates some general tendencies in the area, which should be further researched.

Keywords: languages of Malta, Maltese language, contact linguistics, bilingualism

1. The Maltese language

The Maltese language, locally known as *il-Malti*, is the national language of the Maltese Archipelago consisting of three islands: Malta, Gozo (*Għawdex*) and Comino (*Kemmuna*). The islands cover the area of about 316 square kilometers and are situated approximately in the middle of the Mediterranean Sea. Malta is located 96

km south of Sicily and is 288 km distant from Tunisia (Borg, Azzopardi 1997: xii). The name of the language naturally comes from the name of the main island - Malta. Nevertheless, the origin of the island's name is not apparent (Fabri 2010: 791). The first record of the name as *Melite* or *Melitaie* was discovered in Vulci, old Etruscan city, in 500 BC on an amphora (Vella 1974: 1 in Fabri 2010: 791). Therefore, the writers from Rome and Greece referred to Malta as *Melite* or *Melitaie*; however, the Phoenicians named it *Malithah* or *Malta*, which means *refuge* (Fabri 2010: 791). Nowadays, its name is rather consistent - in the great number of languages the name of the country is homogenous and is written *Malta*.

As far as the language family affiliation is concerned, Maltese is a Semitic language; more specifically, it belongs to the South Arabic branch of Central Semitic (Fabri, 2010: 791). Thus, undoubtedly, Maltese was originally an Arabic dialect. However, as the result of Latinization and Christianization processes it naturally diverged from Classical Arabic (Brincat 2005). Due to these facts, Maltese is definitely quite an outstanding language - it is the only one in the Semitic family that is written in Latin alphabet. However, not only the Latinization but also other aspects of the rich history of Malta left the imprints on the Maltese language to which it owns its uniqueness. Therefore, in order to get a more comprehensive view of the Maltese language, the history of Malta has to be provided.

2. An outline of Maltese history

Being situated between Europe and North Africa, Malta has always played a strategic role in both commercial and political events concerning Mediterranean countries. There are other small islands in the center of the sea (e.g. Pantelleria, Lampedusa or Linosa), yet only Malta has natural deep harbors that enable taking large ships (Fabri 2010: 795). Therefore, the Maltese islands have rich and eventful history which influenced greatly the language of the Maltese islands.

2.1. The emergence

The emergence of the Maltese language is still at question and to some extent a matter of speculation. The excavation has indicated that the first signs of human activity on the island can be traced back to 5200 BC (Fabri 2010: 795). The people inhabiting these terrains were at Neolithic level of cultural development. Due to the archeological data quite a lot is known about their way of life as well as social organization. Unfortunately, nothing is known about the language of these inhabitants.

However, in 725 BC the Phoenicians arrived in Malta (Brincat 2000: 17 in Fabri 2010: 795). As Blouet (1984: 30) states, the Phoenicians have established themselves and influenced the already existing population of the island with their culture by about 800 BC. The Phoenicians brought not only more developed culture but also the knowledge of iron-working what introduced Malta to a thoroughly new age. Having taken the control of the archipelago, they introduced it to the resilient trade of goods and cultural exchange (Wituch 1980: 15). Phoenician period came to an end in approximately 650 BC and was followed by the Carthaginian phase which ended in 218 BC with the Roman conquest of Malta. Consequently, Romans introduced Latin to the archipelago. Interestingly enough, the inscriptions in stone as well as the contemporary coins indicate that at that time three languages were in formal use: Punic, Greek and Latin. Nevertheless, the very inscriptions do not tell anything about the spoken language of the inhabitants (Brincat 2006: 8).

The year 870 is the beginning of significant period in the history of Malta, especially from the linguistic perspective since it was the year of the Arabs' arrival to the island. According to Misfud (1995: 3) "(...) 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." Even though Malta was taken over by the Christian Normans in 1091, the Muslim community was allowed to stay on the island. The situation changed in 1224 when those who did not convert to Christianity were expelled from Malta (Brincat 2006: 9, Fabri 2010: 797). During this phase Christianity was thriving since "(...) the main religious orders established their monasteries between 1371 and 1452 and consequently churches mushroomed: from 10 in 1350 to 430 in 1575" (Brincat 2006: 8). Furthermore, even though Latin was the formal liturgy language, the evangelization process took place in local dialects. Before Malta was given to the Order of St. John the Baptist by the Pope Clement VIII and King Charles V of Spain it was ruled by numerous dynasties such as the Swabians, the Angevins, the Aragonese and the Castellians. Nevertheless, the reigns of these dynasties were not of significance in terms of Maltese language and its change. Only the abovementioned period of the Order of St. John governance brought considerable changes to the language of the islanders.

2.2. Sixteenth to eighteenth century

The period from sixteen to eighteen century was of great importance when it comes to the development of the linguistic situation in Malta. Not only was Italian introduced, but also Maltese finally started to gain more attention. It was so due to the fact that Malta was the base of the Knights Hospitallers of the Order of St. John the Baptist for quite a long period of time, namely from 1530 to 1798 (Fabri 2010: 798). According to Fabri (2010: 798), during the time of the Order, a great number of Romance elements was absorbed into the language of the islanders. Consequently, as Borg and Azzopardi (1997: xiii) indicate, the period established Italian as the language of the educated and Maltese, with its dialectical variations, as the language restricted to low domains.

The first open declaration of the significance of Maltese language was recognized only in 1796 by a Maltese scholar Mikiel Anton Vassalli. He admitted that Malta was in need of national language but it could not have been Italian since it was spoken only by the educated group; while Maltese, the indigenous language of the islands, was spoken by the great majority of the inhabitants of Malta. Vassalli was aware that Maltese was a hybrid language; nevertheless, he regarded Maltese speaking citizens as *true nationals*. The scholar's innovative attitude towards Maltese did not go unnoticed: Vassalli was named the father of Maltese language and, even more importantly, gave rise to national conscience, identity as well as self-determination of the Maltese islands inhabitants (Sciriha 2002: 96–97).

In the end of the eighteenth century, in 1798, on his way to Egypt, Napoleon abruptly ended the rule of the Order. However, the French dominion did not last long due to their hostility towards Catholicism; the French plundered the churches in order to finance Napoleon's wars. Nevertheless, the Maltese were not strong enough to defeat their enemy on their own. They asked the King of Naples for help who was in alliance with Britain at that time (Sciberras n.d.). After a several months blockade, the French finally capitulated in 1800 (Borg, Azzopardi 1997: xiv, Fabri 2010: 799). In consequence, Malta became a British colony what reflected greatly both on the Maltese language and culture. These two centuries were an eventful period in the history of Malta which is reflected greatly in the linguistic situation of the

island. Nevertheless, the following centuries did not bring steadiness in the field of language. Although a lot had already changed in the linguistic situation of Malta, the major changes were only approaching.

2.3. Nineteenth to twenty-first century

During their reign, the British had two major obstacles to communication with Malta's inhabitants: religion and language (Hull 1993: 5 in Fabri 2010: 799). As far as the language is concerned, the main challenge of the colonizers was to replace Italian with English in the position of the language of dominance which resulted in political dispute known as the *language question* (Fabri 2010: 799). English and Italian contented with each other for linguistic prevalence; Italian was gradually losing this encounter. Surprisingly, one of the results of the battle was the emergence of Maltese language (Borg, Azzopardi 1997: xiv). According to Rosner and Joachimsen (2011: 13), what also contributed greatly to the development and consequent standardization of Maltese language were mid nineteenth century Fortunato Panzavecchia's Bible translations.

In 1921 a new constitution was enacted which established English and Italian official languages of the Maltese islands. The former one was the language of administration and the latter the official language of the Courts. In cultural domain, both languages were perceived equal (Hull 1993: 53 in Fabri 2010: 799). On the contrary, Maltese was to “ (...) enjoy all such facilities as are necessary to satisfy the reasonable needs of those who are not sufficiently conversant with English or Italian language” (Hull 1993: 53 in Fabri 2010: 799). Owing to this fact, Maltese members of local government (*i.e.* Senat and Legislative Council) were allowed to conduct debates in Maltese, English and Italian (Hull 1993: 53 in Fabri 2010: 799).

At the beginning of 1934 the Government officially adopted orthographic system founded in 1920 by *l-Għaqda tal-Kittieba tal-Malti* translating as “the Union of Maltese Writers.” A few months later, in August 1934, Malta started to have three official languages: English, Maltese and Italian. Nevertheless, English was foremost in administration as well as in public and governmental records; Maltese and Italian were treated as non-mandatory translations (Fabri 2010: 799). Two years later, Italian was deprived of the status of official language of Malta and was replaced with Maltese which, together with English, became the language of the administration (Sciriha 2002: 97, Fabri 2010: 799).

Malta gained independence only in 1964; nevertheless, it took 15 years for British troops to thoroughly withdraw from Malta. From that moment on, Maltese language has continuously grown and English is no longer perceived as a language of colonizers but rather of wide communication (Borg & Azzopardi 1997: xiv). The last breakthrough in the history influencing the Maltese language was Malta's accession to European Union in 2004. Since then, Maltese is recognized as one of the official languages in the European Union (Fabri 2010: 800). As Fabri (2010: 800) admits, “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.” Nowadays, it is preserved and researched on an international level, not only by Maltese scholars.

As it can be summarized, the centuries of history and conquests influenced Malta greatly. Yet, what cannot be forgotten is that, along with the country, the rulers and the people, the language of the island had changed significantly. It absorbed and borrowed different features from various languages of the leaders, mixed and developed them to achieve the shape it has today. If it was not for all the nations, dynasties and nationalities that subjugated Malta, the linguistic situation of this country would not look this way.

3. Legal status of Maltese

Legally, Maltese is the national and, together with English, the official language of Malta. The Constitution regulates the use of language in three main areas: administration, parliament and law courts (Constitution of Malta 1964, Ch. I, art. 5). According to the document: “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 1964, Ch. I, art. 5, § 2). As far as the House of Representatives is concerned, it is allowed to regulate its procedure and “(...) determine the language or languages that shall be used in Parliamentary proceedings and records” (Constitution of Malta 1964, Ch. I, art. 5, § 4). Furthermore, article 75 of the Constitution states that each law should be enacted both in Maltese and English. Nevertheless, in the situation of discrepancy between the Maltese and English texts, the former one is prevailing (Constitution of Malta 1964, Ch. VI, art. 75).

In broader perspective, Maltese has acquired high status not only nationally but also at the international level. Since 2004 Maltese holds a status of an official language of the European Union which has both its advantages as well as disadvantages. On the one hand, it is a major historical victory for such an undermined and marginalized *language of the kitchen*. Consequently, all the European Union laws and documents have to be translated into Maltese. Moreover, the official European Union institutions are obliged to respond in Maltese to each letter obtained in this language. Also, this status guarantees the representatives of Malta the possibility to speak in Maltese on official occasions (Fabri 2010: 802–803), e.g. when addressing the European Parliament. On the other hand, this international status causes certain troubles. Translating the European official documents is a great challenge since Maltese lacks numerous technical and legal terms. Since there exist very few specialized technical dictionaries in Maltese, the translators do not have authoritative sources. In consequence, they use various terms for the same objects or concepts bringing overall confusion (Fabri 2010: 803, Rosner, Joachimsen 2011: 12).

Thus, even though both Maltese and English are official languages of the Maltese Archipelago, the Constitution confers an advantage to Maltese language by naming it *national* as well as by granting the superiority to the laws enacted in Maltese over these decreed in English. However, being an official language of the European Union does not implicate only the assets. International significance entails certain challenges for the language with which certain associations and organizations have to deal on the daily basis.

4. Language cultivation in Malta

The phenomenon of language cultivation in Malta had a late start when compared to other European languages. Nevertheless, despite being a recent development it is thriving. It can be assumed as the consequence of centuries of marginalization and inferiority of Maltese to the languages of numerous rulers of the island. The importance of the Maltese language started to be highlighted only at the end of the 18th century. However, the efforts yielded the effects only in 1964 along with the Constitution and forty years later when further developments resulted in gaining the status of the official language of the European Union. In consequence, since then the need for standardization of Maltese is increasing.

One of such organizations, probably the most prominent one, is National Council for the Maltese Language (*Il-Kunsill Nazzjonali tal-Ilsien Malti*) founded in 2005 as the first government organization responsible for language cultivation and since then it is considered the most significant official body in this matter. The National Council was established by the Maltese Language Act (Act V of 2004). As it is stated in the document, Malta was in need of the institution “(...) having the aim of adopting and promoting a suitable language policy and strategy and to verify their performance and observance in every sector of Maltese life, for the benefit and development of the national language and the identity of the Maltese people” (The Maltese Language Act 2005, part II, art. 4(1)). That is to say, the motivation behind this document was the accentuation that the basis of cultural as well as national identity of Malta is the Maltese language shared by the overwhelming majority of the citizens of the country. Therefore, the tasks of the National Council are, amongst others, the promotion of Maltese both inside and outside the country, the update of the orthography and the establishment of contacts with organizations sharing the functions of the Council worldwide (Rosner, Joachimsen 2011: 13).

In conclusion, since late 18th century Maltese has transformed from an undermined vernacular into a fully-fledged and cultivated language which significance is recognized internationally. Nevertheless, it shares the status of official language with current lingua franca with which it has to vie for everyday users and recognition. One of the fields in which Maltese has to compete with English is education.

5. Bilingualism in education

Education plays a significant role in every country and society. It shapes generations of people, enables to enlarge citizen's knowledge as well as gain experience. Therefore, the language of instruction in schools at every level of education is vital in the process of shaping the view of the world. The education system in Malta has always been bilingual, sometimes even trilingual since its establishment almost two centuries ago (Camillieri-Grima 2012: 553). Since in 1800 Malta became a British colony English was introduced to Maltese schools in 1833. Nevertheless, it did not manage to diminish the importance of Italian which remained the most significant language of both education and instruction. Maltese, in turn, was recognized as the first language and guaranteed a place in school (Zammit Mangion 2000 in Camillieri-Grima 2012: 553).

By the time education was made compulsory in 1925 English had already gained more popularity. One of the factors that influenced the prevalence of English in Maltese education system goes back to 1881. Since this year up to 1960s all the elementary school principals along with others representatives of school administration were obliged to undergo their training in the United Kingdom (Zammit Mangion 1992 in Camillieri-Grima 2012: 553). The other background factor conducting to English in education system pertains to the teachers who were also trained by British staff. It took place between the end of the World War II and 1978 when the Faculty of Education was established within the University of Malta (Darmanin and Mayo 2007 in Camillieri-Grima 2012: 553–554). Therefore, in the post-war years Italian was declassified to being taught as a subject in all secondary schools. Maltese and English took over the role of the languages of instruction thoroughly. However, private and church schools introduced quite stringent English-only policy. The increase of the usage of Maltese was imposed on church schools only in 1987 when the government made them cease taking fees and enroll students by a ballot system.

Consequently, according to Camillieri-Grima (2012: 554) a greater number of Maltese speaking students from various social backgrounds could attend church schools.

On the other hand, contemporary official curricular documents highlight the importance of bilingualism in education. According to the principle 10 of National Minimum Curriculum (1999) bilingualism is considered:

as the basis of the educational system [...] entailing the effective, precise and confident use of the country's two official languages: Maltese, the national language, and English. This goal must be reached by the students by the end of their entire schooling experience. (Ministry for Education and Employment 1999)

Furthermore, according to NMC every school is obliged to develop its own linguistic strategy that takes into account linguistic needs of the students and insuring equal importance to both first and second languages at every level of schooling. At primary school level it is recommended "(...) to use English when teaching English, Mathematics, Science and Technology" (Ministry for Education and Employment 1999). In secondary schools, however, it is encouraged that "(...) teachers of Maltese, Social Studies, History, Religion and PSD teach these subjects in Maltese; teachers of foreign languages teach in the language in question; and teachers of the remaining subjects teach in English" (Ministry for Education and Employment 1999). As far as code-switching is concerned, it is not advocated by the National Minimum Curriculum. At primary level it "(...) can be used as a means of communication" (Ministry for Education and Employment 1999) when teaching in English causes difficulties. At the secondary level it is only accepted in cases of "great pedagogical problems" (Ministry for Education and Employment 1999). Nevertheless, as Camillieri-Grima (2012: 555) summarizes multiple studies carried out in numerous schools after the implementation of National Minimum Curriculum indicated that the change in the field of the language of instruction was small or even none.

The more recent document dealing with the matter of education in Malta is called *National Curriculum Framework for All* (2012). This document does not include recommendations concerning the medium of instruction. However, similarly to the previous document, the significance of high proficiency in both Maltese and English is highlighted. The knowledge of Maltese is described as "an expression of national identity" (Ministry for Education and Employment 2012: 41) and the proficiency in English is motivated by the need for "competitiveness in a globalized economic environment" (Ministry for Education and Employment 2012: 41). In addition, "(...) for their full social, cultural and economic integration" (Ministry for Education and Employment 2012: 41) students should preferably become proficient in some other language.

The other document *A National Literacy Strategy for All in Malta and Gozo* (2014) propagates not only bilingualism but also "biliteracy in Maltese and English" (Ministry for Education and Employment 2014: 8). It recognizes an early start in bilingual education as essential for gaining "appropriate levels of competence and for shaping children's overall progress" (Ministry for Education and Employment 2014: 28). The Strategy states clearly the need of ensuring proficiency in both official languages of the country and recommends the methodology where they are both utilized in processes of teaching and learning non-language content. Furthermore, since the abovementioned document promotes an early bilingual start, the other one was released entitled *A Language Policy for the Early Years in Malta and Gozo* (2016) which not only propagates bilingual education of young children aged from 0 to 7 years but also provides with guidelines aiding the process. As it is stated in the document: "It is important for children to acquire

and learn these two languages to develop their language and cognitive skills to be able to make progress in the learning areas” (Ministry for Education and Employment 2016: 9).

As it can be concluded, numerous documents released throughout the years by the Ministry for Education and Employment have always been supportive of the bilingual education in Maltese schools. Some of the provided recommendations were more specific, the others were very general. However, as the numerous researchers have proved, not recommended code-switching has always constituted a meaningful part of education in Malta. Therefore, the two official languages are definitely supported by the officials and the teachers in Maltese schools make use of both languages in the process of education.

6. Maltese society

When it comes to language and language change, the people using it are of high importance. Moreover, in the context of language contact social constraints are believed to be even more significant than the linguistic ones. Each society is characterized by different demographics and qualities. The most important issues concerning the Maltese society are provided below with particular reference to tertiary education statistics, characteristic features and attitude towards Europe.

The newest accessible document providing relevant information on the Maltese society was released by Malta’s National Statistics Office in 2019 on the occasion of World Population Day. According to the document, at the end of 2018 the estimated total population of Malta and Gozo was 493,559 which was 3.8% up in comparison to the previous year. The population increase was mainly due to a net migration of 17,102 persons which was 17% up when compared to 2017. The youngest group, aged under 18, made up 16.2% of the Maltese population while persons aged 65 and over constitute 18.7%. The dominant religion is Christianity—97%. When it comes to birth rates, it was estimated that there were 9 births for every 1000 persons. What is more, the average age of the parent giving birth raised from 28.6 to 30.5 over the past ten years. Nevertheless, the overall birth rate is higher than death rate: 4,444 to 3,688.

As far as education is concerned, 93.6% is literate. The most numerous group of Maltese aged over 15 declared to successfully complete lower secondary education (41%) while about 14% completed tertiary education. According to the most recent statistics, 15,220 students enrolled in tertiary level courses in the academic year 2017/2018. Females comprise of 55.9% and 71.1% of the total number were studying full-time. However, there was an increase of 14.9% in part-time enrolments with comparison to the previous academic year. As for the foreign students, they comprised of 10.7% of total tertiary level enrolments. The largest proportion of the total number of tertiary students were attending the courses in business, administration and law (27%) as well as health and welfare (20.7%).

As for general characteristic features of the Maltese society they were quite accurately described in 1994 by Ronald G. Sultana and Godfrey Baldacchino in *Maltese Society: A Sociological Inquiry*. Surely, since that time Malta has undergone numerous changes; therefore, a lot of information provided in the book can be considered outdated. Nevertheless, some of the facts given by Sultana and Baldacchino can still be viewed as current since they are connected to the geographical limitations of the country which remain unchanged. These are *intimacy*, *totality* and *monopoly*. Intimacy makes Maltese get along with each other regardless of their likes and dislikes since they are almost forced to strengthen the relationships with the same people throughout their whole lives. In addition, “[k]nowledge which elsewhere is

either private or unavailable is quickly acquired, even inadvertently, and rapidly transformed into a public consumer good via the exchange of information and gossip. Such a high degree of transparent, interpersonal communication engenders a pervasive atmosphere of familiarity” (Sultana, Baldacchino 1994: 16). Totality, in turn, is connected to the idea of the omnipresence and omnipotence of the small state government. Moreover, monopoly power is considered to be easily obtainable in such a small scale environment. As Sultana and Baldacchino (1994: 18) write:

As soon as an individual develops even a modest edge in an area of skill, study or research, s/he may find him/herself - we could add, to the great satisfaction of the person's ego - proclaimed as an expert and ascribed with authoritarian standing in that area by others. (...) It is thus relatively easy to become a big fish when one operates in a small pond, unless one takes the risk and challenge of testing the ocean deep.

Furthermore, there is yet another issue that cannot be ignored when describing Maltese people, namely their attitude towards Europe and *European-ness*. According to Mitchell (2002), Maltese are *Ambivalent Europeans*. It is prominently displayed by numerous local festivities taking place in Malta, especially by *San Pawl* which is an annual commemoration of national patron St. Paul. Surprisingly enough, such festivities are not only conservative, national practices communicating opposition to European modernity but also, by commemorating St. Paul's shipwreck, they ensure that the country is a part of Christendom, therefore also of Europe. As Mitchell (2002: 2) writes:

This ambivalence is signaled in *San Pawl* itself, which celebrates both Malta's inclusion within Europe and its separateness from it. Rather than unequivocally resisting these supralocal forces, then, the ritual can be seen as a means by which people manage, or accommodate, this ambivalence.

Furthermore, since 1980s Malta increasingly stated in favor of European Union which it finally accessed in 2004. Nevertheless, Europe was perceived as positive, on the one hand, as “a source of wealth, education, democracy, modernity” (Mitchell 2002: 2) and negative on the other hand, as “a threat to local integrity, tradition, and morality” (Mitchell 2002: 2). The escalation of such traditional practices and rituals is due to the geo-political marginality of Malta—the location on the fringes of Europe influenced Maltese national identity and enhanced the ambivalence or even anxiety towards Europe.

Therefore, it can be concluded that Maltese society is a small, catholic group of Europeans highly valuing their national identity. Even though the percentage of the young is smaller than the old, the birth rate outnumbers the death rate. In addition, the increasing number of immigrants raises the total population rate. In large part the society is literate and quite a numerous group decides to attend tertiary courses. As it turns out, the geographical location of the country as well as its size influence the protection of the traditions and customs. Nevertheless, the Maltese simultaneously try to show their belongingness to Europe and be *modern*. Whether these observations comply with the linguistic situation in Malta was the matter of the research which results are presented below.

7. Research results

All of the abovementioned facts about the Maltese language and Maltese society raise questions about the linguistic future on the island. In order to predict certain scenarios it seems appropriate to investigate

linguistic preferences and attitudes of the younger generation, such as a group of university students. Therefore, to get the answers, the research based on a questionnaire was conducted during one of the lectures held at the University of Malta. The total number of the participants was twenty five students. The respondents were eighteen, nineteen and twenty year old males and females inhabiting both the island of Malta and Gozo. Nevertheless, neither age, gender nor the origin were taken into consideration while presenting research results. The research was anonymous, voluntary and all the surveyed students agreed to participate in the study.

The statements in the questionnaire were constructed in the way to provide with answers to the posed research questions. Thus, the questionnaire comprised of three parts. The questions from the first part aimed at collecting background information about the participants themselves, such as age, gender, origin and their knowledge of languages. The second part of the questionnaire consisted of two tables; the first one focused on language preferences concerning daily basis activities, such as reading books, counting or watching TV, while the second table revolved around language preferences whilst communicating with others. The questions concerned, among others, various family members, lecturers and doctors. The last part of the questionnaire referred to language attitudes. In order to establish them, five-point Likert scale questions were posed. The answers ranged from strongly disagree to strongly agree with the possibility of being undecided. Then, two questions about the significance of learning English in Malta were asked. The questionnaire closed with a space for any additional comments or remarks.

7.1. Part I—background information

The first group of questions was aimed at gathering background information concerning the participants. They were eighteen to twenty year olds males and females coming from both Malta and Gozo. However, these data are not taken into account during the analysis. The most significant data obtained in this part of the questionnaire are:

- 100% of the participants consider Maltese as their native language;
- 100% of the participants speaks Maltese fluently while 80% declares fluency in English and 20% in Italian;
- almost $\frac{3}{4}$ of the participants have knowledge of other languages, such as French, Italian and Spanish.

7.2. Part II—preferences

The following group of questions was focused on linguistic preferences of the respondents concerning daily basis activities. The possible answers were *Maltese*, *English*, *Maltese Sing Language (LSM)*, *other* or *does not apply*. In the diagrams, the option *other* is marked as *Italian* since it was the only language provided along with the response. It has to be highlighted that there was no limit to the number of options respondents were able to choose.

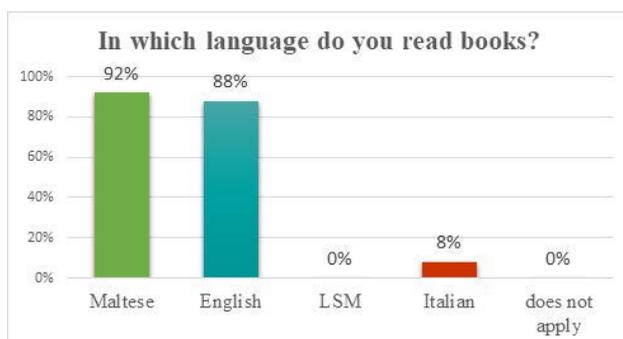


Figure 1 The subjects' responses to the question "In which language do you read books?"

Almost all of the respondents (92%) read book in Maltese. Similarly, a great number of participants read books in English (88%). In addition, two students also do it in Italian. Interestingly enough, not everyone reads books in Maltese and nobody marked the answer *does not apply*. Thus, there are people who do not read books in their native language but prefer to do it either in English or Italian.

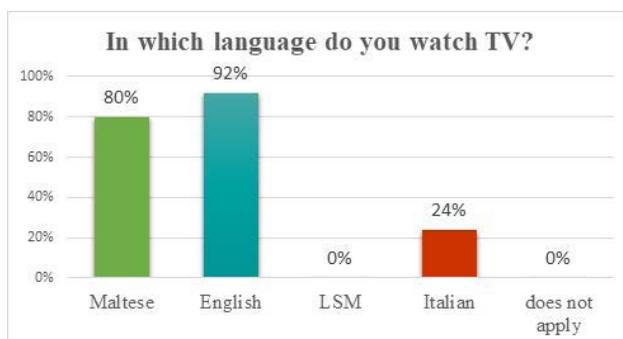


Figure 2 The subjects' responses to the question "In which language do you watch TV?"

Although 80% of the respondents watch TV in Maltese, the most popular television is the one broadcasted in English (92%). However, Italian TV is still quite popular choice among the participants (24%).

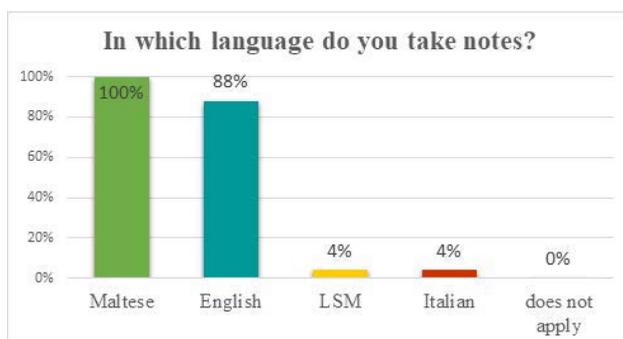


Figure 3 The subjects' responses to the question "In which language do you take notes?"

All of the respondents (100%) take notes in Maltese. However, the great majority of them (88%) claim to do it also in English. One person (4%) is able to take notes in Italian. One respondent also marked the answer *Maltese Sign Language*, supposedly by mistake.

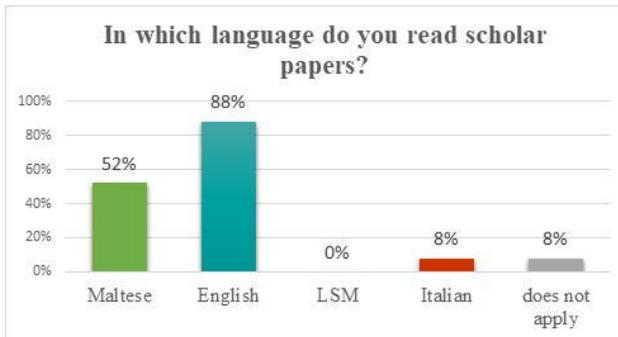


Figure 4 The subjects' responses to the question "In which language do you read scholar papers?"

Even though more than half of the participants (52%) reads scholar papers in Maltese, the vast majority of the respondents read them in English (88%). However, 8% does it in Italian and two participants (8%) admitted to not read scholar papers at all. These responses show the strong position of English as the academic language.

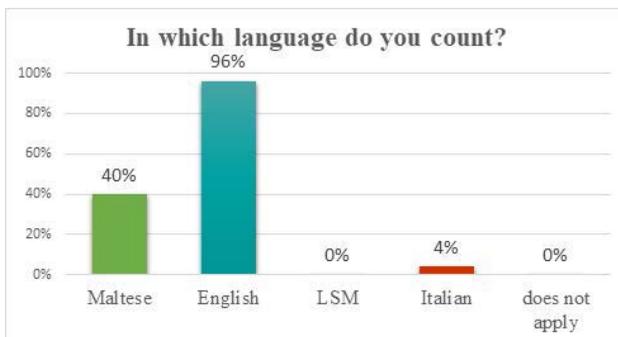


Figure 5 The subjects' responses to the question "In which language do you count?"

Surprisingly enough, 96% of the participants declared counting in English. Less than half of the subjects (40%) counts in Maltese while only one person does it also in Italian (4%). The distribution of the responses to this question is rather unsuspected—counting is perceived as one of the basic activities and is expected to be performed in one's native language. However, the expectation is not reflected in the answers given by the respondents.

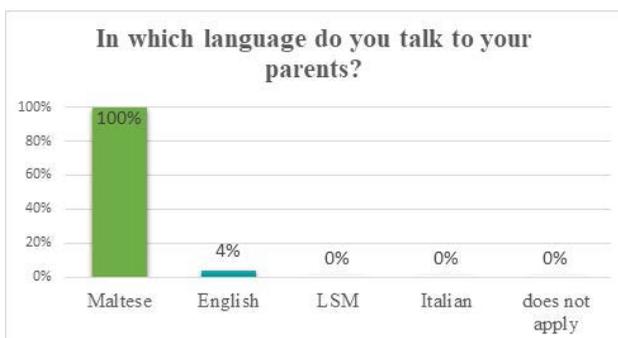


Figure 6 The subjects' responses to the question "In which language do you talk to your parents?"

All of the respondents (100%) talk to their parents in Maltese. Only one person does that in both Maltese and English. The answers indicate the tendency to use Maltese at home.

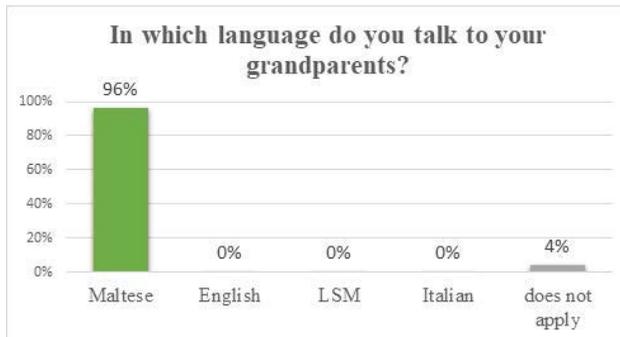


Figure 7 The subjects' responses to the question "In which language do you talk to your grandparents?"

Figure 7 presents that all of the respondents communicate with their grandparents in Maltese. This distribution highlights that Maltese is a dominant language at home, especially when communicating with the members of the older generation.

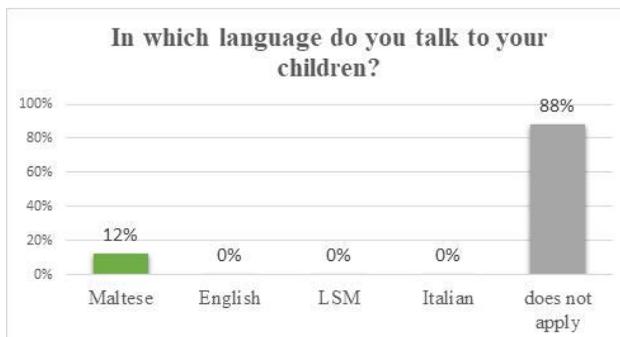


Figure 8 The subjects' responses to the question "In which language do you talk to your children?"

The figure shows that the majority of the respondents (88%) does not have children. Those who have, communicate with them only in Maltese. It indicates the intergenerational transmission of the language and may mean that Maltese will retain its strong position.

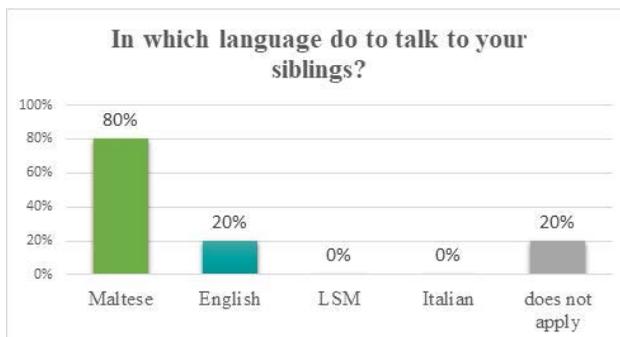


Figure 9 The subjects' responses to the question "In which language do you talk to your siblings?"

According to figure 9, 20% of the respondents do not have siblings. All of the remaining 80% of the participants communicate with their siblings in Maltese and 20% also does it in English. Such distribution of the responses corresponds with the previous assumption that Maltese is more frequently used when communicating with the members of the family. However, it also shows that English is more popular within younger generation.

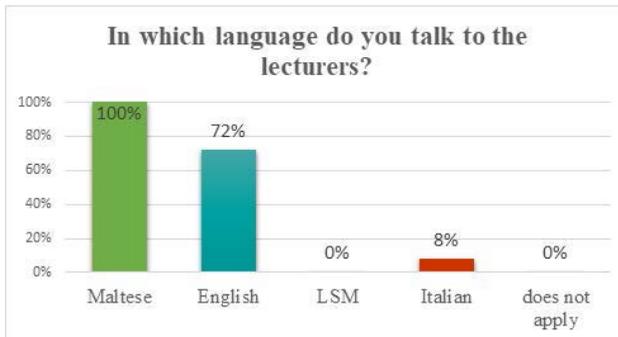


Figure 10 The subjects' responses to the question "In which language do you talk to the lecturers?"

As figure 10 illustrates, the majority of the respondents communicate with their lecturers in both Maltese and English (72%). Two participants additionally do it in Italian (8%). Being the academic language, English is very common at the university which is the reason for such a distribution of answers.

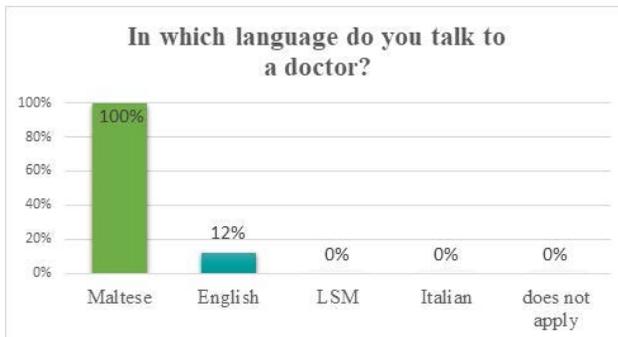


Figure 11 The subjects' responses to the question "In which language do you talk to a doctor?"

As figure 11 presents, 12% of the respondents talk to their doctor both in Maltese and English. The rest of the participants use Maltese in medical settings. None of the respondents chose the answer Italian. It can be assumed that the language used in order to express personal things such as pains, needs etc. is the one in which the subjects feel the most confident, i.e. Maltese.

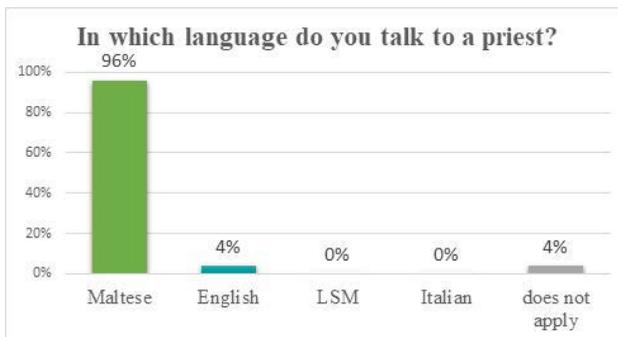


Figure 12 The subjects' responses to the question "In which language do you talk to a priest?"

According to figure 12, only one participant talks to a priest in two languages: Maltese and English. The rest of the subjects who have an opportunity to talk to a priest do it in Maltese only. Again, this distribution corresponds with the one from the previous question—in order to talk about private affairs such as feelings, emotions, sins etc. people prefer to use the language which is the closest to them, in which they feel comfortable and confident.

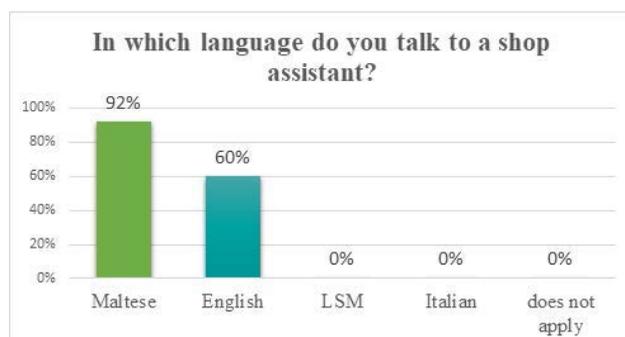


Figure 13 The subjects' responses to the question "In which language do you talk to a shop assistant?"

Figure 13 shows that English is quite frequently used during shopping. Taking a closer look at the distribution of answers one may notice that 8% of the respondents talk to a shop assistant only in English, 52% do it in both languages and 40% use only Maltese to communicate with a shop assistant. It shows that English is quite commonly used language in commerce.

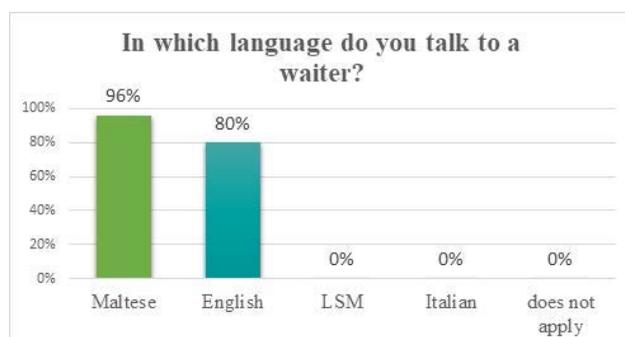


Figure 14 The subjects' responses to the question "In which language do you talk to a waiter?"

The analysis of figure 14 illustrates that one respondent uses only English when talking to a waiter while 20% performs the activity in Maltese. The majority of the participants talk to a waiter in both Maltese and English. This may occur since a great number of Maltese restaurants is tourist-oriented. Thus, in such places English is quite a common medium of communication.

7.3. Part III—attitudes

The third part of the questionnaire consisted of five-point Likert scale questions concerning language attitudes. They were followed by two more questions about the significance of learning English in Malta. The distribution of the answers is presented in the diagrams below.

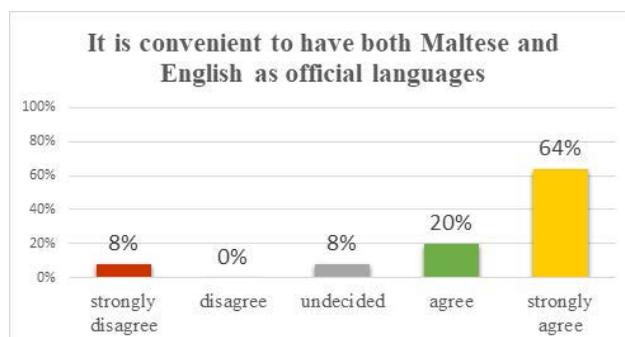


Figure 15 The subjects' responses to the statement "It is convenient to have both Maltese and English as official languages"

Figure 15 presents that the majority of the respondents believe that having two official languages is convenient (84%). However, 8% of the participants strongly disagree with the claim. The same number (8%) is undecided. Such distribution of answers may mean that university students are satisfied with the current linguistic situation in Malta.

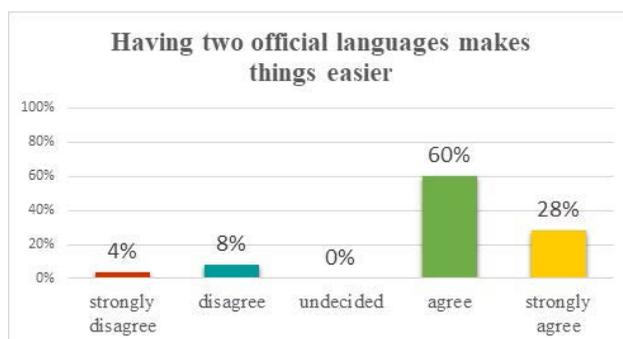


Figure 16 The subjects' responses to the statement "Having two official languages makes things easier"

According to figure 16, the majority of the respondents (88%) agree or even strongly agree with the statement that having two official languages makes things easier; only 12% of the participants disagree or strongly disagree with the statement. Such answers may result from the fact that English is a global language; hence, the knowledge of it actually facilitates people's lives on many levels.

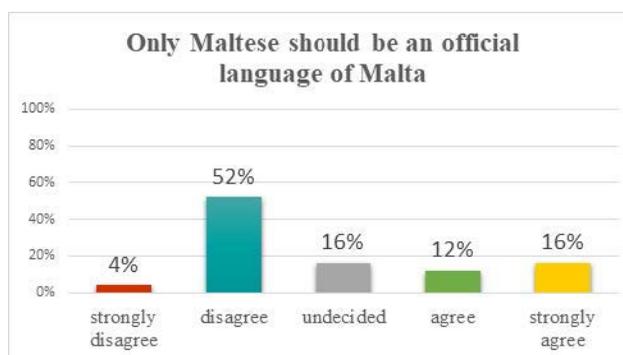


Figure 17 The subjects' responses to the statement "Only Maltese should be an official language of Malta"

Figure 17 shows that more than half of the respondents (56%) disagree or strongly disagree with the idea that only Maltese should be an official language of Malta. 16% is undecided and only 28% of the participants agree with the statement. Such choice may be connected with the unpopularity of the Maltese language. Therefore, the respondents may believe that Maltese is not enough in today's world. Moreover, such distribution of answers may be connected to the fact that bilingualism or even multilingualism are deeply rooted in Maltese society.

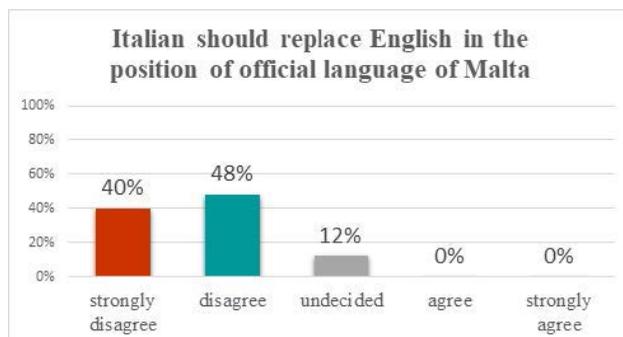


Figure 18 The subjects' responses to the statement "Italian should replace English in the position of official language of Malta"

Figure 18 shows that the majority of the participants does not agree with the idea that Italian should replace English in the position of official language (88%). Even though 12% is undecided in this matter, none of the respondents chose the option agree or strongly agree. The answers show that English is definitely more preferable language, probably due to its global, international status.

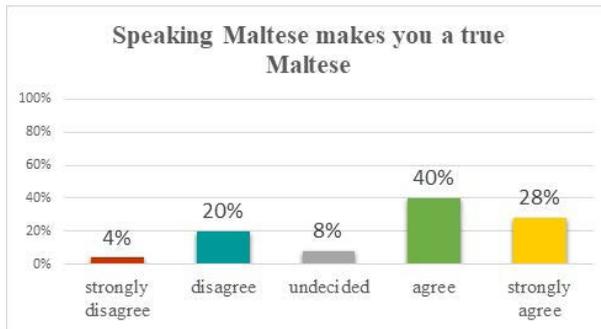


Figure 19 The subjects’ responses to the statement “Speaking Maltese makes you a true Maltese”

As figure 19 presents, only 24% of the respondents do not agree that speaking Maltese makes one a true Maltese. While 8% is undecided, 40% admits to agree with the statement and as many as 28% strongly agrees with the claim. Such answers show that the language is a significant factor determining national identity in Malta.

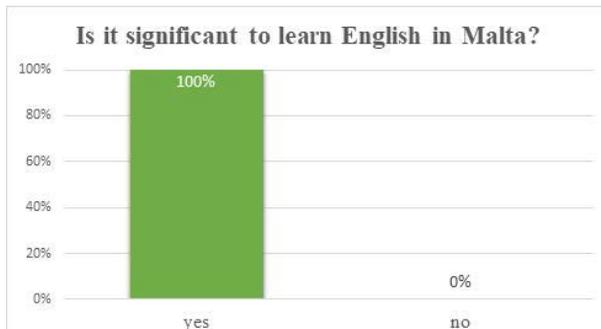


Figure 20 The subjects’ responses to the question “Is it significant to learn English in Malta?”

All of the respondents (100%) believe that learning English in Malta is significant. However, supposedly the answers would be the same regardless of the country—English is such an important language in today’s world that it is important to learn it almost everywhere, not to mention the country in which English serves as one of the official languages.

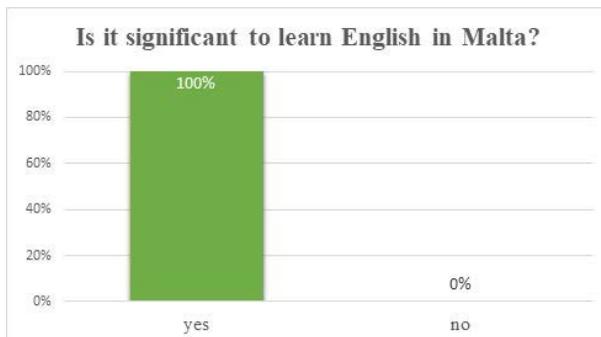


Figure 21 The subjects’ responses to the question “Why is it significant to learn English in Malta?”

Figure 21 shows that learning English in Malta is important for numerous reasons. The most frequently chosen option was to talk with people worldwide (80%). Getting proper education was second most common answer with 68% of the respondents choosing it. Similarly, 60% of the students believes that learning English in Malta is significant because one may get better job. The least frequently chosen option was to talk with tourists (40%). Besides, two participants decided to add their own reasons. One of them wrote: “to understand texts written in English.” The

other additional reason was: “[o]ur country is geographically small and to connect with the rest of the world it is operative to learn English.” The answers to this question show that the reasons for learning English are abundant and involve a variety of contexts—private life, carrier, education etc.

Conclusions

Malta is a bilingual country where Maltese and English share the status of official languages. Even though English is currently an international medium of communication and is gaining more recognition in the Maltese islands, the university students do not abandon their native language; Maltese is used and preferred in the majority of researched situations and settings.

As for language preferences of Maltese university students, they use Maltese decidedly more frequently. Whether in various daily activities or communication with others, in the majority of the cases the Maltese language dominates. English is more preferable when it comes to watching television and reading academic publications which may be due to wider possibility of choice and opportunity to get to know more. However, counting is the only activity performed in English not connected to gaining knowledge, obtaining information, exploring the world, *etc.* As far as family settings are concerned, it can be noticed that the younger the generation the more frequently English is used to communicate. Nevertheless, the small group of participants who are already parents declare to talk to their children in Maltese. It may indicate further stable position of Maltese since the subsequent generation is acquiring the language as their first. Furthermore, in more formal settings Maltese also has a strong position among the students. They use it in a variety of settings, especially when they have to talk about personal and emotional matters. English is quite frequently used at the university and in the tourism sector which is rather accountable considering the popularity of the language in these areas. Altogether, Maltese is a preferable language in each domain of everyday life, with few exceptions mostly connected to the wider access to the information. Therefore, Maltese cannot be labeled an *endangered language* in no condition; it can be named a *small language* since the overall number of Maltese speakers is not large, yet it enjoys the strong position in the country.

As far as language attitudes are concerned, it may be concluded that university students are satisfied with the current linguistic situation in their country. They appreciate having two official languages and do not believe that English should be replaced or discarded. In addition, they feel strong national connection with the Maltese language and consider it a factor determining their identity. As for English, it retained the prestige it used to enjoy. However, it is no longer incident to colonial power and upper class affiliation; it is rather connected to the ability to communicate worldwide what is the main provided reason why learning English in Malta is of significance. English is therefore treated as a window to the world—it enables the Maltese to get the access to different people and varied sources, such as media, literature or academic papers, effortlessly. However, if it was not for the geographical circumstances of Malta, the Maltese language would not enjoy such a strong position. Not only is the country situated in the strategic location, but also it is an island. Consequently, it prevented the inhabitants from massive migrations or international marriages what aided the process of retaining the Maltese language as well as its sustainable development.

In conclusion, without the knowledge of English, Maltese students would not be that well-informed, would not have access to many resources and would be limited to the ones created in their native language. Nonetheless, without Maltese, the only Semitic language written in Latin alphabet, they would lose their identity, sense of belonging and the uniqueness which their beautiful language provides. However, it seems that neither the position of Maltese nor English in Malta is threatened in no condition. Maltese would thrive, bearing great national importance while English would facilitate the lives of the Maltese people serving purposes of wide, global communication.

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