CHAPTER V

THROWING OUT THE BABY WITH THE BATHWATER: THE OSTRACIZATION OF ENGLISH IN MALTA

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Maltese is a minority language in world terms but it is a majority language on its own territory. It is spoken by not more than 400,000 speakers who inhabit the island nation of Malta and a few other thousand emigrants situated in various parts of the world. It is the only national language in Europe to be of Semitic roots. Its origins are to be found either in the period of Arabic occupation between the years 870 – 1091, or a date following that, 1049 based on the theory that the island had been abandoned for some time up to that date. (Cassola, 1996: 1; Brincat, 2011: xiii)

Maltese is not, however, the only language spoken or written in Malta. We have had, throughout our history, a language situation in which more than one language has co-existed, which means that the Maltese have always lived in a position between languages. This is not a unique situation, of course, but it is interesting to note that what is now the national language, Maltese, was up until the early 20th century, a language used almost exclusively in oral form. Up until the 19th century this spoken language had been described over and again as a corrupt dialect of Arabic and its status could objectively be compared to those regions in Europe where dialects were more commonly used than a national language. This is certainly the case in many regions of Italy, and in particular, in the Italian Mediterranean islands such as Sicily, Sardinia, the Aeolian Islands, and others.

Other languages used for literate purposes in Malta over the centuries were, in turn, Arabic, Latin, Italian (Sicilian and, later, the Tuscan variety) and English. Each of these languages is Western and rich in literary culture. Educated Maltese speakers therefore had direct access to some of the most important literary works of the West. Over the years there have been many Maltese scholars and writers who studied at foreign universities and who wrote both literary and factual works in the particular dominant language of the time. A large number of these scholars were priests who had access to

some of the best universities in Italy, together with a discrete number of lay scholars and poets. Hardly any mention of women until the 20th century.[75]

The section of the population which was literate was, until the end of the 19th century, composed of a discrete minority. The majority of the Maltese polulation tended to be monolingual speakers of the Maltese dialect and mainly illiterate. As the education system improved over the years levels of literacy increased but the majority of students had to make use of what was effectively a second language, Italian or English, as their language of instruction through which all subjects and other languages were taught. This situation still persists to some degree today.[76]

Narratives of Identity

Within a Pan-European discussion of narratives of identity, memory and mediation, the Maltese narrative is a very small one. But then, most things Maltese are small in comparison. Literary narratives often perform the function of 'grand narratives' that encapsulate issues of cultural definition, of collective and personal selfhood, of the broad distinctions between 'us' and our 'others', against which, in Lacanian terms, the individual or collective progressively defines itself.

However, when we come to examine historical Maltese literary narratives we find that there are relatively few which are written in the Maltese language. If one expands the definition to literature written by Maltese people in other languages, namely Latin, Italian and English, then it is a larger and more varied canon, but still small. Notwithstanding the obvious limitation of size it is only fair to point out that there is a thematics of repetition of particular narrative *topoi* which can be discussed under the description of a narrative of identity. We find, for instance, in a number of dramatic, poetic and prose texts a recurrent theme of resistance in the face of adversity, in particular in the face of siege – *assedju*. There are a significant number of works that deal with the Great Siege of 1565 when the Maltese fought together with the Knights of St John to repel the attack of the Ottoman Turks, and an equally large corpus of works that deal with the siege that was World War II. These narratives focus on elements of heroism, of fortitude and courage,

[75] See Arnold Cassola's *The Literature of Malta: An Example of Unity in Diversity*, Minima, Malta, 2000, for a critical overview of Maltese literature from its origins to the 20th century and a discussion of the variety of influences from other languages.

[76] The issue of language and education in Malta is treated in another paper by the same author titled 'Identity and Instruction: Issues of Choice between the Maltese Language and its Others' in *A Sea for Encounters: Essays Towards a Postcolonial Commonwealth*, Rodopi, 2009.

and of victory against all odds. They seem to be based on a deep narrative structure of the biblical David and Goliath theme in which the weak uses the essential and basic means at his disposal, namely a catapult, overcoming the threat of a giant who seeks to dominate and exterminate him. David, the one chosen by the Christian God, is the ultimate victor. The appeal of this theme is indeed evident. It states that size is not necessarily the single factor which determines victory. Furthermore, the renderings and variations of the stories about Malta under each of its sieges are imbibed with a religious sub-text and explicit religious overtones. The religious element in these texts is often focused on the Madonna as helper of the people[77] in their hour of desperate need. This features in the abundance of references and interpolations to Our Lady of Victories during literature of the Turkish siege of the 16th century as well as to a variety of texts on the Second World War. The feast honouring Our Lady of Victories is still celebrated annually on the 8th of September in the Grand Harbour of Valletta, site of the original battles between the Ottomans and the Knights of St. John together with the Maltese.

Physical traces, in terms of stone remains of both these significant historical sieges impinge on our lives in the form of fortifications, bastions, towers and, not least the fact that both our cities, Mdina and Valletta, were both constructed as defensive bastions against enemy attack. That the enemy would eventually arrive in *Stukas* and *Messerschmidts* from the sky was certainly not to be predicted at the time of construction.

Apart from the *topos* of siege and resistance in Maltese literature, there is another recurrent theme equally central to the narrative of Maltese identity, and this is inextricably linked to the politico-historical issue of what is referred to as 'The Language Question'.[78] This is the historically documented journey of the resistance to, and eventual acceptance of, the Maltese language firstly to be determined as a language rather than a dialect, and secondly as Malta's national language.

Over the last fifty years the notion that the Maltese language is synonymous with Maltese identity has gained much ground. This association of language and identity has not always been so strong. Previously, the aspect that was more pertinent up to the 18th

[77] This aspect of cultural/religious identity is further explored in *Malta at War in Cultural Memory: Representations of 'The Madonna's Chosen People'*, eds. Clare Thake Vassallo and Ivan Callus, Malta University Publishers, 2005. This book is also part of the ACUME project exploring aspects of European identity and memory.

[78] Geoffrey Hull's *The Malta Language Question: A Case Study in Cultural Imperialism*, Said International, Malta, 1993, is a detailed historic overview of the role language played in Maltese political history.

century was that of religious identity. Malta was perceived as bastion of Roman Catholicism against the 'infidel' and a modification of this element of staunch Catholicism can still be discerned in the stand taken against abortion and divorce by Malta within the European Union up to the present day. Religious sentiment and religious identity have also been central to political life in Malta, and undoubtedly, the clergy played a powerful and pivotal role at least until the 1960s but seems to be slowly losing influence.

Malta: From the Knights of St John to the British Empire

The problem of language comes to the fore under the issue of education. The choice of a language of instruction has hounded education policy from the days of the earliest schools to, possibly, the present. The choice of a language of instruction was, and surprisingly continues to be, one of the central issues of debate within the Maltese education system.

During the domination of the Knights of St John, the welfare of the inhabitants of Malta was very low on the list of priorities. The Knights of St. John arrived in Malta early in the 16th century, very much against their will after they had lost the island of Rhodes and Emperor Charles V offered the drought ridden, but strategically placed, island of Malta in exchange for the famous annual rent of one Maltese Falcon. Among the population was a small class of nobles, made so under the auspices of the Bourbon Dynasty since Malta fell under its dominion as part of the Kingdom of the Two Sicilies, who had the means, the contacts and, sometimes, the interest in educating their children. The rest of the population was not educated in any organized manner. The Church did provide some schooling but not on any large scale.

During the period of the Rule of the Knights the language of instruction tended to be Italian, and in the Church schoolrooms, Latin. There were no attempts and no interest to teach local children in their own language until, towards the end of the 18th century a petition was presented to Grand Master De Rohan asking for permission to set up a public school in which reading and writing in Maltese could be taught. Up until this time, there was no established and accepted alphabet or script for the Maltese language. The request was signed by perhaps the most heroic and enlightened name in the quest for the acceptance of the Maltese language, Mikiel Anton Vassalli. He was born in 1764 and died in 1829, was a scholar of Oriental languages, and traveled, studied and worked in Italy and France, as well as Malta. Although we know that the Grand Master granted permission there is no written evidence of the progress of otherwise of this school.

Vassalli's attempts to grant recognition to the Maltese language reflects his dedication to this cause, and provides us with one of the most historically emblematic episodes which highlight the recurrent aims and obstacles the language has faced. As a scholar of Arabic and Oriental languages, Vassalli believed that Maltese ought to be studied within the Semitic context from which it was derived. Furthermore, he argued speakers of Maltese would find Arabic an easy language to learn it being the root of their language. He compiled and published a dictionary and a number of important works on the Maltese language while he lived and worked in Italy as Professor of Oriental Languages[79]. He spent many years away from Malta, moving to France for twenty years after Napoleon's invasion of Malta in 1798, only to return just before 1820 when Malta was under established British Rule.

The end of the 18th century and the early years of the 19th century brought a number of significant changes to Malta. The Knights of St John of Jerusalem departed at the arrival of Napoleon. After only two years of French Rule the Maltese rebelled and instead invited the British, through Lord Nelson, to Malta in 1800. At this time there were only three schools that could be described as 'state' schools: one in Valletta, one in the Harbour area adjacent to Valletta, and one in Gozo, together with a University established by Grandmaster De Rohan. This state of affairs improved slowly under British rule – but not without a different set of problematic obstacles to education in general, and to the Maltese language in particular, being brought into play.

The English scholar and translator, John Hookham Frere settled in Malta in 1821, a date which coincided with Vassalli's return. Frere was of a similar school of thought to Vassalli about the nature of the Maltese language and the desperate need to have it studied, taught and written. He compared this particular dialect of Arabic to the Greek spoken on the island of Corfu, which also has, embedded within it, aspects of the Italian language. He proposed that just as those Greeks had turned this attribute into a feature of excellence at their University, together with related subjects and languages, so should the University of Malta do the same with Maltese and Arabic, thereby becoming a center of excellence for the study of Oriental languages.[80]

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[79] Frans Sammut published an annotated version of Vassalli's *Lexicon* in 2002, which includes a biography and a discussion of the man and his times. The dictionary is from Maltese – Latin – Italian and is one of the most important works published in the Maltese language.

[80] See David Marshall for a more detailed discussion of points of agreement between Vassalli and Hookham Frere.

As Chairman of the University Council, Hookahm Frere was in a position to propose the introduction of a Chair of Maltese and Arabic at the University. This proposal was not opposed by the British Government in principle, and Mikiel Anton Vassalli was indeed made the first Professor of Maltese, a position he held for a few years until his death in 1829. However, the Government did not allocate funds for the position and Hookham Frere paid Professor Vassalli the 25 pounds per annum of his own pocket. Almost a hundred years were to pass before the position of Professor of Maltese was again filled, this time by the learned linguist, Professor Guzé Aquilina, in 1937. It is very likely that the decision not to provide active support was taken under pressure of the local Church, for reasons I shall discuss shortly.

Education

There are three essential issues which play significant roles in the context of education during the first century of British Rule. Firstly, the lack of established schools and schooling, secondly the impossibility of using the vernacular as a means of instruction since there were no generally agreed upon rules or alphabet to base the writing on, as well as barely any literary or other texts in the language, and lastly the resistance to the promotion and use of the language in its written form by most of the educated Maltese people.

These points bear some further discussion. Until the latter part of the nineteenth century no agreement had been reached about a definitive alphabet for the Maltese language. Before a written form could be firmly established and accepted, the Maltese language could not fully make the transition from an oral form of communication, which was used to express the daily issues of life, to a written form which would come to embody a spirit and a style that would deal with areas of life that were removed from the mundane. In fact, with the eventual acceptance of a uniform alphabet, Maltese publications, publishing houses and readership began to grow and flourish and today's statistics are quite healthy[81].

Apart from the search for a written form, one of the most interesting and recurrent features in the narrative of the Maltese language is the fact that the strongest resistance to its use as a written language and as a language of instruction came directly from the more educated class of Maltese people. This might sound like a contradiction in terms today, yet the reasons are firmly bound within the acquisition of literacy and through that, the

[81] Victor Fenech's *Il-Ktieb Malti*, provides a detailed history of book publishing and publishing houses in Malta.

textually acquired sense of cultural identity intricately connected to literary positioning. As educated and sophisticated readers they were able to understand the 'textual attitude', to use Edward Said's term, embedded in the Italian and English texts they read in issues pertaining to all matters Arab and Oriental. These Maltese readers were Roman Catholic, with Italian surnames, a Western outlook, and a very Western bias in their education and reading. It is not difficult to understand why they wished to continue to be associated with the West rather than to be seen as an outpost of the Oriental sphere when examines the hegemonic attitude used to depict the Oriental.

David Marshall, in his *History of the Maltese Language in Local Education*, traces the historical occurrence of these reactions and attitudes in some detail. He claims that:

> influential opinion, including the views of those responsible for education, held that Maltese was a remnant of Arabic. As such, it stemmed from a nation foreign in both blood and faith to the Maltese, in whose minds were memories of the Arabs' domination of Malta which they would rather forget. That these views were for the most part biased prejudice can be witnessed from the fact that the Arab occupation had ended more than seven centuries earlier. (5: 1971)

Here, David Marshall clearly identifies the anti-Arab sentiment. The cause of these feelings were, it seems, mainly cultural and religious. A resistance to being identified and associated with Arab culture or the religion of Islam, which was decidedly foreign to the Maltese. Religious identity is an astonishingly powerful factor in determining the creation of group identity. Staunchly Roman Catholic, the Maltese reaction against all things Arab stems from the fundamental difference in religious belief. The Muslim was in many ways that 'Other' against whom the Maltese defined themselves. And more to the point, the fear that this 'Other' may in fact be the darker, hidden side of the 'Self', as the spoken language seemed to suggest, was a thought to be banished at all costs. This was certainly not an aspect of being Maltese that the people wished to advertise. This complex attitude to the roots of the language was the reason for describing Maltese as a Punic rather than an Arab language. It is surprising however, that to this day there are many Maltese who still resist the fact that Maltese is derived from Arabic. Marshall continues,

> They objected on the grounds that Maltese, stemming from a Semitic language of the East, could be of no use in furthering the education of a people whose country had connections with Europe and the West. To the administrations of Malta even before

> that of the British, it seemed that the Maltese language was likewise useless as far as trade and other links with other countries were concerned, and as far also as the administration within Malta was concerned. It was thus that up to this time the teaching of Maltese had been debarred, while in its place Italian had been taught, together with Latin. It was this latter language which had long been in use as the language of the courts of law and the administration, until in the days of Grand master de Rohan (1775) it was superseded by the use of Italian in legal proceedings and notarial deeds. (7: 1971)

The racial roots of this debate were carried into the quest for a written form of the language. Some argued in favour of using Arabic symbols to convey Arabic sounds in the Maltese language, others made a strong case proposing an alphabet based on the Italian one in Latin script but with a few additional symbols to convey the 'extra' sounds not found in the Italian language. This, it was argued would make the transition and translation from Maltese to Italian, and vice versa, easier. An alphabet based on phonetic principles composed of symbols familiar from the Italian writing system did, eventually, came to pass – but only as late in history as 1934. However, this does not mean that Maltese was not written until this date, but only that there were different and contradictory orthographic rules being used.[82]

Certain norms for education and language use had been established in the British Empire as far back as the 18th century and were generally based on the situation in India. There are many documents describing the positions taken as part of Language Policy during Indian Colonial Rule which were eventully made public by the British Bureau of Education in the 1970s. Without entering fully into policy behind these language guidelines, it is relevant to point out that it had already been decided that the norm in India was that vernacular ought to be the language of instruction at primary level and that English should be introduced only at secondary level. The reason for this policy being that since many children did not progress beyond primary education it would constitute a waste of resources to teach them a language they would never use in their eventual manual or unskilled jobs. Those pupils who, on the other hand, proceeded to secondary level were far more likely to be employed in positions where the use of the English language was essential. Some of those might also progress into professions and later

[82] See David Marshall, p.27. Section XXI of the Keenan Report provides a list of at least 18 titles of works published in Maltese.

work within the British administration in the courts, or hospitals after, sometimes, completing their tertiary education in Britain.

This established education policy could not, however, be implemented in Malta since the vernacular lacked a written form. Despite the fact that more schools were created under British Rule, and some effort was put into educating the majority of the people, especially after the abysmal pictures painted by the Austin Commission and the Keenan Report were published[83], the British Government did not create a system of compulsory schooling in Malta. In the mid-1930s Sarah Austin, wife of the author of the Austin report, played a very active role in establishing schools in the years she spent in Malta. She was responsible for overseeing the opening of no less than ten village schools. Her personal letters and other writings indicate her shock at the terrible state of education in the country. One of the remedies she proposed was that children ought to be taught in their own language, the vernacular. Again and again this suggestion was made, and always eventually rejected on various grounds which included financial straits, lack of an alphabet, pressure from the Curia, and other obstacles. The main feature in this issue is that the British and the pro-British Maltese were in favour of this measure, whereas the pro-Italian Maltese and the Curia, emphatically rejected it.

However, further complications were to arise to thwart the few efforts made by the British Government. Just as the British did not impose their language on the people, neither did they impose their creed. Nevertheless, when efforts were made to translate English works into Maltese to be used as textbooks in schools, these attempts were perceived with great suspicion by the local clergy, a very powerful political force on the Islands, as attempts by the Government to convert the young to Protestant ways of thought. They were therefore shunned.[84]

There is a very noticeable linguistic phenomenon in Malta, one which is an echo of a situation to be found in most, if not all, ex-British Colonies. The use of English as a language used mostly by the higher, more educated, more powerful members of society. This situation is a contemporary legacy of the British policy of recruiting educated members of the colonized population into administrative and professional positions. E. M. Forster's *A Passage to India* set in British Colonial India, provides an interesting insight

[83] See Geoffrey Hull and David Marshall for discussions of these two highly relevant reports.
[84] A recent discovery by Alfred Zahra de Dominico (*Dawl Gdid fuq Vassalli*, 2004) of a Protestant Catechism for children translated by Mikiel Anton Vassalli into Maltese does, however, prove that the suspicions of the Catholic clergy were not entirely unfounded.

into situations commonly found across a number of British Colonies at the time. One of the principle characters, Dr Aziz, is an Indian, Muslim doctor in working in British hospital in India after having been trained in Britian. Similarly, most members of the legal profession were also indigenous yet also educated in Britain. The other main character is Fielding, a visiting Englishman in India to teach English and English Literature.

The reader is presented with a stratum of Indian society which was intimately familiar with British norms and identified with Britian to the extent of sharing, to some degree, the structures of knowledge and of power, and therefore, in Michel Foucault's analysis of society, also embodied elements of the power of the Colonizer. That power was, of course, power over their own countrymen in the name of the colonizing 'other'. Nothing new in one sense since most societies are not egalitarian and knowledge and power are generally divided unequally between members of the population. However, the colonial structure led to the creation of a stratum whose power was granted at the hands of the colonizer, who came to identify with the colonizer, and yet was not accepted by them as an equal. In effect, these people followed recognized patterns of power and solidarity and began to take on the manners and behavior of the colonizer, and importantly, the English language as a mark of identification. This happened in India as well as in Malta.

By the end of the 19th century noticeable modifications in social and class structures had taken place in Malta. The rise of the middle class which was composed of people who were sufficiently educated and financially comfortable who often formed part of the professional class, or worked in the British Civil Service. There was also a budding group of merchants, importers of goods which were sought after by this new class as well as by the British, and who functioned as ship chandlers to the Merchant Navy visiting the Grand Harbour. This section of society, especially the women, usually spoke Italian and later English among themselves and to their children, whereas Maltese was used mainly to address servants and other workers. Not surprisingly, they were perceived as scornful of the Maltese language. Many of the less educated sections of society found skilled jobs with the British forces in the drydocks. These people also picked up a working level of English in order to facilitate their working lives.

Up until the start of the 20th century this situation prevailed. English slowly came to be used by the middle class as well as the lower class, to some extent. Italian continued to be the main language of the University, the Church, the Courts, and also among the educated citizens, many of whom would alternate with Maltese. But in the late 1930s, in

the approaching shadow of the WWII a politico-linguistic situation, referred to as The Language Question, erupted. The impetus of this wave was to oust all pro-Italian elements from Maltese society, to exile a number of leading personalities, such as the Chief Justice, to Uganda at the start of the war, and to remove Italian as a local language. The interesting by-product of this clash of cultures now at war with each other was that Maltese was seen as the linguistic solution. Within a short time a single Maltese orthography was finally accepted and the language was granted official status as Malta's National Language, whereas English came to occupy the position of Official Language in the country's new Constitution. The writing, publishing and reading of works in Maltese has continued to increase steadily up to the present day.

Colonial Legacy – The 'Cultural Effects'

The reading of literary works in English became possible and popular by the 20th century. To quote Alistair Pennycook in *English and the Discourses of Colonialism*, "beyond the economic exploitation and political domination that were in many ways the most obvious aspects of colonialism, there were also cultural effects. And it is these that have survived colonialism and that still live on in many forms today." (65:1998) One of these 'cultural effects' is the interpolation of the reader, the creation of a 'readerly' sense of belonging.

The co-operative strategies at work during the act of reading as described in Umberto Eco's work on the Semiotics of Reading in *The Role of the Reader* describe how the reader is 'pulled along' by the reading/writing strategies of the author into a particular perspective and point of view. Of course, a reader can read against the grain of the narrative strategy, but a more pleasurable, less critical type of reading, or to quote Roland Barthes, a more 'readerly' than a 'writerly' mode, tends towards the strategic co-operation between reader and author moving along the established reading habits inbuilt into the particular genre. The narrative voice and point of view lull the reader into sharing with the narrator, a particular outlook such as, for instance, the fictional world being described from a male point of view, or from a culturally superior or 'hegemonic' point of view, as is the case in most British texts. These reading strategies and prejudices are also present in children's literature and draw the most naïve of readers, children, along towards the sharing of a particular world view.[85] It is interesting to query to what extent these strategies impinge on the young reader's construction of self and identity. In other words, if the reader of

[85] Perhaps the reason for the creation of libraries by the British, such as the Garrison Library in Palace Square, Valletta, were not simply to promote reading but to condition the desires and aspirations of children. In other words, there may perhaps have been conscious propaganda reasons for the libraries and perhaps, for the choice of books available.

English fictional texts in a colonized or post-colonial environment grows up on a diet of such works, such as Enid Blyton's adverntures, where do their sympathies and aspirations lay? Who does the reader empathize more easily with, the 'native' spoken down to, or the voice of the culturally dominant hero or narrative voice?

When it comes to forming and following cultural role models, how many of us would rather be Fielding than Aziz? How many of us on reading *A Passage to India*, a text, incidentally often to be found on the local Advanced Level syllabus for English, automatically assume and share in Fielding's and Forster's points of view and dilemmas, rather than in Aziz's? In post-colonial societies like Malta, the social divide can also seen in terms of the 'Azizs' and the 'Fieldings'. The hegemonic sense built into literary works is imbued by the reader consciously or unconsciously. The mind associates freely with the cultural hegemonic attitude inscribed within the work, while the reader's physical features show him or her to be unmistakably an 'Aziz'. What of these mixed identities brought about through language and literacy?

It seems that this is a manifestation of contemporary multiculturalism. We construct various encyclopedias of identity that enable us to move with ease between different societies, different world views and different languages rather than fixing us according to a specific set of national rules of identity. The more languages one has access to, the more easily this sense of multicultural belonging is constructed. After all, why should identity be expereinced as singular? Are we not all carriers of ideas and beliefs which tend to be mutually incompatible? Who is lucky enough to feel such internal coherence as the idea or myth of the 'singular self' seems to suggest?[86] This is not, indeed, to be viewed as a negative feature of contemporary society. The weakening of a sense of national identity is supplanted by a understanding of 'identities' in the plural, the sort of educational formation that ought to lead to more tolerance among people. Perhaps, now that Malta has its national language and national culture firmly in place, it is time to weaken that sense national identity, of belonging to a single race, of speaking a single national language, and instead to grasp the multilingual and multicultural possibilities that have historically been offered us.

[86] Similar arguments have been put forward by a variety of feminist descriptions of reading. Virginia Woolf, for instance, describes the act of reading as a woman as a sort of parallax activity when the narrative point of view is male.

This is an argument which in a strange and roundabout way links contemporary narrative theory to some of the positions held by the liberal humanists of the Leavis 'era'.[87] The notion that reading 'good' literature made us better people, can be paralled in the notion that reading in different languages might make us more culturally versatile and tolerant. Traces of literary memory form part of the creation of a personal 'encyclopedia' of knowledge and identity, a sort of ideolect, as it is described by Umberto Eco. This encyclopedia is composed of memories of events that are lived and others which are experienced through reading and which are often incompatible among themselves that lead to a literary construction of selfhood that conditions us all to some degree.

The Present Situation – Maltese, Italian, English and Education in Malta

Up until the 1930's, specifically with the outbreak of the II World War, Italian was the language used in education, the courts and matters of culture in certain circles. The obvious dilemma of pro-Italian sympathy of the Maltese speakers of Italian lay in their cultural affiliation to all things Italian, just when Malta was about to be brought into the war to fight against the Italian enemy. This led to some deft linguistic policies which made the Maltese language, for the first time, the National Language of the Maltese people with English as Official Language. English then became the official language of instruction in schools and the University, firmly ousting Italian.

Italian, however, was not to be ousted so soon. Due to unforeseen technological advances television was introduced in the early 1950s. Malta's proximity to the Italian islands made it possible to receive all three national Italian stations, RAI, with the help of a simple aerial, this together with the only local national station, MTV. Maltese television viewers were automatically also viewers and listeners of Italian television which led to an extended presence of the Italian language and culture in Malta. However, in time the use of Italian became more passive than active among the young even though it was corroborated by the teaching of Italian as a compulsory foreign language in schools until the 1980s.

Time and technology have continued to exert change. Italian is no longer a compulsory foreign language, and the position of Italian television has been challenged with the advent of cable in the late 1990s. There is now a wide selection of English language stations to choose from which attract much of the younger audience.

[87] An idea that was shattered by the fact that some of the best educated minds, some of the more voracious readers of 'fine' literature were ultimately responsible for some of the atrocities committed during the World Wars.

The linguistic legacy of colonialism, the English language, has been transformed into an asset in the contemporary world governed as it is by media which functions primarily English. A range of events, political, economic, cultural, military supremacy and technological advances have led to the current situation in which English is the undisputed world language. Whether this will continue, or whether Manadrin Chinese will become strong enough to lead the world, remains to be seen.

From a tri-lingual nation, Malta is fast becoming a monolingual, minority language speaking nation. For the majority of the Maltese population, the fact that of having their own language provides a strong sense of national pride. Each language provides, in Edward Sapir's terms, a unique view of the world, every language is a living cultural artifact, part of the cultural heritage of the world and ought not to be lost. But sadly, what seems to be happening in Malta is that English is still not being recognized as the valuable instrument that it is, and is being shunned. It is fast becoming a lost opportunity, one not developed by the young. It is likely that traces of feelings against the British colonial occupation, which came to an end in 1964, are at the root of the rejection of the English language by a large proportion of the population.

In an apparent contradiction, the minority language culture in Malta is constituted of first language speakers of English.[88] Throughout history Malta was never a monolingual island, and any attempt to create a monolingual reality in today's multicultural world is dangerously out of touch with international reality. There are some public fora from which Maltese monolingual English speakers are excluded, these include local TV programmes which are perceived as important arenas for political discussion and for the expression of opinion on public issues. Malta joined the E.U. in 2004 through the skills and negotiations of a team of, mainly, English speaking Maltese politicians and diplomats. With E.U. entry Maltese was granted recognition as a national language in E.U. legislation. Consequently, all local candidates for E.U. jobs have to prove fluency in Maltese as well as in English. Ironically, this linguistic stipulation is keeping out some of the best prepared and most able Maltese people, who would be suited for jobs in Brussels and Strasbourg, for not being fluent in a minority Maltese language when they are fluent in the world language. The E.U. does not take into account that a 'mother tongue' might be

[88] This issue is further explored in *Linguistic Identity and Versions of History: Postcolonial Issues in Malta*, a paper presented at the ACUME General Meeting held at the University of Malta in May 2004.

a language that is not necessarily the national language in countries where more than one language is spoken.

Despite the fact that English is taught in all local schools as a compulsory subject, the use of the language has become mostly a passive skill. The English language is barely spoken in the Maltese islands among the Maltese themselves, apart from approximately 3% of the population[89]. All meaningful communication at school and home for this tiny section of the population (mostly descended from that stratum created by the British) takes place in English. Being more economically stable and generally more educated, these people tend to travel and are better able to see, at first hand, the advantages of being an English speaker in the world at large. The Maltese language can nevertheless provide a sense of national identity, but is in addition to the abilty to use the English language, which is what is needed when sights are set on achieving goals that lie beyond the shores of the island.

Could this be the root of the language problem?

We have seen that Malta has not had a clear language policy in its schools with specific reference to a language of instruction. In the 19th and early 20th centuries the problem centered on the vernacular Maltese not having a written form and therefore not being eligible for consideration as a language of instruction. It was for this reason that the British Colonial Policy of making use of the vernacular at primary level education could not be implemented.

As a result, English and Italian came to be the languages of instruction, until Italian was shunned after 1938. This led to a situation in which children were put into compulsory education but could not learn the school syllabus in their own language. The difficulties a child encounters in having to learn through an imperfectly known second language are many. These include a serious lack of self-esteem since they often cannot distinguish the fact that they do not understand because of language difficulties and not because they are less intelligent. It also takes away the pleasure of learning, the natural development of logical and cognitive skills because the medium of learning is not 'transparent' as it is in the case of learning through one's first language.

[89] This figure is based on a study carried out by Lydia Scirha and Mario Vassallo and published in *Malta: A Linguistic Landscape*. Malta, 2001.

Malta has had and continues to have a very high level of illiteracy despite education being compulsory till the age of 15.[90] The language issue might well be at the root of this. It might also account for the negative attitude shown towards the English language in the population at large. The strong argument in favour of English as the language of instruction because it is a world language is not strong enough to counter the effects of children having to learn through a second rather than a first language. Although British Education Policy regarding language learning in primary schools came about through economic reasoning it seems to hold an important insight into learning at its core. Today, although many subjects are now being taught in Maltese in state schools, but not in private schools where students first language tends to be English, most of the text books are still only available in English.

The negative attitude which has developed towards the English language has been instrumental in the assertion of the notion of linguistic identity being equivalent to national identity. The speaking of English by Maltese people tends to be seen as an unpatriotic act.

In order to avoid throwing out the baby with the bathwater, the goal of Maltese language policy ought to be to provide a controlled bilingual process of education. The unsystematic exposure to more than one language does not lead to bilingualism but, rather, to two imperfectly spoken and written languages. There is enough evidence around us to confirm this. Instead, if were to carefully introduce a structure for *successive* bilingualism in our schools we might salvage our linguistic advantage. An interest in learning, unhampered by language issues, might prepare children to become more proactive and interested in learning. Their state of mind might become more open to seeing the acquisition of English for what it is, an important instrument of learning and communication which is essential for a decent working life at home or abroad. Perhaps, most importantly of all, to understand that using the English language *in addition* to Maltese does not pose a threat to Maltese, or to a hard-faught sense of Maltese identity and independence, and that it does not seek to supplant the language that is rightfully ours.

[90] See 2005 E.U. statistics on of each E.U. country's percentage of the population having attained education at various levels, and on percentages of illiterate citizens. Malta consistently ranks very low on these statistical tables.