

LANGUAGES IN CONTACT IN MALTA

(Lecture delivered on 19th April 1976 to participants attending the *Conference on Bilingualism and Education with special reference to Malta*)

by J. AQUILINA

WE Maltese may not be bi-lingual or multi-lingual to the extent of some of the inhabitants of Swiss cantons, but we have our own type of bilingualism, and, in some cases, also tri-lingualism. By 'bilingualism' or 'multilingualism' for Malta I understand two or more languages used alternately by different speakers generally in different social contexts, one of which is primary (the native language); and the other is secondary – as a rule a foreign language (in our case either English or Italian or both – tri-lingualism).

Languages in contact inevitably affect one another in several ways and at different levels. Even some of our language-conscious workers, who were largely unilingual when Italian was the dominant foreign language in pre-war Malta, probably for reasons of personal prestige have now become bilingual. The bilingualism of the working classes and the professional classes operates at two different levels. One notes a difference in the acculturation trend in the two classes. Of two languages, generally the foreign language which one associates with a foreign culture and foreign rulers, carries more social prestige than the native language. Small nations are often hopelessly gripped by a sense of inferiority complex vis-à-vis larger countries even when these are their former rulers or conquerors. That is still Malta's position today vis-à-vis England. Cultural and linguistic colonialism have survived political colonialism and by doing so it has slowed down the formation of our national character. There was a time when French was the language used by the Russian aristocracy who looked down upon Russian as the language of the serfs. We had the same phenomenon in Malta. English, and to a smaller extent now also Italian, are associated with a higher social status. English, more than a cultural heritage, is being used as the language of cocktail parties and other social occasions, especially when some of the members are British monoglots. The influence of the native language makes itself felt in the foreign language as spoken or written by the Maltese themselves. Many of us who speak or write English or Italian think in Maltese

and use a Maltese intonation. The words are very often English because, taken as a total of so many single lexical units, they belong to the dictionary of the English people. In collocation, however, these words very often fall outside English contexts. In other words, they are English or Italian when taken singly as individual words (lexemes), but together they may be only partly or wholly English or not English at all. Here are some examples taken from school children's compositions: 'Come *we* (let's) go' for Maltese *ejja mmorru*; 'My scope (aim) is to' / *l-iskop tiegħi hu*; 'he bumped his head with (against) the wall' / *ħabat rasu mal-ħajt*; 'he entered from (through) the door' / *daħal mill-bieb*; 'she pretended I would give her my seat' / *ippretendiet li għandi nagħtiha posti*; 'She pretends to be something' / *tippretendi li hi xi ħaġa*; 'You must do it by force' (nilly-willy) / *ikollok tagħmilha bil-fors*; 'You are coming tomorrow?' (Maltese intonation) / *ġej(ja) għada?*. To these one may add also current sentences which are neither English nor Maltese such as: 'come and make nice to the pussy'; 'make me a kiss'; 'he makes it nicely'. The following are other examples from the essays of school children who will be sitting for their GCE examination in English next June: 'With the excitement that I had I didn't have the ability to make my homework' / *bl-eċċitament li kelli ma kellix il-ħila nagħmel il-homework*; 'I decided to prove Italian, English and Maltese for my GCE examination' / *Iddeċidejt li nipprova l-eżamitat-Taljan, Inglis u Malti għal GCE*; 'I lost my favourite television programme' / *tliet il-programm favorit tiegħi tat-television*; 'I did not pass from Maltese' / *M'għaddejt mill-Malti*; 'Many people have houses near the sea so that they can make the three months enjoying the beautiful season' / *ħafna nies għandhom id-dar fejn il-baħar biex ikunu jistgħu jagħmlu tliet xhur igawdu l-istaġun*; 'I take a bath and I sleep a little' / *nieħu banju u norqod ftit*; 'I was crying, even my family' / *bdejt nibki, anki l-familja*; 'I did a little make-up' / *għamilt ftit make-up*; 'I decided to tell the sir to send him home five minutes before the time' / *iddeċidejt li ngħid lis-sir biex jibagħtu d-dar ħames minuti qabel il-ħin*.

In order to correlate our linguistic study to Maltese society, we have to refer it to an extra-linguistic background and social phenomena which form part of our social and cultural history – formative elements that have conditioned present day language habits.

Two foreign languages that have been used alternately in Malta are English and Italian and much earlier still, in medieval Malta, Sicilian was used in official documents. Up to the Second Great World War, Italian was more widely used than it is now. In fact, we

have in Malta enough material for a history of Italo-Maltese literature and culture. A record of this literature can be found in O.F. Tencajoli's anthology *Poeti Maltesi D'Oggi* (1932). There was a time when Italian was the main language of our national culture and administration. When in 1813 the British took over from the French (at the request of the Maltese) only Italian was the language of Maltese culture and administration. During the British rule Italian continued to be the predominant foreign language of the country.

In 1879 Patrick Joseph Keenan, resident Commissioner of National Education (Ireland) on page 88 of his REPORT UPON THE EDUCATIONAL SYSTEM OF MALTA wrote that 'The fact that more than half the candidates for admission have been rejected for want of a very humble acquirement in Italian, as the language of the schools, of the Lyceum, is more arbitrary than indispensable. In the great majority of cases, the candidates have to prepare themselves in the Italian as a foreign language'. Further on, on p. 89, he writes that 'In connexion with all these considerations, it is to be borne in mind that the whole of the people – those of the towns, as well as those of country – speak the Maltese language; and the problem thus resolves itself into this – whether the Maltese language is to be repudiated altogether; whether it is to be tolerated until it dies out; or whether it is to be cultivated by itself, or used as a medium for the cultivation of English or Italian, whichever may be determined upon as the future language of the schools;'. Still further on, he points out that 'no efficient instruction is given either in the Maltese language itself, or in any branch of knowledge imparted through its medium. Practically, therefore,' he continues, 'it may be said that the children of Malta are denied the gift of reading a book in the only language which they really understand. Is this wise?' asked Mr Keenan. His answer: 'I am convinced that the vast majority of the children who pass through the classes of a Maltese school leave the school entirely uneducated – entirely unfit to pursue the humblest form of mental culture when they grow up to be men; inasmuch as they never acquire, and under the present system never can acquire, such a mastery of Italian or English as would fit them to read intelligently a book in either language'. Unfortunately, owing to political strings, the leaders of Maltese public opinion outside and inside the Department of Education, were far more unanimous in their support of the Italian language as a fit subject for schools. Keenan wrote: 'One influential section deprecates, in the most emphatic manner the cultivation of the Maltese language. Another section – pretty numerous, and highly

influential also – is enthusiastic in the expression of its opinion that not only should the Maltese be cultivated in the Primary schools, but that philological attention should be devoted to the removal of its imperfections, so that it may be elevated from its position as a mere dialect to the dignity of a language'. Here Keenan explains that 'This section of opinion comprises those who are the most ardent and thoroughgoing advocates for the extension of the English language; whilst, on the other hand, those who entertain the deprecatory views respecting the Maltese language, although at the same time professing a desire for the spread of English, are chiefly the vindicators of Lyceums, and the University'. Amongst those who supported the study of Maltese as a means of popular education Keenan mentions the learned Dr Pisani who employed the vernacular in his lectures to the candidate midwives, and prepared a treatise on the subject for their use in the vernacular also. Incidentally, I have read his Maltese treatise entitled *Ktieb il-Qabla* (1883) to pick out his obstetrical vocabulary for inclusion in the Maltese-English dictionary which I am compiling. 'From all that I have said on this subject,' continues Mr Keenan, 'I have, I think indisputable grounds for differing from the views of Sir Adrian Dingli when, in reference to the education of the child of the Maltese workman, he observes: 'In his native Arabic dialect, he will very seldom, if ever, find anything to read which it is not better for himself and his fellowmen that he should not read'". Here we come face to face with the chronic problem of language teaching in Malta. On this subject, Keenan wrote that 'Maltese children have a hard time at school. The foreign languages are imposed upon them, and practically nothing of their own language is taught to them. The natural flow of thought in their vernacular is, every morning, dammed up at the threshold of the school door. But if, during the day, anyone asks a question, or above all, says a pleasant or genial word in the Maltese language, a vivacity and a brightness almost magical are instantaneously awakened in them'. Very few of our Directors of Education hardly remarkable as educators and thinkers acted on Keenan's advice, concerning the teaching of the children's native language before taking up the study of a foreign language. They were obsessed (the obsession persists) with the idea that our children needed a foreign language, and that is quite true; but this did not justify the immediate imposition of a foreign language right from the very first classes on children who could hardly manage their native tongue and much less relate it to the world around them.

I have given this background information because the so-called Language Question dragged on practically till 1939. Unfortunately, language teaching in our schools has always been rather confused and mishandled by politicians for ulterior motives. The teaching of Maltese is now compulsory in the schools. But our children have to learn also several languages, recently with an emphasis on Arabic. Few seem to think that the matter of communication is more important than the language through which it is communicated. That is why sometimes language teaching is not justified by the results expected. In our country a foreign language has always been its own end, or a purely utilitarian acquisition though, in fact, the value of a language lies in the ideas that it communicates and in the values and judgements that it forms. No fish tastes better because one can call it by two, three or more different names. Another name does not turn a mullet into a whale! No language is its own end. A language is primarily a social tool of self-expression. Though that is a platitude for those who know what a language is primarily meant for, it still wants repeating in Malta where language teaching is often politically motivated.

I now return to the main topic of my paper and, in a particular manner, to some of the problems created by bilingualism as a by-product of languages in contact.

As a language consists of what one might describe as verbal tools for the expression of ideas (mental pictures turned into intelligible sounds) or of concrete realities (tangible objects), naturally it must be made up of a considerable number of morphemic categories adequate to express such ideas or objects. It follows that when a language cannot draw upon its own lexical resources, it borrows and assimilates words from the vocabulary of a foreign people or from the language of the sciences which provide a sort of international vocabulary naming the achievements of the precise sciences and also the social sciences. Such are words like *astro-nawta*, *bomba idroġena*, *ekumeniżmu* and so on.

Self-expression is a compulsive necessity for gregarious man and if the tools, or words, are not readily available within the stock of native resources, the speaker inevitably has recourse to sources outside his own language. Examples of words drawn from an outside lexical reserve, constitute what we call loanwords. As in English and other languages, there are hundreds of such loanwords and loan-formations in Maltese. One might describe these loanwords and loan-formations as the by-products of languages in contact. A few examples of such single loanwords from English

are: *sandwiċ*, sandwich; *fiter*, fitter; *kowt*, coat; *erjil*, aerial; *ri-volver*, revolver; *maxingann*, machine gun; *ippanċja*, he punches; and many more.

To this category of single loanwords, a few from a very large stock, one might add a considerable number of loan-formations from English and Italian. These constitute the lexical enrichment of bilingual impacts. Here are some examples from English and Italian: *Trid tiġbidli saqajja?*/'Are you trying to pull my leg?'; *Qata' figura tassew kerha*/'He cut a very sorry figure'; *Il-ħaddiema ħarġu fuq strajk*/'The workers came out on strike. A number of such loan formations from English, which are considered objectionable because Maltese has its own alternatives, are: *qiegħed fuq żjara*/'he is on a visit'; *ħalla lil Malta*/'he left Malta'. A fairly large list of such literal loan translations can be found in Ġ. Diacono's book *Ġħiltijet u Barbariżmi fil-Malti* (1977).

I now give some Italian loan formations based on the verb *fare*/*għamel*, 'to do, to make': *il-qattusa tagħna għamlet* (also *kellha*) *tliet frieħ*, 'la nostra gatta ha fatto tre gattini', 'our cat had three kittens'; *għamel eżami*, 'fare un esame', 'to take or sit for an exam'; *għamel il-leħja*, 'far la barba', 'to shave'; *għamel il-geddum*, 'fare il broncio', 'to sulk'; *għamel in-nar*, 'far fuoco', 'to fire'; *għamel il-ħsara*, 'far male', 'to hurt, harm'; *qed jagħmel temp sabiħ*, 'fa bel tempo', 'it is fine weather'; *għamel attenzjoni*, 'fare attenzione', 'to pay attention'; *għamel mod li tiġi*, 'far un modo di venire', 'try to come'.

There are different ways in which the vocabulary of one language can interfere with that of another. These different ways are: 1. Interference by outright transfer of the phonemic sequence from one language to another: ex. M. *Orrajt*, 'allright' (with which cp. American-Italian *azzoraiti*); M. *Ajdonker* as in *bniedem ajdoneer*, 'a carefree person' (with which cp. Fr. *le donquia*). 2. By the transfer of the meaning of words, for instance English, to the same words in Italian or similarly in some cases of Maltese words borrowed from Arabic. Examples of words apparently of Romance origin, but which carry the English meaning in Maltese are: *nintrodu-ċik miegħu*, 'I'll introduce you to him'; *bombastiku*, bombastic and *librerija* for *bibjoteka*, 'library'.

Such interference can occur also in the change of (i) Gender (ii) Number and (iii) Meaning which some words suffered in their transit from Arabic to Maltese.

1. *Gender* – The Maltese words *fies*, 'pickaxe'; *qaws*, 'bow'; *kies*, 'cup'; *nar*, 'fire'; *nagħal*, 'horse-shoe'; *riġel*, 'leg'; *riħ*, 'wind';

delu, 'hopper'; *driegħ*, 'arm', originally, feminine in Arabic are masculine in Maltese.

2. *Number* – *xhud*, 'a witness' and *dnub* 'sin', are plural forms in Arabic and singular in Maltese, but *dnub*, in the sense of 'tails' can also be the plural of *denb*, 'tail'.

3. *Meaning* – Maltese *berquq*, 'apricots', in Arabic means 'plum'. Similarly, *ħawħ*, which in Maltese means a peach, in Egyptian Arabic means not only a peach but also a 'plum'.

Bilingualism operates within the following basic units: 1. Phonemes. 2. Morphemes. 3. Features of order. 4. Semantemes.

1. PHONEMES

The interaction of bilingualism operates not only at the purely lexical level giving rise to what one might describe as a mixed language, it operates also at the level of other constituent elements of the single words, namely their phones or phonemes; what in less technical language we call *sounds*.

In Maltese we come across common consonants most of which exist in English and Italian, the two languages that have supplied the bulk of Maltese loanwords.

We also come across some foreign sounds that have recently crept into Maltese as a result of bilingualism. These are voiced post-alveolar fricative [ʒ] in words like Rediffusion 'ri:di'fju:ʒən and television te'livizən. This sound exists only contextually in Semitic Maltese when voiceless post-alveolar fricative [ʃ] is followed by a voiced consonant as in *xbin* (ʒbi:n), 'godfather', to be distinguished from *għbin* [dʒbi:n] 'forehead' and *xbajt* (ʃbait), 'I have had enough' to be distinguished from *għbajtm* [dʒbait] 'I am full up'. Maltese has no symbol for this special sound which is often replaced by *x* (ʃ). At the end of a word, symbol [ʒ] becoming unvoiced accordingly is phonetically represented by [ʃ] as in *garaxx* [<Fr. garage]. As a result of Maltese and Italian bilingualism, Maltese has also the non-Semitic voiced alveolar fricative [dʒ] as in loanwords *gazzetta*, 'newspaper', *gazzija*, 'acacia'.

When Maltese was still phonetically Arabic, also like Arabic it changed the voiceless bilabial plosive [p] in loanwords from Sicilian or Italian into its voiced counterpart [b]. The following are a few examples which have survived in Maltese: M. *balantsa*, 'a kind of boat', (<Sic. *paranza*); M. *balla*, 'cannon ball', (<Sic. *palla*); M. *baqqun*, 'pickaxe', (<Sic. *piccuni*); M. *barumbara*, 'pigeon house' (<Sic. *parumbata*); M. *batut*, 'oppressed' (<Sic. *patutu*); M. *biċċa*, 'piece' (<Sic. *picca*); M. *bittiera*, 'dewlap' (<Sic. *pittiera*); M. *bizz-*

illa, 'lace' (<Sic. *pizzilla/pizzidda*).

The Maltese alphabet has only the symbol [z] for (i) *ts* ('gotts', 'heap'; *razza* (rattša), 'race'. (ii) *dz* in *mezzanin* (pizzidda medd-zani:n), 'small flat'; *zona* ('dzo:na), 'zone'. The reason may well have been that there are so few of such words that it was not considered wise to encumber the alphabet with little used symbols.

Such phonic interference results from the assimilation of the original sound in the secondary language to the only roughly corresponding sound in the primary language. I say 'roughly' because in some cases the phonic correspondence is not exact as in the case of English alveolar [t] in Maltese loanwords in which it becomes a dental [t̪] or, to give another example English dark [ɫ], which is assimilated to a clear [l] in Maltese loanwords.

LIST OF CONSONANTS COMMON TO SEMITIC AND FOREIGN MALTESE

1. BI-LABIAL CONSONANTS

(i) PLOSIVE: [p, b]: *platt*, 'plate'; *premm*, 'pram'; *blast*, 'blast'; and *bar*, 'bar'.

(ii) NASAL: [m, m]: *gamm*, 'jam'; *tramm*, 'tram'; *mister*, 'Mr.'.

(iii) FRICTIVE: [w]: *wiski*, 'whisky'; *wejter*, 'waiter'.

2. LABIO-DENTAL

(i) NARROWING FRICATIVE: [f, v]: *futboll/fudboll*, 'football'; *fer*, 'fair'; *vann*, 'van'.

(ii) NASAL: [m]: *gamfra*, 'camphor'.

3. DENTAL

(i) PLOSIVE: [t, d]: *ti:m*, 'team'; *trakk*, 'truck'; *dokjart*, 'dock-yard'; *drô*, 'draw'.

(ii) FRICATIVE: (a) [θ]: *triller*, 'thriller'; *tenks*, 'thanks'.

(b) [ð]: *fader*, 'father'; *mader*, 'mother'; *brader*, 'brother' (three religious titles in current use).

This equation of English θ creates two ambiguous homophones in English as uttered in Maltese. These are *three* for *tlieta* and *tree* for *sigra*; *thick* and *tick*. In this and similar words the different phonemes become both dental t's.

4. ALVEOLAR

(i) PLOSIVE: [t̪ d̪]: *tank*, 'tank'; *trakk*, 'truck'; *desk*, 'desk'; *iddimmja*, 'to dim'.

(ii) NASAL: [n, n]: *ganer*, 'gunner'.

(iii) *ROLLED*: [r]: *irrolja*, 'to roll'; *orrajt*, 'allright'.

(iv) *LATERAL*: [l(l, t)]: *troller*, 'trawler'; *troli*, 'trolley'; *kitla*, 'kettle'. One should note that English dark [l] in Maltese becomes clear [l].

(v) *FRICATIVE*: [s, z]: *sikspenz*, 'sixpence'; *ser*, 'sir'; *skuna*, 'schooner'; *roža*, 'rose' (< It. *rosa*).

5. PALATO-ALVEOLAR

(i) *AFFRICATE*: [tʃ, dʒ]: *ċarg*, 'charge'; *ċans*, 'chance'; *ġersi*, 'jersey'; *iġġamja*, 'to jam'.

(ii) *FRICATIVE*: [ʃ, ʒ]: *xorts*, 'shorts'; *xokk*, 'shock'; *rediffjuzin*, rediffusion; *kazwal*, 'casual'.

6. PALATAL

(i) *FRICATIONLESS CONTINUANT* or *GLIDE*: [j]: *jott*, 'yacht'; *kju*, 'queue'; *jarda*, 'yard' (measure).

7. VELAR

(i) *PLOSIVE*: [k, g]: *kar*, 'car'; *kowt*, 'coat'; *gowl*, 'goal'; *grawd*, 'ground'.

(ii) *NASAL*: [b]: *bank*, 'bank'; *rank*, 'rank'.

8. GLOTTAL

(i) *FRICATIVE*: [ħ, ʕ]: *howlder*, 'holder'; *ħenger*, 'hanger'; *ħarpun*, 'harpoon'.

VOWELS

In this comparative list I am including the arbitrary vocalic renderings in English, in complete contrast to Maltese which is phonetic, in order to show the mental effort our school-children have to make in order to memorize the English multiple vocalic spelling.

1. [i]

Short [i] in Maltese orthographically is represented by [i] followed by more than one consonant: *bint*, 'daughter'; *fimt* (spelled *fbimt*), 'I understood'; *sidt*, 'mistress'.

Long [i] in Maltese spelling long [j] is represented by [i] followed by one consonant in the same syllable. Ex. *konkrit*, 'concrete'; *fil*, 'line' (with which cp. Eng. 'feel'); *piż*, 'weight'; and *sid*, 'owner' (with which cp. Eng. 'seed'). English rendering: (i) *ee* (free); (ii) *e* (concrete); (iii) *ea* (flea); (iv) *ie* (piece); (v) *ei* (receive); (vi) *ey* (key); (vii) *i* (police) and (viii) *ay* (quay).

This is often diphthonged in both languages in final position.
(Ex. *jigi* [yidʒiy] 'he comes'; *ibni* ['ibniy] 'my son').

2. [æ]

This sound occurs in Maltese as a dialectal variant of [a]. e.g. qæmh for *qamħ*. It has recently been brought into Maltese with some English loanwords but no particular symbol has been provided for it. Some examples are: *flat/s*, *hanger*. In other English loanwords, this vowel becomes *e*. Many make no difference in the pronunciation of Christian name Pat (Patricia) and *pett*, 'sole' though the difference is phonemic in English *pat/pet*.

3. [e]

M. *sett*, 'set'; *nett*, 'net' (profit).

English rendering: (i) *e* (bed); (ii) *ea* (bread); (iii) *a* (many); (iv) *ay* (says); (v) *eo* (Geoffrey); (vi) *ie* (friend).

4. [ʌ]

M. *qatt*, *ħadd*. cfr. English sound: *cut*; M. *xatt*, 'strand'.

English rendering: (i) *u* (sun); (ii) *oo* (blood, flood); (iii) *o* (come); (iv) *oe* (does); (v) *ou* (country).

5. [ə]

M. *kar*, English *car*.

English rendering: (i) *a* (pass); (ii) *ar* (cart); (iii) *ear* (heart); (iv) *er* (clerk); (v) *al* (half); (vi) *au* (aunt).

6. [ɔ]

M. *jott*, English *yacht*.

English rendering: (i) *o* (dock); (ii) *a* (was); (iii) *ou* (cough); (iv) *au* (because).

7. [ɔ̃]

M. *bord*, English *board*.

English rendering: (i) *or* (horse); (ii) *aw* (saw); (iii) *ou* (bought); (iv) *au* (caught); (v) *a* (salt); (vi) *ore* (more); (vii) *oor* (door); (viii) *our* (four).

8. [ʊ]

M. *kuxin*, English *cushion*.

English rendering: (i) *u* (put); (ii) *o* (wolf); (iii) *oo* (book); (iv) *ou* (could).

9. [u]

M. *kju*, English *queue*.

English rendering: (i) *oo* (moon); (ii) *o* (who); (iii) *ou* (group); (iv) *ew* (chew); (v) *ue* (blue); (vi) *ui* (juice); (vii) *oe* (shoes).

10a. [ə]

M. *ners*, English *nurse*.

English rendering: (i) *ir* (girl); (ii) *yr* (myrtle); (iii) *er* (her); (iv) *err* (err); (v) *ear* (earth); (vi) *ur* (church); (vii) *urr* (purr); (viii) *w+or* (worse); (ix) *our* (journey).

10b. [ə]

M. *wejter*, English *waiter*.

English rendering: (i) *i* (possible); (ii) *e* (gentlemen); (iii) *a* (woman); (iv) *o* (oblige [əblaɪdʒ]); (v) *u* (suppose [spuz, spuz]); (vi) *ar* (particular); (vii) *er* (mother); (viii) *or* (doctor); (ix) *ou* (famous); (x) *our* (colour); (xi) *ure* (figure).

DIPHTHONGS

The difference between the diphthongs that are common to Maltese and English is a matter of different direction in the glide from one vowel to another. While in English diphthongs most of the length and stress associated with the glide is concentrated on the 1st element, the 2nd element being only lightly sounded, in Maltese diphthongs, such length and stress are concentrated on the 2nd element. In other words, in English we have *falling* diphthongs while in Maltese we have *rising* diphthongs.

Examples of loan-diphthongs

1. vowel *a* +

(i) [a+i = aj], common to Maltese, Classical and dialectal Arabic (ex. m. *paġp*/pipe; pl. *paġpijiet*/pipes. N.B. It. *ae* > *aj* m. *paġġiż*, 'country'/It. *paese*, *majjistru*, 'master'/It. *maestro*).

(ii) [a+u = aw], common to Maltese, Classical and dialectal Arabic (ex. m. *faul*/foul. This diphthong appears as the last stress-bearing syllable of loan-verbs from (a) English and (b) Italian or Sicilian in the Perfect Tense IIIrd person pl. (a) ex. *illandjaw*, 'they landed'; *skiddjaw*, 'they skidded'; (b) *immaġinaw*, 'they imagined'/It. *immaginare*; *irrabjaw*, 'they got angry'/It. *arrabiare*).

2. vowel *e* +

(i) [e+i = ej], common to Semitic Maltese and dialectal Arabic. ex.

m. *trej*/tray; *krejn*/crane; *irrejġa*/he raided.

(ii) [e+u = ew stressed when in final position], common to Semitic Maltese. ex. *trofew*, 'trophy'/It. *trofeo*; *mawsulew*, 'mauseleam'/It. *mausoleo*; *liċew*, 'lyceum'/It. *liceo*.

3. vowel i +

(i) [i+a = ja], common to Semitic Maltese, Classical and dialectal Arabic. ex. *jarda*/yard. This diphthong appears as the final stress-bearing syllable of loan-words from Eng. Perfect tense, 3rd person sing. masc. ex. *illandja*, 'he landed'; *ikkraxxja*, 'it crashed'. Similar verbal loans from Sicilian or Italian end in [a]. Thus *iffittja* < Eng. 'to fit' and *iffitta* 'to be importunate' < Sic. *fittu*.

(ii) [i+o = jo], common to Semitic Maltese. ex. *jott*/yacht; *jordna*, 'he orders'/It. *ordinare*.

(iii) [i+u = ju], common to Semitic Maltese. ex. *fjura*, 'flower'/Sic. *fiura*.

4. vowel o +

(i) [o+i = oj] unknown in Semitic Maltese but can occur dialectally. ex. *doyler*/doiley; *bojler*/boiler.

(ii) [o+u = ow] common to Semitic Maltese and Maghribi Arabic. ex. *gowl*/goal; *kowt*/coat.

5. vowel u +

(i) [u+a = wa] common to Semitic Maltese, Classical and dialectal Arabic. ex. *guardja*, 'guard'/It. *guardia*; *ingwanta*, 'glove'/It. *guanto*.

(ii) [u+e = we] common to Semitic Maltese. ex. *werċ*, 'squint eyed'/It. *guercio*; *gwerra*, 'war'/It. *guerra*; *iwweldja*/he welded; *winċ*/winch; *wens* (cf. As origin) 'company'.

Language interference takes place not only at the phonic and lexical level, it affects also the stress of the word. It is largely the quality of identifiable phonemes and other factors, such as stress and rhythm, that make the foreign version very perceptible to the native speaker of a language. That is what one means when one says that so and so speaks English, or any other language, with a foreign accent. This phonic and intonational 'foreignness' is perceptible in varying degrees and in proportion to the degrees of the speaker's mastery of the second language. Schools for such experience in linguistic 'foreignness' are the dramatic societies which perform English plays with Maltese actors that take place in some of our theatres. Here bilingual interference at the phonetic and in-

tonation level illustrates also the influence of the native dominant language on the foreign language even when this is used as an alternative to the primary language in conversation, on the stage and on the radio. The phonic and intonational substitutions give away the foreignness of the non-English, or non-Italian, speakers when they take part in an English or in an Italian play. If I could have used a pirate microphone I could have illustrated several phone and intonational substitutions of a very amusing nature not only from the performances of some of our dramatic societies but also from the campus of the university, especially from the female students.

Language contact brings into play also sets of structural patterns initially in conflict with one another till such conflict is resolved by structural adaptations to the patterns of the borrowing language. This is what happened in Malta in the process of contact between Maltese and Italian at one time, and between Maltese and English at another. The resolution of this structural conflict has been easier in the case of loanwords from Italian than in the case of loanwords from English. The reason for this is that in Italian there are more word-patterns common to Maltese than there are in the lexical corpus of English. The word-structure of most English words has been more difficult to adapt to a Maltese pattern largely because of the very different collocations of the constituent consonants, and the quality of the vowels singly or in sequences. For instance, the assimilation of the Italian words: (i) *carta*, 'paper'; (ii) *manto*, 'mantle'; (iii) *spione*, 'spy'; (iv) *timone*, 'rudder' has been very easy because these and other words easily conform to existing Maltese word-patterns. Examples of the corresponding Maltese words are: (i) *qatla*, (ii) *qalb* (the same word-pattern of Italian *carta* less the final vowel); (iii) *djun*, 'debts' (plural pattern in Maltese); *qlub*, (plural pattern in Maltese). One should note here that the adaptation to an existing pattern, is sometimes made regardless of its grammatical category.

The assimilation of English words like *trade union* (treid jujn n); *football* (futbol); *bulldozer* (buldouzer) and others prove more difficult to assimilate because structurally they do not conform to any existing word-pattern in Maltese. A rare example of a complete assimilation is the word *kitla* pl. *ktieli* from English 'kettle' conforming to *xitla* pl. *xtieli*, 'plant(s)', *tifla*, 'girl'.

Does Maltese betray foreign grammatical influences, at least on the morphological plane? Meillet in his book *LINGUISTIQUE HISTORIQUE ET LINGUISTIQUE GENERALE* stated that 'The grammatical sys-

tem of two languages are impenetrable to each other'. Edward Sapir in his book *LANGUAGE* (New York, 1927) writes that 'Nowhere do we find any but superficial morphological interinfluencings'. But, in fact, one could give from Maltese numerous examples of interferences in various grammatical relations. Such are the developments of (i) new grammatical features and (ii) of word order. In my paper *Linguistic Cross-Currents in Maltese*, published in *ANTIQUITATES INDOGERMANICAE* (Innsbruck, 1974) I listed a few such features. Some of these are:

1. **NON-SEMITIC PLURAL ALLOMORPHS:** largely in words of Romance origin (e.g. *ingravata*, 'necktie' (pl. *ingravati*, also semiticised pl. *ingravajjet*); *frejgata*, 'frigate' (pl. *frejgati*); *batut/i*, 'in pain'; (iii) *film/s*; *play/s*. These and many other words feature a non-Semitic pl. suffix [i] corresponding to the pl. suffix in Sicilian and to [s] which is the general pl. suffix of nouns in English. Because in Maltese voiced consonants at the end of a word, except in continuous speech, and when the following word begins with a voiced consonant, ex. *bieb żgħir* [bieb zeyr], 'small door' are unvoiced, pl. suffix [s] in Maltese is similarly unvoiced in loanwords from English. Thus English films (*filmz*) in Maltese becomes *films*. Our children, for the same reason, unvoice final [s] in English verbs in 3rd person singular when this sound is preceded by a voiced consonant. They generally pronounce reads (*ri:dz*) as *ri:ts*; and glides (*glaidz*) as *glaits*.

2. **PARTICIPIAL ALLOMORPHS:** (i) *-ut* attached to (i) Semitic words and (ii) to Sicilian words. *emmnut*, 'believed' (made up of *emmn*, *emmen* whence *emn* + *amine* + *ut*. Sic. participial suffix *utu*); and *-at* attached to words of Italian origin like *irrabjat* (<It. *arrabbiato*) and *indannat* (<It. *indannato*).

3. **ADVERBIAL PHRASAL ALLOMORPH:** *severament* (for *bis-severità* or *b'mod sever*); *serjament* (for *bis-serjetà* or *b'mod serju*).

4. **AUGMENTATIVE SUFFIXES:** *-un* from Italian *-one*: *dar darun* (for *dar+un*), 'a very large house'; *ħmar ħmarun*, 'a very ignorant man'.

5. **SUPERLATIVE ALLOMORPH:** (Made up of the adjective + suffix *-issimu*) Example: *verissimu* (for *veru* + *issmu*); *ċertissmu* (for *ċert* + *issmu*).

As Maltese has no neuter pronoun corresponding to English 'it', sometimes our school children, when they write English, thinking in Maltese, use the masculine or feminine gender that the loanword takes in Maltese. Thus they refer to the Government (M. *gvern*

masc.) as 'he' and to the sun (*ix-xemx* fem.) as 'she'. The word 'boiler' which is of neuter gender in English has become *bajla*, a noun of feminine gender in Maltese. In Pennsylvania Germany, on the contrary, English word 'boiler' becomes masculine *bailer* because it replaces German *kesel*.

As I think I have said enough about the language mechanism, I now turn to a consideration of bilingualism from a socio-cultural point of view. Mr Uriel WEINREICH in his book *Languages in Contact*, stating that the individual's aptitude for learning a foreign language is almost by definition a factor in his performance in the second language, writes that 'according to one school of thought, very early bilingualism affects adversely an individual's aptitude for language learning.' He states also that 'Tireman, however, found that the child bilingual's handicap in acquiring a second vocabulary is not as great as is sometimes supposed' and that 'Spoerl, comparing the mental performance of 69 bilingual college freshmen with that of a control group, discovered that the bilinguals surpassed the unilinguals slightly in English ability. On the other hand,' continues the same author, 'Toussaint found the performance of Flemish-French bilinguals in dictation to be far inferior to that of unilinguals. Obviously, only additional research can establish a basis for explaining such discrepancies.' He points out that 'a special claim made in favour of bilingualism is that it helps in the acquisition of a third language – not because of the similarity of the third language to one of the first two, but simply because of the greater experience of the bilingual in language learning. This point too awaits clarification by research.'

The findings recorded in this passage are of interest to Maltese linguists and educationists. I think someone should investigate the local bilingual situation to establish whether it is true or not that our school children are being adversely affected by bilingual teaching or, worse still, by multi-lingual teaching. Besides Maltese and English, our school children have to learn an optional third language which can be German, Italian, Arabic or French. The relevant question is: Does a school boy become more intelligent, or better educated, when he is taught to call a dog, a fish, a cat and a fool by three or more different names? Is language teaching in Malta being done at the expense of the time needed for the accumulation of related knowledge and experience? Someone should carry out an investigation and give us urgent answers to these questions. It would be interesting to verify for the purposes of Maltese education whether, in our case, the evidence would favour

Tireman's or Spoerl's theory.

A relevant question of practical importance is this: 'What is the right age for teaching children a second language?'. Pedro a Cebollero in his book *A School Language Policy for Puerto Rico* (San Juan, 194(5)?) on page 78 writes: 'It is interesting that where the desire or pressure to teach children the second language is particularly great, the age of first exposure is lowered. In Switzerland, for example, many Romansh schools voluntarily depart from the cantonal curriculum by introducing German as early in as the first grade. In the Soviet Union since 1938, children in four year national minority schools have been compelled to study Russian from the second grade on. Hardy discusses the deplorable results of too early, or exclusive use of the second language in schools of colonial countries.' As Swadish puts it we consider 'an empiric fact the observation that the more fully adult a person is at the time he comes in contact with a new language, the less likelt he is to obtain full control of it.'

There is another school of thought which stresses the negative, or adverse, effects of bilingualism. For instance, Leo Weisgerber, in his book *Zweisprachigkeit, Schaffen und Schauen*, says that bilingualism can impair the intelligence of a whole ethnic group, and cripple its creative abilities for generations. What answer can we Maltese produce from the evidence of our ethnic group to this very serious statement? Has our preoccupation with bilingualism or trilingualism sharpened or crippled the intelligence of our ethnic group? Has it promoted, or has it crippled, omr creative abilities? Has it or has it not affected adversely our mental development and emotional adjustment?

While it is true that we Maltese can call a fish and a donkey and more other things by more than one name, are we sure that bilingualism and, in our time, multi-lingualism has not proved more of a handicap than an advantage? I am merely calling attention to an actual, or hypothetical, situation which calls for an objective investigation by a team of expert linguists and sociologists.

Weisgerber is not alone in his contention that bilingualism may have an adverse effect on the intelligence of the people. Elmer Jamieson and Peter Sandiford in their article on *The Mental Capacity* of Southern Ontario Indians (*Journal of Educational Psychology*, 1938) reported that monoglots surpassed bilinguals in intelligence in three tests out of four. N. Toussaint in his book *Bilingualism et Education* (Brussels, 1935), in a study carried out in Belgium in 1938 in which he compared the intellectual and moral

development of unilingual and bilingual Flemish and Walloon children on the basis of written examinations of about 40 children of each kind, found that bilingualism affected the intellectual performance of primary school children negatively. But there are, of course, other opinions to the contrary. M. Davies and A.G. Huges in their joint work *An Investigation into the Comparative Intelligence and attainments of Jewish and Non-Jewish Children* (British Journal of Psychology, General Section, 1927) reported that the former, presumably bilingual, showed a high degree of intelligence. Arsenian Seith in his work *Bilingualism and Mental Development* (New York, 1937) reported that 'sixty per cent showed a handicap induced by bilingualism, thirty per cent considered a handicap to be unimportant and ten per cent produced no conclusive evidence of such handicap'. Arsenian ascribes this 'wide divergence in results to methodological deficiencies'. He then made his own statistical study using more careful methods, a larger number of samples and after correlating the mental ability, age-grade status and socio-economic background of 1,152 Italian and 1,196 Jewish American born children aged 9 to 14 Brooklyn, New York with their background, he came to the conclusion that bilingualism made no significant impact on intelligence. He noticed no significant difference in the intelligence of 'highly bilingual' and low bilingual children. Hubert Stecker in a study published in *International Education Review* (1932-33) wrote that 'he did not notice any detrimental effect of bilingualism on the intelligence of South American children. According to the findings of the South African bilingual survey mentioned by Ernest Gideon Malherbe in his work *The Bilingual School; a study of bilingualism in South Africa* (Johannesberg, 1934), Afrikaans Edition, Capetown, 1943), 'children from more or less bilingual homes, are, on the whole, more intelligent than children from purely unilingual homes, whether English or Afrikaans. This superiority in intellectual development is probably due largely to selective factors of a social nature which operate in South African society'. Spoerl Dorothy Tilden in her article *The Academic and Verbal adjustment of College Age Bilingual Students* (Journal of Genetic Psychology, 1944) reported that 'Bilinguals equalled the unilinguals in verbal intelligence, surpassed the latter slightly in the level of their vocational plans and excelled them significantly in academic work.' On the other hand, a contrary opinion is expressed by W.R. Jones in his article *Attitude Towards Welsh as a Second Language; Preliminary Investigation* published in British Journal of Educational Psychology, General section,

1949. He says that 'unilinguals surpassed the bilinguals in intelligence in both verbal and non-verbal tests'.

Summing up, one can say that it is not proved that as a rule bilingualism has no adverse effects on mental development. Nonetheless, as Uriel Weinreich points out, 'the contrary results obtained by Saer, Jamieson and Sandifor, Toussaint, and Jones and Stewart must still be accounted for.' Malta is an ideal place for carrying out an investigation into the situation to ascertain whether (i) bilingualism as such and (ii) multi-lingualism which may represent an additional strain, have had a slow-down effect on the mental development or the performance of our school children in primary and secondary schools.