

THE ROLE OF LANGUAGE IN SOCIETY*

(A talk given at the Convent of the Sacred Heart to the members of the Private Schools' Association on January 3, 1958)

By J. AQUILINA

'WHY have you chosen this subject at all?' some of you may feel inclined to ask. 'This is not a Congress of Linguists, but a gathering of Private Schools teachers.' I see your point and I think I owe you an explanation, but I certainly do not owe you an apology for choosing this subject. For what subject plays a larger and more significant part than language in the schools both as the medium of instruction and itself a subject-matter of intense study in a country that, rightly, attaches great importance to the teaching of languages? The premise from which I draw the conclusion of such importance is justified by the importance of the social purpose that Language serves.

Language is a means of inter-class and inter-group communication. It is man's natural means of mental contact with organized society; and within that society Language serves multifarious social purposes. We educate our young men and women for a purpose that is likewise social, and in using language to communicate ideas and principles of conduct, we fulfil a social purpose of the highest order. Here is, therefore, at the very beginning of this talk, a statement of the greatest significance; namely *that Language is a natural means of communication and self-expression*. Language is to ideas, from which actions and behaviours spring naturally, what a bottle is to the liquid it contains. Its capacity determines the quantity of the content.

One can assess the intellectual and social capacity of the British from their mixed and varied vocabulary and the way the words are strung together in the spoken and written language at its various levels. So also one could assess the intellectual and social capacity of the Italians, the Arabs, the Greeks and the Japanese. Consider carefully and then compare the vocabulary of a Bantu tribe with that of a highly civilised Greek community of Aristotle's time, and you have evidence enough on which to draw if you wish to establish various degrees of social and linguistic relationships.

* This talk originally published serially in *The Bulletin* (Jan. 30, 1958 - Feb. 5, 1959), is reprinted here with thanks to the Editor.

Man is inconceivable without language. If, unfortunately, he is born deaf and dumb, he instinctively makes up for the lack of audible language by a series of rationalised gestures; he devises a signalling system of his own and a process of lip-reading, so that he may maintain contact with other men like him. And, as pointed out by the Unesco Commission in the introduction to its monograph on *The use of Vernacular Languages in Education* (1935), 'a handbook which should be read carefully by every teacher of languages and every Head of school or College, 'there are various ways of looking at language: to a physiologist, it is a biophysical device consisting of a certain number of units of sound; to an anthropologist, it is a cultural inherited trend; to a sociologist, it is a medium for the transmission of feelings, ideas and knowledge, which may be summed up as social usages or culture.'

In this talk I can only take one aspect, the sociologist's aspect which is also the educationist's aspect, more strictly so far our purposes than the other scientific approaches, not less interesting by any means but falling within a different category of scientific discipline. The sociologist's approach is also the linguist's approach because to the linguist language is primarily a means of communication and as such it is a social tool. It being no more than that, for our purpose we could relate its social importance to that of communication itself without which human society, as we know it, would be impossible; for who can conceive an inarticulate society, or a society whose language is badly related to the objects and ideas it purports to communicate without his mind going back to the confusion of tongues that happened at Babel, when a group of monoglottic workers having suddenly lost the nexus between word-sounds and the objects indicated by them, could no longer work and live together?

Strictly speaking, I should have used not the word 'Language' but the word 'Speech' which is man's universal gift of self-expression and self-extension into the physical world of sound, but I have preferred to use the word 'Language' because I am not going to theorise about speech as such. I am going instead to contextualise my talk, if I may say so, by direct references to the language spoken in our islands, and state a few platitudes which apparently want re-stating because, somehow, there is still insufficient evidence of their cultural and social reality.

The nonsense that we hear or see printed about Maltese generally from uninformed or ill-informed persons as if it were something apart from the men and women that speak it is too silly for words. When this nonsense exists in places or institutions where one expects scientific clear-headedness, it constitutes a serious threat to the main purpose of education at all levels. Indeed, what do we educate our children for? We educate them,

in the first place, for life which is much larger than a job even as a man's soul is much larger than his coat and shirt. ;

As genuine patriotism impersonates part of that abstraction we call 'Life', so education is largely impersonated in the life of one's country in a very broad sense. Similarly, as the young newly planted tree thrives after it has not merely struck root but has also spread them far out (the larger trees more so than the smaller trees), so also one's education must first strike root in its own soil, then, spreading outside its native soil draw richer nourishment from other deeper soils. Language is one of the means of contact with our own fellow-countrymen alive and dead, with the history of our people yesterday, today and tomorrow; with the national personality of the country as a whole, and its book of recorded and unrecorded history. Without that means of psychological contact, something precious is lost or missed, something without which no people can be welded together into a nation. No one better than the dictators knew this. Mussolini, Hitler, Stalin and other dictators suppressed minority languages because they knew that the main force that holds small peoples together is the language they speak. ;

As Catholics, we share our faith with the Italians, the French, and multitudes of other nationalities in every corner of the world. It is only by the language we speak that we are Maltese; just as it is by the language they speak that the British and the French are what they are. Of course, one's birthplace, the place we are brought up in counts a great deal; but we would consider Churchill and Macmillan less English if they used French as their home and public language. At the most, we would consider them as two French-speaking English men; and under these two conflicting aspects, the English-speaking community that inhabits the British Isles would not have accepted them as their leaders. The foreign language would have placed a barrier between them. ;

Apply the example to Malta where some families are still unreasonably shy of using Maltese at cocktail parties and other socials, a small decreasing number who prefer to cut a good figure by speaking a sort of English as once they used to speak a sort of Italian when social and class prestige was on its side. Something like this for many years happened in Czarist Russia and the Kaisers' Germany where polite society preferred to chatter in French. ;

Why does this happen at all? It is a question that educationists should ask themselves; and not merely ask but face the implications of the answer boldly. Why do these families feel uneasy? What 'complex' are they trying to repress? Do they reach higher levels of self-expression by doing so? Are they not cutting off themselves, linguistically at least, from the social

context of their native country, from that sum-total of social responses that derive their nourishment from the native soil? What would an English educationist say of such an anomaly in his country? There was a time when this linguistic attitude, a queer manner of showing off, was more prevalent. Then Italian, not English, glittered in society; that was when the people's own language suffered unfairly from the competition of the rulers' privileged language. Prestige plays a great part in the popularity or otherwise of native languages. But the effects of wrong ideas on linguistic education were often disastrous. They certainly retarded the growth of a national literature and a compact Maltese linguistic awareness. Some future Maltese sociologist may, one day, write a thesis on this unhealthy mental attitude from the educational and linguistic point of view.]

In one of his essays, William Hazlitt described prejudice as 'the child of ignorance'. I would describe 'linguistic and social prejudice by the native people' as the child of fear, the expression of a fear and shame complex, fear and shame of both linguistic and social adverse comparisons, fears not less painful and embarrassing because they are in fact imaginary so long as they are real to those they embarrass, to those whose false pride they hurt. When the fear or shame complex is purely social you get, for instance, the village maid sophisticated by expensive and artificial town habits aping her mistress even beyond her means. When the fear, or shame, complex is linguistic, you get the better educated persons brought up in ignorance of the value of their own language as a medium of inter-class and inter-group communication, not only aping the habits and manners, no matter how exotic, of the foreigners or the ruling classes, but also abandoning their native speech as a medium of self-expression at socials or in literary or cultural gatherings.] This is a terrible mistake that cost many countries the best in thought and feeling that the best men and women of these countries might otherwise have enshrined for ever in the people's native language for their own lasting good!

This shame or fear complex is by no means an exclusively Maltese aberration. Here is a brief list of languages which today have their own literature and enjoy an official status in their respective countries but were once overshadowed by the foreigners' language and, in some instances, by Latin or Greek as cultural and liturgical languages. Latin itself was for many years overshadowed by the greater cultural prestige of Greek, early Italian and English by that of Latin, Hungarian by Latin, Hungary's official language up to 1843; Czechoslovakian by German; Polish by French; Portuguese by Spanish; Norwegian by Danish; Turkish by Arabic and Persian; Bulgarian by Greek, Finnish by Latin and Swedish;

Japanese by Chinese. The list could be increased by other examples, but the one significant example I wish to mention now is that of the Faroe Islands inhabited by about 30,000 people, whose native language Norse is now, together with Danish, the official language.

So what happened in our country is by no means an exclusively Maltese error of judgement. The worst that one can say about us, perhaps, is that we Maltese suffered irrational prejudice longer than other peoples who emancipated themselves from the fear and shame complex before us. ;

You'll agree with me that educationists and teachers, besides a good knowledge of the subjects they specialise in, need also a sense of history. With a sense of history and a sense of humour they can go a long way; they can debunk myths and promote Truth. ;

Women that had a public school education are the worst sinners against the dignity of grammatical Maltese speech. I have noticed the growth of a sort of Maltese patois in Sliema. This Sliema jargon, largely of the feminine gender, has created some linguistic phenomena in the field of Maltese phonetics including the Semitic part of their mixed speech that are worth study though from the literary angle this patois is no more than a pretentious hotch potch. I have noticed that some of the public school girls use a different set of vowels, distinctly different from those used by girls attending other schools. These distinctive phonetic traits have become a sort of family or class badge almost like the so called Oxford accent which some people in Britain consider very artificial and annoying. Of course the comparison ends here; for while the Oxford intonation and phonetics are associated with one of the best types of education, here in Malta this curiosity of Maltese accent does not make up for its exotic strangeness by any comparable claim in the field of culture and general education. ;

I state a problem here for the private schools staffs especially those catering for the girls of our better off families. What can they do, or what are they failing to do, in order to integrate the personality of Maltese Womanhood within the framework of Maltese public education, with the stress on the word Maltese? Let me give you an example before I take leave of this point; and will you please excuse me if the case history may sound unpleasant to some of you. I preside a fortnightly Brains Trust in Maltese. The questions I asked so far touched on literature, Science, Sociology, points of theology and other odd bits of human knowledge. On the Trust, I had University professors, and Primary School teachers, members of the clergy, civil servants and other categories of Maltese social life. It took me some time to find half a dozen women in Malta willing to take part in a Brains Trust with men. Once, I had an all-women Brains Trust and it was fun to hear what they thought of men, as it was fun to

hear the day after what men had to say about women. With one exception not one of them had a private school education and the single exception was terribly handicapped by her inability to speak good Maltese.

The language barrier made it practically impossible to most young women I invited to take part in a Maltese Brains Trust. In other words, the language barrier deprived them of the privilege of communicating with the general public at a higher level of self-expression than mere gossip.

I had a talk with a very intelligent girl, now employed as a clerk, and from this talk I was sure that she had much to tell Maltese listeners about Literature. I asked her whether she would like to take part in a Brains Trust. She accepted; but when I told her the Brains Trust was to be conducted in Maltese, she apologised. 'I cant' talk Maltese', she told me, 'I never learnt Maltese at school'. She is Maltese-speaking at colloquial level. What she really meant was that she did not possess a sufficient command of the language at a level higher than everyday colloquial. Whether that girl will ever be invited to join a B.B.C. Brains Trust is very doubtful; but it is beyond doubt that she would be welcomed on a Maltese Brains Trust if only her private school education had not crippled her natural means of self-expression and thus fatally reduced her chances of establishing educative contacts with other women. Maltese womanhood must come forward, meet and address the thousands of other Maltese women who would like to hear the feminine point of view, who would like to feel that some of their sex can hold their own with men.

My main point up to now is that language is not only a means of communication in the abstract but also a means of social inter-group and inter-class contact in everyday life. Without this contact there is isolation. Of feminine snobbish aloofness from the ordinary type of the uneducated or less well-educated woman we have more than is good for Malta.

The harm of an education unrooted in its native soil on account of wrong ideas or lack of an appreciation of the fundamental social importance of the people's language, accounts for the wedge that other differently educated men and women gradually drive between one section of society and another. Neither the State nor the Church can benefit by this mentality. Here is, therefore, a problem from another angle equally worthy of careful study.

The objection often raised against the more intensive teaching of Maltese (and no teacher can teach that has not learned his own language at a higher level than he or she teaches it), is that the People's language is, indeed, so unimportant in the world of business that it is sheer folly to waste on it time that could be more profitably spent on other subjects. Now this lone objection is stupid and can be mischievous and very harm-

ful. No other subject can be as important really as the language the people handle in their daily commerce and inter-communication of ideas at different levels. Consider what use is being made of Maltese in Malta — no other language is being used as extensively as Maltese; and naturally no other language can ever take the place of the heart except by some act of despotic violence. The priest needs Maltese for his day-to-day spiritual ministry; he needs it for the pulpit especially and for the modern form of apostolate, which is Catholic journalism that should cultivate its Maltese Bellocs and Chestertons. The priest, who has insufficient command of the people's language, who can speak it, but cannot write it effectively can never do justice to the Church he belongs to; and believe me, the time has come when the Church in Malta will have to muster a larger and more impressive number of lay and religious writers that can handle the written and spoken word effectively enough to influence ideas, and create or re-create the mental attitudes the Church wants to foster.]

Most of our religious literature is ineffective precisely because it lacks those graces of style, that word-power of self-expression which we acquire by intensive training only.]

The lawyer needs Maltese too; if he is a man of high principles he won't be satisfied with a hybrid jargon; he'll do his best to speak intelligently and effectively not only to persuade the judge or magistrate, but also to satisfy the client that foots the bill. A lawyer can talk jargon if he is careless; and a jargon is a sort of Secret Language that cuts out the humiliated listeners from the fellowship of verbal inter-communication.]

More examples could be mentioned to show how close to native social life a people's language is. All we need keep in mind all the time is that it is the vehicle of a people's ideas, thoughts and feelings; that self-expression, in its turn, expresses truths, untruths, half truths, sublimities and banalities etc. We have in a nutshell the main social justification of the proper teaching of Maltese in every public and private school for a purpose that is higher than may be immediately visible to the naked eye, or to such mercenaries as estimate values by their financial returns in terms of £, s, d.]

Another objection against the teaching of Maltese is that it is no good outside Malta, that our emigrants need English more than they need Maltese. Let me clear these two hurdles. That our children need English not merely for mercenary purposes but also for the benefits that they can derive from British culture is agreed. No one need convert me to that opinion. Thirteen years ago in a lecture which I gave at the British Institute I stated several reasons for a basis of Anglo-Maltese culture and so long as the balance is not tilted far too much on one side (all extremes and naturally

'extremists' are harmful), I'll continue to believe in the creation of Anglo-Maltese culture. But the roots of this composite culture, mind you, must be laid in Malta.

If you agree with me, you must agree also that this demands a certain amount of self-education in the social Maltese way of life and historical background from the non-Maltese teachers who come from different cultures and whose privilege it is to educate our future educationists.

Cultures, you know as well as I do, spring from the same dynamic force that compels man to excel his own day-to-day experience of life. He does so in many ways. One of these ways is socio-linguistic. He creates his own literature and his own Art to enshrine what is best in the continuous personality of native manhood. This accounts for the rise of so many cultures with one basic universal motive but otherwise different in flowering. There is such a thing as a Maltese socio-historical culture; and it must be taken into account by the non-Maltese teachers. It cannot be passed by as something not very important. Like any other people, we have our Maltese ethos. If our literature is still limited, we shall have to accept it as an outgrowth of the Maltese ethos; and it is the duty of every teacher, Maltese and non-Maltese, to accept this basic principle for if he does not he will inevitably injure our manhood and womanhood.

Some private schools, I understand, find it necessary to penalise pupils when they speak Maltese. I want to speak frankly about this. I think this policy can be psychologically crippling if the reason for such embarrassing discipline is not explained beforehand. Young boys and girls at their impressionable age look up to their teachers for the right lead. They swear by what they are told by their teachers. To them they are not men but Supermen. It is possible, and, I am afraid, some of the results of this queer discipline show that it is so, that as these boys and girls grow into young men and women they come to regard their native speech as a sort of helots' language or base dialect; begin to feel that there is little to be proud of in speaking their parents' home language; and as one thing leads to another, also that there is not much cause for being proud of being Maltese after all. Or you might get a completely different reaction. You might get in adult life a sort of national reactionary chauvinism which is as bad really. There is a middle way. This internal school discipline, if it has to be enforced at all (Is it enforced in other schools in France, Italy, Spain etc? I wonder!) has to be explained in terms of the utilitarian benefits aimed at, such being the learning of spoken English, which, for a time involves the renunciation of the pupils' native language. I am afraid I have little personal experience of this kind of discipline nor would I like to see my children subjected to it. I learned English and a few other

languages in the Seminary of Gozo without ever being subjected to this anomalous discipline. I am a believer in my own way of learning a foreign language. (By the way, teachers of foreign languages might benefit by Jespersen's book *The Teaching of Modern Languages*).

I was still a boy when I fell in love with books, and the stories they said, read voraciously; later, I fell in love with ideas and the handling of the medium. I do not think really you can learn any language in a simpler and more effective way. Some of the school books that cut up a language into unrelated bits, verbs, phrases, prepositional verbs, teach language very much as the professor of anatomy teaches his subject to medical students — bone by bone, nerve by nerve. But as the skeleton on which he lectures is not the living man or woman that once kept it moving about clothed in flesh and blood, so also this anatomical language teaching will never teach the living language. This mechanical method teaches verbal isolates. It does not create a living language which is a social dynamo.

Frankly, I think the method I followed instinctively is simpler and more direct. I need hardly call your attention to the folly of prescribing for our children books that were written expressly for the use of English children. Our children inevitably start at a disadvantage. The production of textbooks in English by local teachers is a step in the right direction. The principle is always good even if the books locally produced may leave much to be desired.

The point I have made just now is that as a boy's or girl's native language is his, or her, natural means of communication and social contact with the rest of the country, it is not in the best interests of our manhood and womanhood to foster, no matter how unintentionally, tacit or spoken prejudices against their native language.

More than a century ago, Mr. John Hookham-Frere, who was for some years the Chairman of the Malta University Council, to whom our M. A. Vassalli dedicated his Book of Maltese proverbs, submitted a memorandum to the members of the Council. This memorandum contained some very useful 'reflections on the studies which may be cultivated in the University of Malta'. In this memorandum which was reproduced in Vol. I: *Memoir by the Right Hon. Sir Bartle Frere* (London, 1874, pp. 301-7) he stated *inter alia* that 'to speak one's language without a knowledge of its grammar and construction, is the true characteristic of ignorance in an individual and of barbarism in a people'.

By the way, it was Hookham Frere that made possible the temporary Chair of Maltese held by M. A. Vassalli by himself defraying Vassalli's salary. Then, even more than now, material results, immediate and lucrative, were expected to justify the teaching of any subject. Then as now

Maltese could not mint money. Most spiritual values do not. That crippling mentality has not died out because, apparently, our University and public education has not faced the menace with sufficient moral strength. No wonder moral values which cannot be translated immediately into £. s. d. are now crumbling at our feet one by one, in spite of the increasing number of government and private schools. The monster is still at large. Many still demand the immediate return in tangible results, largely of a material and utilitarian kind. As the Malta University Commission insisted that none should expect immediate, tangible results of a utilitarian nature from subjects that are entitled to a place in the academical curricula of our Alma Mater, so also Hookham Frere who ably pleaded for the teaching of Maltese and the promotion of Oriental studies in our University, stated that 'in everything, if a noble and superior object is pursued for its own sake with zeal and generosity, all the inferior advantages which are connected with it, will follow naturally and of their own accord'.

A more warm-hearted and persuasive teaching of Maltese by teachers who love and know the subject at a sufficiently high level, believe me, is bound to produce a generation more conscious of their own national heritage and their linguistic place in the world. It will, frankly, produce more genuine, more enlightened and well-educated patriots; that lively sense of collective interest in the well-being and progress of our people at all levels as a distinct nation; it will produce a true, militant patriotism which is above party politics. Patriotism has to be fostered by creating a healthy sense of self-respect in the country of our birth and the language we speak.

An inferiority complex, wherever nourished by prejudice, no matter how unintentionally and indirectly, breeds contempt for the country that gave us birth because, as Edmund Burke said very well in his *Reflections on the Revolution in France* 'to make us love our country, our country ought to be lovely'. Frankly, I do not think that a country like ours, still unhappily afflicted with some unpatriotic men that write silly letters to the press running down their native languages is a very lovely country. We can create the missing loveliness in the minds of our young men and women by getting them more intelligently, and spontaneously, interested in their native language from the historical, literary and social angle and, correlatively, by getting them also interested in the history of their homeland for which the people and the government of Malta have not yet provided a Chair in our University.

I am not unaware of the teaching of the people's language in some of the private schools. But I have seen no signs yet of a deep-rooted awareness of its vital role in our national life. I have a feeling that Maltese,

somewhere and somehow, has been suffered as an aggressive intruder one could not turn away, a sort of gate-crasher instead of a master in his own house. Those who glibly talk about national identity do not always show they have a strong enough grip on the kernel of the question at issue. They do not seem to be sufficiently aware that language is the most important characteristic of nationhood because, as I have repeatedly pointed out, it is the only, and if not the only anyhow the main, medium of inter-group and inter-class communication in the country where it flourishes.

Language is bound up with thinking and acting. That is what Nathaniel Webster in the preface to his Dictionary had in mind when he said that 'Language is the expression of ideas, and if the people of one country cannot preserve an identity of ideas, they cannot retain an identity of language'. Let me refer this to the language we speak and tell you non-Maltese teachers entrusted with the education of our children that the language we speak carries the awareness of our Mediterranean Catholic culture and identity, ethnically and linguistically distinct, while it is integrated within a vast framework of European culture serving as the unique European bridge between the Semitic and the Indo-European family of languages, a key to two Continents, and two cultures. This is the context into which you must fit our linguistic education.

I have stressed this point over and over again because, in my opinion, one of the fundamental concepts of nationhood which is falling to pieces because of a lack of correct ideas that can hold them together, is our Maltese national identity both ethnic and linguistic. I unhesitatingly say that it is the duty of all private and public schools to stem the tide of the anti-national congruent influences that are sapping our nationhood both physically and morally. Where are the patriots? They are outnumbered by those that run down their native heritage.

The preservation of our national identity, a sociological reality bound up with the language we speak, and which under one form or another has been continuously spoken for at least the last 2,000 years, is a primary function of national education, and ethnic continuity which I regard as an obligation of all private and public schools whether the teachers are Maltese, Irish or English. This is no plea for the use of Language as an ally of national chauvinism, but for its use as an ally of our national personality without which we cease to be a nation.

But apart from this consideration which some hard-headed people may describe as sentimental (I don't. I as hard-headedly describe it as a national reality) there are other basic considerations of a purely utilitarian nature, such as the service it renders in the teaching of foreign languages, for instance. The value of Maltese as itself a school subject, is a helpful

medium of learning other subjects and laying the foundations of adult education, all too desperately neglected in Malta, as was ably explained by such men, born ahead of their times, as De Soldanis, M. A. Vassalli, our greatest scholar in the field of lexicography, the first advocate of universal education at a time when education was a jealously guarded class privilege, and later by A. E. Caruana, G. B. Falzon, Badger, Schlienzy and others.

Some of the views, though expressed a hundred years ago, sound very modern. Such are the views favouring the use of Maltese as a medium of instruction in the schools, views which agree with those stated and illustrated by contemporary experience in the Unesco monograph on *The Use of Vernacular Languages in Education*. This report was drawn up at a meeting of specialists held on the use of vernacular languages in education which was convened in Paris in November 1951. Their views, therefore, should control the aberrations of the amateur educationists who advocate a use, or should I say, an abuse of language in a manner that belies the function and purpose of language as a vehicle of ideas. Such is, for instance, the silly system of teaching English to Maltese children through English from the very first classes of the Primary schools, by the so-called 'direct method' in spite of the fact, to quote from this Language monograph, 'that education can best be carried out in the mother tongue of the pupil, adult child'.

Now let me quote again from Unesco monograph platitudes that are no platitudes to such as self-complacently depart from the basic policy outlined by expert linguists and educationists in this invaluable book. 'The use of the mother tongue' we read on page 48 'will promote better understanding between the home and the school when the child is taught in the language of their home. What he learns can be easily expressed or applied in the home. Moreover, the parents will be in a position better to understand the problem of the school and, in some measure, to help the school in the education of the child.' Why is that so? Well, for the very evident reason that the child, already a learning member of his native society which uses a language that has been its own historical creation through the centuries, already knows some of that language. The jump from the known to the unknown is much easier, certainly a shorter cut than the jump headlong from the unknown to the unknown. I have discussed this incredible system with some local teachers and they expressed to me their regret at so much wasted labour, at taking so long to get where they want to get. One teacher mentioned an example of the confusion created by the longer way. Where do we go from here? To Confusion where worse confounded? A school inspector asked one of the boys the meaning of the English word 'wind'. The boy did not know the meaning. The kind inspec-

tor tried to lead him to its meaning by the longer way. He went near the window and began by moving his arms up and down, and sideways to give an impression of the movements of the wind. The child could not understand till he thought he understood and then 'I know Sir he cried 'wind' means *tixxejjer!* 'swing yourself' — a general laugh, the merry laughter of amused children. I discussed this method with British educationists when I was last in the United Kingdom under the Commonwealth Universities Scheme. They condemned the system. None the less the fad is still enforced in Malta.

Precious time could have been saved for more profitable use if the nexus between one recognisable phonetic unit and another less recognisable was expressed by the direct Sound-Image process in Maltese. Here is a problem for such educationists as have adopted this round about method of teaching English to Maltese children in the elementary stages. Other questions that come to mind are: Is the method I am condemning wasting time? If so how much time per lesson? Are corresponding advantages being obtained in other directions? If so, what are they and how do far they compensate for the loss of mental energy and time involved in the round about method? Are we keeping statistical records checking the results of the method?

The point I have made now is not merely how wasteful it is to abandon the use of the child's own language in the teaching of a foreign language, but also in positive terms, how useful it can be in the teaching of other subjects. Personally, I believe that up to a certain stage of the child's mental development when its only thinking tools are still the number of native words it learns at home and its still limited ability to string them together in baby language, it is a mistake to use English when the child's home tongue can so much more easily serve to transmit ideas and to widen its little world of sensations and contacts with the outside world.

To me it is also preposterous that primary school children, for instance, should be made to learn their native history through English. The approach is psychologically wrong. One has really to decide what one wants to teach directly. If one wants to teach geography and history, or the truths that Our Lord Jesus Christ entrusted to His Church, the medium should never assume a greater importance than the content, namely the subject-matter it communicates. And lest you run away with the idea that I am not on scientific grounds on this matter, let me quote from the Unesco experts' Language monograph again.

On page 49 we read that: 'Some people claim that it is impossible for children to acquire a good use of the second language unless the school adopts the second language as a medium of instruction from the very be-

ginning. In fact, it is on the basis of this action that some schools, in the past have actually forbidden any use whatsoever of the vernacular anywhere in the school. However, recent experience in many places proves that an equal, or better, command of the second language can be imparted if the school begins with the mother tongue as the medium of instruction, subsequently introducing the second language as a subject of instruction.'

On page 54 the Unesco Report continues: 'We believe that when the people as a whole have had an opportunity of observing the results of education in the mother tongue, they will be convinced that it is sound policy,' and again on page 55, the expert linguists stated that 'the early training in the mother tongue should serve as a bridge for learning the second language'. That aim cannot be reached if the Teachers' Training Colleges fail to provide sufficient training in the use of Maltese as a means of education. It is a question of balancing the time-table and the distribution of subjects with not too much on one side, and less than enough on another. After all, primary school teachers spend their lives teaching the children of the masses most of whom leave school at the age of thirteen. As we read on page 53 of the same Unesco Report: Teachers who have themselves received their education and professional training in a second language have real difficulty in having to teach in the mother tongue. That difficulty can have serious consequences. How many of our teachers can teach their own language profitably and interestingly? How many of them possess an adequate historical background? And, more precisely, how many of them did they learn it at school at a sufficiently high level? Those that became teachers before 1939 never studied the language at school; those that studied it in the transition period studied it very superficially. Under the circumstances, what depth and breath of vision can we expect from them? *Nemo dat quod non habet* and thereby hangs a story.

In Malta many often write and speak as if most of our children could afford the privilege of higher education at least at Secondary level. That is a fallacy which we should regard with some misapprehension because the result of that wrong attitude has led to the utter neglect of the mental broadening and education, general enlightenment of the masses on whose numerically larger number the pillars of our democracy and ideals rest. The thousands of men and women who can never hope to learn enough English for the higher purposes served by language leave schools too early, for the simple reason that they have got to start working for a living. Having left school, the little English they learned vanishes into the air and no more remains of it than a few unconnected words of little practical value for the purposes of citizenship.

These neglected, book-starved, men and women need more attention from us than we have paid them so far. The penalty for such omission of duty is that we may one day be all carried away from below; that Church and State will totter because their supporting pillars are shaky. I need not enlarge on the social utility of the mother tongue in the promotion of adult education. The members of the University Commission in their report spoke also about the need for this type of education. Again I quote from the Unesco Language Monograph: 'The teaching of adults requires special technique and materials, both of which are adapted to the needs and psychology of the mature learners'. Now listen to this: 'It must be borne in mind that the interest of adults are much more specific and immediate than those of children and that there must be greater variety in the contents of reading material provided for them. . . . Wherever possible, adult education should be carried out in the mother tongue. The great majority will not have time to master a foreign language sufficiently for it to be used as an effective medium of education'.

Surely, the Unesco authorities confirm what I have been saying for some years now; and make it clear enough that private schools should show greater unawareness of the sociological importance of the people's mother tongue. It also makes it clear enough for the scientific-minded that the cultivation of Maltese as a medium of communication should occupy a very important place together with English in our Teachers' Training Colleges. Teachers inadequately versed in the mechanisms of their native language and their national literature will prove very poor teachers in the broad sense of the word. They will be no more than hired wage-earners; men without vision and without a message. Our teachers more than anybody else need not merely a good knowledge of the structure of their native speech and information about the literature that is being rapidly produced in their speech, they need moral encouragement and a sense of pride in their speech and literature; for how can they communicate to others an interest which nobody communicated to them?

I am now going to read out the main objection to the use of vernacular languages which the Unesco Commission encountered and answered. Here they are in the right order:

- (1) *The language has no grammar and no alphabet* (Answer: There is nothing in the structure of any language which precludes it from becoming a vehicle of modern civilization. . . .)
- (2) *The Child already knows his mother tongue* (Answer: No child has completely learned his language before coming to school. . . . the school is not merely teaching the child his mother-tongue; it is using his mother tongue as the most effective means of teaching him other things). . . .)

(3) *The use of the mother tongue will prevent the acquisition of the second language.* (Answer: already given in the course of this talk).

(4) *Shortage of educational materials.* (Answer: Find or train competent authors and you'll have the books).

(5) *Shortage of suitably trained teachers.* (Answer: Enable teacher trainees to do at least some of their practice teaching in the mother tongue. ; and provide special teachers' guides and handbooks in order to prevent old-fashioned methods of teaching by rote. And remember, please, that 'a teacher is not adequately qualified to teach a language merely because it is his mother tongue'. (p. 69).

But what about the time the teaching of Maltese takes? ask some local educationists of the transitional period, that is, educationists whose education did not include very often even the elements of their own language. My answer is 'If the teacher is competent to teach Maltese in a manner both profitable and interesting, whatever time is devoted to the study of Maltese is not wasted. As for the amount of time allocated to it, that will be considered with the time that has to be allocated to other subjects with due regard to the national, educational and social importance of the people's language as the medium of this inter-group and inter-class communication at different social and educational levels that one aims at in the eventual expansion of adult education, the cultivation of the spoken word over the Rediffusion System, shortly on T.V. on the pulpits and in the Maltese lay or religious press, as well as the well-maintained growth of a national literature. No time is really wasted on the cultivation of the imponderables, and our native, more than 2,000 years old speech is one of the imponderables.'

I have just mentioned a national literature. But have we a good Maltese literature? some of you who have done no Maltese may ask. It is paradoxical that some of my countrymen who insist on our ability to govern ourselves are so blinded by irrational prejudice that they insist no less emphatically on our inability to produce our own literature. I have edited several anthologies and as my love of literature is not limited to Maltese, I can make comparisons and in a separate lecture I could have exemplified the heights reached by our best contemporary poets, especially Dun Karm, who no longer stands a solitary star shining in lonely majesty.

Maltese literature has attracted the attention of the well-known British author, A.J. Arberry, Sir Thomas Adams professor of Arabic in the University of Cambridge and Fellow of the British Academy. He read our literature and liked it; not only liked it but wrote about it to a wider circle of people interested in literature. He has compiled a Maltese anthology published by Oxford University Press and has also compiled an

anthology of the best poems written by Dun Karm. The book of translated poems will be published by the University of Cambridge.]

Surely that is something we Maltese should be proud of, something that private and public schools should foster and encourage? Maltese literature is the image of our national identity. It is typically Maltese in that it preserves Christian values and loyalties no longer maintained, except comparatively to a limited degree, in other de-Christianised countries. The objections against the use of the mother tongue, those listed in the Unesco Monograph and others purely local, are generally urged by prejudiced persons, who may be in good faith but are not, therefore, less mistaken.]

Prejudice is the child of ignorance, and it is certainly out of place in private or public schools. Prejudice is as much out of place in an educational establishment as the devil in a church, and, of course, prejudice is not less prejudicial when it is supported, under false pretences, by single-track minds, men whose authority and competence (if they are really authoritative or competent in any subject!) lie outside the field of Linguistics and education.]

There is many an authority that is also an ignoramus outside his speciality.]

Language being a natural means of communication provides evidence of the quality of the soul within us. We Maltese are neither inarticulate nor dull.]

As a matter of fact, considering the size of the island, we are very articulate yet our literature is comparatively recent. Why? It could not be very old, because we started late and the reason is that we Maltese who never ruled our own destiny got so involved that we lost sight of first things and failed to appreciate the primary function of language neglecting Maltese as a medium of literary self-expression. Of course, the school authorities of the past and their unqualified superiors are much to blame for the loss of the literary heritage that would have been ours to enjoy. The more progressive, less handicapped schools of today have to catch up now and not merely accept Maltese as one of the school subjects but promote its growth as Malta's best medium of individual and collective self-expression.]

An inarticulate nation is dead. It is not a nation. It is a country of helots. It can never produce greatness either above or below. The masses and their leaders inevitably lack vision and where there is no vision the people perish; and they deserve to perish. The schools could make more Dun Karm's possible by just keeping the Torch he lighted for us burning.] If they keep it burning very low, the output will be negligible and the progress we are aiming at will be retarded again.]

Our future is in our hands. To you I say our future is in our schools and you are our future.]